

Feedback culture is not a poster on the wall, it is what people say and do when something goes wrong on a Tuesday afternoon. In London, where teams cross time zones and job markets move quickly, the way leaders request, give, and act on feedback often sets the ceiling on performance. I have worked with founders in Shoreditch, product leads in Paddington, and finance directors in Canary Wharf who told me the same story in different words. They were smart, well intentioned, and drowning in noise. What they needed was not more feedback, but better feedback, delivered in a way their teams could trust.

A skilled Leadership Coach, whether they work as an Executive Coach for the C-suite or a Business Coach supporting functional heads, improves feedback culture by changing three things. First, the behavior of the most watched people in the room. Second, the systems that cue useful conversations rather than adversarial ones. Third, the skills that make everyday feedback specific and fair. It sounds simple. In practice, it is craft.

## Why feedback culture often stalls in London teams

London is a magnet for global talent. That diversity is an asset, yet it also raises the stakes in how feedback is interpreted. A blunt sentence that reads as helpful in one culture can feel humiliating in another. Add hybrid schedules, project teams that reassemble every quarter, and a layer of British indirectness, and you have fertile ground for misunderstandings. I often hear managers say, I flagged it politely, but nothing changed. Their reports say, I had no idea the issue was that serious.

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Two patterns recur across sectors.

The first is speed. Tech and creative teams sprint, agencies rebid constantly, and financial markets move out from under your feet. Feedback lags behind the work. By the time a formal review happens, the project is over and the learning window has closed. People receive a surprise rather than a course correction.

The second is safety. Junior employees in London's high brand environments can feel they are one mistake away from being replaced. If a meeting turns into a public autopsy, you will see polished silence rather than useful debate. A cautious workforce does not flag risks early, and managers start to assume that a lack of noise equals a lack of problems.

A Leadership Coach makes headway by drilling into the leader's habits. Leaders do not intend to discourage candor, but their calendar, their rituals, and their phrasing often do it on their behalf.

## What good looks like

I describe a healthy feedback culture in four traits.

- It is frequent. Signals arrive in small packets, often the same day. People do not wait for quarter end.
- It is specific. Colleagues name the behavior, the situation, and the impact with plain language.

- It is two way. Managers ask for critique on their own decisions and accept it in public.
- It leads to a change. Teams see adjustments in scope, staffing, or process within a week or two, not a quarter.

Those traits are observable. You can sit in a room and count them. A coach helps leaders measure what they currently do against that yardstick, then installs habits that raise the scores.

## **The first lever: demonstrate how to receive feedback**

Leaders who want more upward feedback usually start by asking for it. That is necessary and insufficient. What changes the culture is what happens in the five minutes after the ask.

I worked with a CTO of a London scale up who ran a weekly architecture review. He wanted engineers to challenge design choices early, yet the room stayed quiet. We recorded one meeting and transcribed it. His responses to dissent started with a defense, included a mini lecture, and ended with a promise to revisit it next sprint. No insults, no raised voice. Still, the message was clear. Debate equals delay. We rewired those five minutes.

He switched to a three sentence rule for receiving feedback. First, reflect back the essence. Second, ask one clarifying question. Third, thank the person and say what you will do next. Within three weeks, engineers contributed twice as many challenges in the first half hour. Nothing else changed except how the leader absorbed critique.



An Executive Coach does this type of micro analysis often. They observe, slow down the tape, and rehearse alternatives until a new habit is automatic. Leaders then model it in front of others, because culture follows what the top person does when it is inconvenient.

## **The second lever: build shared language**

Feedback collapses when words are fuzzy. Vague phrasing like needs to be more strategic or is not proactive enough breeds frustration. A coach installs shared templates that reduce ambiguity without turning conversations robotic.

The Situation, Behavior, Impact format is deceptively simple. You state the situation where the behavior occurred, name the observable behavior, and describe the impact on results or people. When teams use this consistently, meetings shift from personality to evidence. I often pair SBI with a feedforward prompt that looks ahead. It keeps people out of the replay loop and anchors next steps.

The point is not to memorize a model. It is to give people a structure when their adrenaline is up. In busy London teams, where feedback windows can be ten minutes between calls, a common structure does not make you mechanical, it frees you to be clear.

## **The third lever: raise skill through live practice**

Leaders are promoted for judgment and delivery, not for their feedback craft. A Leadership Coach runs short, frequent drills. No slide deck replaces a live, awkward sentence spoken out loud until it comes out clean. This is where Leadership Training earns its keep.

I schedule thirty minute clinics with a pairing system. Two managers role play a real scenario, and we timebox it. Two minutes to frame, three minutes of feedback, two minutes of ask, one minute to agree on an action. We then swap roles. Over six weeks, vocabulary tightens, excuses shrink, and everyone develops a better ear for vague language. These are small muscles. They grow with reps.

If you are working with a Business Coach who understands your commercial context, they will also help [Business Executive Coaching](#) you write performance notes that tie feedback to revenue or risk. I have watched this unlock budget for engineering backlog fixes because leaders could point to concrete £ impacts.

## **The fourth lever: redesign meetings and workflows**

Most feedback sits in the seams of your calendar. If you want it to show up on time, build it into the structure. I help teams add two changes to their weekly routines.

First, pre wire contentious decisions. London teams juggle many stakeholders. If you wait for a big room to reveal a risky assumption, you will get politics. Instead, leaders identify the two people most affected and ask for critique one day before the broader meeting. A ten minute call can surface an issue early, then the larger group sees a leader who arrives informed and open.

Second, make retros short and reliable. Many teams hold long, sporadic post mortems that everyone dreads. I prefer a tight, repeatable ritual that lasts 25 minutes and occurs within 48 hours of delivery. People bring one data point and one surprise. The facilitator captures only what will be acted on in the next sprint. When people see change next week, participation jumps.

A coach does not only suggest these routines, they shadow them, tweak the prompts, and help the leader hold the line when old habits creep back in.

## **How hybrid work changes the feedback game**

London firms still run hybrid patterns. The office creates energy, but real feedback cycles must survive on Slack, email, and quick calls. Written feedback is dangerous when rushed. Without tone, a two sentence message can read like a reprimand. I teach leaders to treat written feedback as a draft of a conversation, not a replacement.

We set thresholds. If the topic affects reputation, scope, or money, pick up the phone within the hour. If it is a small calibration, write it, but follow a template. Start with context, state the observation, propose a fix, and invite a short chat if needed. I encourage managers to keep the written part under eight lines. If it takes more, it is a call. Over time, this discipline reduces slow simmer conflicts that drain a week before anyone notices.

## **Cross cultural nuance without walking on eggshells**

A London leader will often run a team with five or more national cultures represented. Two moves help.

First, make norms explicit. I ask teams to write a one page document that answers simple questions. How direct is our default? How do we disagree with a senior person? When are we fine with interrupting? What does yes mean here? People can adapt to almost anything once it is named.

Second, use calibration rounds. Before a new manager runs performance reviews, we hold a one hour session where managers bring three sample evaluations and compare. This reduces the risk that one culture's style grades harder or softer. I have seen gender and cultural bias drop measurably after one cycle of structured calibration.

A Leadership Coach brings a neutral voice to these conversations. When an outside person asks, How do you want to do this here, teams answer with more candor than when a peer asks it.

## **Measurement that does not feel like surveillance**

If you do not measure it, you will rationalize anything. At the same time, feedback metrics can make people defensive. I keep it simple and behavior based.

We track three numbers every fortnight for the first three months.

- How many upward feedback requests did managers make in public?
- How many pieces of peer feedback were logged in the project tool or noted in sprint docs?
- What percentage of items led to a visible change within two weeks?

When we start, upward requests are often near zero. After training and modeling, I expect to see three to five public asks per manager per fortnight, with 60 to 70 percent of them leading to a small process change. That visible loop, not a high score on a survey, is what convinces skeptics.

If your environment is regulated or client facing, a Business Coach will help you fit this into your compliance frame. The goal is habits you can defend to a client or auditor. Keep personal data out, focus on behaviors and work artifacts.

## **A short case from the Square Mile**

A mid sized asset manager based near Liverpool Street asked for help. Their investment committees were tense. Juniors did not challenge theses, and post mortems devolved into legalistic language that avoided fault. We mapped the current flow. People brought dense decks to meetings. Senior partners spoke first. Time pressure meant late agenda items were waved through.

We changed four things over eight weeks. The chair spoke last, not first. Every deck began with a one page risk section that names two assumptions most likely to break. The presenter had to ask for at least one challenge before recommendations. Retros ended with a one line owner and a date for a check back.

Within two months, the committee logged an average of five challenges per session, up from one or two. Two investment notes were pulled for revision before client distribution, preventing potential misstatements that could have cost six figures in client penalties. That was enough proof for the partners to keep the changes.

## **Coaching the middle, not only the top**

Executive Coaching often starts with the CEO or a small senior group. That is wise, since culture follows the top. Still, feedback culture collapses without the middle layer. These managers run one to three teams and conduct

most of the daily conversations. A Leadership Trainer who can drop into that layer, run fast clinics, and coordinate with the executive sponsor, will save months.

I ask for a cohort of twelve to twenty managers for a 90 day cycle. We pick two real metrics to move, for example, percentage of client issues escalated within 24 hours, or number of design decisions challenged before build. Then we run a rhythm of skills clinics, shadowing, and a light leaderboard that shows behaviors, not names. Middle managers respond to visible progress and peer examples. When they see another team shipping cleaner work after adopting a feedback ritual, they copy it faster than any directive can force.

## **Trade offs and edge cases**

There are costs. A feedback rich culture can feel noisy. If you flood the day with micro critiques, you will see decision fatigue and a dip in morale. The art is to concentrate feedback where it changes outcomes. Tie it to the most expensive or most reversible decisions. In early stage product work, that might be prototype direction. In a law firm, it may be how a client email frames a position. Train people to ignore cosmetic tweaks during crunch time.

Another edge case is the high performer who resists process. London teams often have a rainmaker who brings revenue and a trail of frustrated colleagues. A coach can help the leader draw a line between high standards and exemption. We build a performance contract that names the hard outputs and the cultural minimums. Then we enforce it. If the star cannot or will not meet the minimums, leaders must be ready to call the bluff. Most of the time, clarity and coaching move the needle. Sometimes, a principled exit lifts the whole floor.

A final trade off is speed versus documentation. Regulated sectors need paper trails. Over documentation, though, kills the immediacy that makes feedback work. I advise a light scaffold. Keep a shared note where managers log date, topic, and next step in two lines. If escalation happens, you can expand it. If not, you have just enough to remember the pattern without turning every chat into a tribunal.

## **A simple cadence any London team can adopt next week**

- Monday stand up, each lead names one place they want feedback this week, then asks for a specific person to weigh in.
- Midweek, 15 minute check in pairs to deliver one piece of peer feedback using SBI and one feedforward suggestion.
- Thursday afternoon, the senior leader asks for upward feedback in a live forum, receives it using the three sentence rule, and states one change they will implement within a week.
- Friday, a 20 minute retro on one project, limited to two actionable items with owners and dates.

This schedule fits into existing routines and takes less than an hour of extra time across the week. After four weeks, measure the visible changes. If you cannot name what shifted, tighten the prompts rather than adding more meetings.

## **How a coach accelerates change you could, in theory, DIY**

Everything above can be done without a coach. The difference is speed and fidelity. A Leadership Coach sees patterns leaders miss because they are inside the event. They also lend authority during the awkward middle when habits are changing and people feel exposed.

The most valuable service is in the micro corrections. I have paused a manager mid sentence and asked them to try a different first line, then watched the entire room relax. When to be curious, when to be directive, when to switch to written follow up, these are decisions you can script and practice. A coach compresses the learning curve from a year of trial and error to a quarter.

An Executive Coach working closely with founders or partners also manages the political side. They help leaders decide which norms are non negotiable and which can vary by team. Culture work fails when it becomes a tug of war over taste. Framing it in terms of risk, revenue, and retention gets decisions made.

## Selecting the right partner

Not every coach fits every company. I tell London clients to look for three markers. First, ask for examples where the coach improved a measurable behavior in less than 90 days. Vague stories are a warning sign. Second, listen to their language. If they default to motivational phrases but cannot show you how to run a retro or write a feedback note, you will get inspiration, not change. Third, check if they can coach at more than one altitude. A Business Coach who can support a team lead on a Tuesday and then brief the board on Fridays keeps alignment tight.

Price matters, yet context fit matters more. A coach who understands your sector's tempo, client expectations, and risk profile will shorten the time to value. In London, that context varies by neighborhood. A media agency in Soho and a quant fund in Mayfair both need feedback culture, but the expression and tolerance for informality differ. The best coaches adapt without losing the core.

## What a 90 day engagement usually looks like

Week 1 to 2, discovery and baselining. The coach interviews a cross section, shadows key meetings, and gathers existing feedback artifacts. They define two or three metrics and a small set of target behaviors with the executive sponsor.

Week 3 to 6, leader modeling and clinics. The coach scripts specific moments for leaders to request and receive feedback in public, runs short training sessions, and installs light templates. They provide daily nudges, often by message, to reinforce the new habits.

Week 7 to 10, system tuning. Meeting structures, pre wiring, and retro cadences are refined. The coach facilitates difficult conversations, writes example feedback notes with managers, and helps the middle layer hold standards.

Week 11 to 12, handover and measurement. The coach steps back, leaders run the rituals unaided, and the team reviews metric movement. A short document records the norms, templates, and checklists for continuity.

I have seen this cadence raise visible feedback behaviors by 50 to 100 percent in teams that started from a low base. The variance comes from leader commitment, not from industry.

## A compact checklist for leaders who want to start today

- At your next team meeting, ask for one piece of upward feedback on a recent decision. Repeat your understanding, ask one question, and say what you will do next.
- Write and share a one page team norm doc that answers how we disagree, how direct we are, and how we ask for help.
- Run a 25 minute retro within 48 hours of a delivery and limit outcomes to two actions with owners and dates.
- Set a rule that material feedback affecting scope, money, or reputation happens by voice within the hour.

- Track, for two fortnights, how many feedback requests you make in public and how many lead to a visible change. Share the numbers.

Do these five moves and you will feel the culture tilt. Then bring in a coach to harden the habits, tune the systems, and scale it across teams.

## **The London advantage**

A strong feedback culture fits London's temperament. This city rewards pace and polish, but its real advantage is concentration, thousands of talented people within a short walk of a Tube station. When feedback flows, that density compounds. You learn faster from clients, onboard hires in half the time, and correct execution before it becomes expensive. A Leadership Coach helps turn that potential into practice. With the right habits, a team can replace fear with clarity, and opinion with evidence. Over a year, the effect shows up in the numbers that matter, lower rework, faster time to decision, and higher retention of the people you most want to keep.

Leaders who have lived through the shift rarely go back. They still make hard calls, they still hold a high bar. The difference is that the team knows where the bar sits, hears why it moved, and has permission to say when it is placed in the wrong place. That is feedback culture, not a slogan but a shared way of working, and it is the quiet edge that wins in a crowded market.