

Giving Sensitive Feedback – Part 1

We have done a series of workshops about using English to communicate a sensitive issue with a colleague or employee. It is important to use English with tact and sensitivity in this type of context. However, for non-native speakers it is all too easy to come across as direct and unfeeling. We created a scenario where workshop participants acted as HR professionals/managers supporting their teams in managing a range of confidential issues in a 1 to 1 meeting. Some of the key expressions we generated are noted below.

Part 1 is from the perspective of the manager.

1) Setting the context of the meeting:

- Firstly, you need to know everything you say will remain confidential.
- I know it is not easy, but try and speak as candidly/openly as possible.
- I really appreciate you coming to see me/Thank you for taking the time to see me today.
- Firstly, I would like to say we greatly value the work you do. However, recently we have noticed that you have...
- I have organised this meeting to understand what you have experienced.
- We are here to support you in any way we can.
- I appreciate this is difficult for you, so take your time.

2) Ways of offering advice:

Supportive:

- Have you considered/thought about/reflected on...?
- I am very sorry to hear this, firstly you need to think about...
- One option you might want to consider is ...
- How would you like to move forward?
- One solution would/could be to...

Stronger:

- My recommendation is that you should...
- You should/you ought to... (be careful with 'should' and 'ought to' they are strong and can come across as forceful/judgmental). Also note that 'ought to' is a little more old-fashioned!
- **Note:** Only use 'must' or 'have to', when you feel there is a serious problem/or immediate action needs to be taken.

3) Closing:

- Thank you for taking the time to share your concerns. I will contact you to outline our next steps...
 - If you need any further help and support, please get in touch/contact me...
 - My door is always open if you want to talk about this further/in more detail.
 - I would like to outline our next steps...
 - I suggest we meet again in three weeks' time.
-