

[The art of feedback: update from Loveday Ryder](#)

The art of feedback

8 October 2019 is Ada Lovelace Day (ALD), the international celebration of women in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). It aims to increase the profile of women in STEM and create new role models.

To mark ALD 2019, we're sharing this open, honest and insightful post by our CEO, Loveday Ryder, on her commitment to becoming a more authentic leader.

The breakfast of champions

They say that feedback is the breakfast of champions, but I've never really believed it. I've always gone to some lengths to avoid asking people what I can do better, and if someone is kind enough to give me a compliment, I feel like hiding under the table. Call it Britishness, call it reserve, call it modesty – now I call it arrested development.

This year, I'm determined to change and I've started down the long, brave path to embracing feedback – because I know it will do me a great deal of good.

It's not just cricket

My 9 year old daughter joined a cricket club last year and I went along to support her. Most of the coaches were other parents keen to see their daughters take up the beautiful game and who had themselves, learned at school.

Having no sporting ability myself, I watched from the sidelines, content to observe the coaches and the effect they were having. All were keen, all were supportive, but there was one who stood out from the crowd – let's call him Fred.

Fred was an inspiration – every ball bowled, he said a word or two on how to improve. Every batting stroke, he commented and showed them little changes to make, praising them when they got it. And the improvement they made was phenomenal – developing ball by ball, shot by shot – working on each piece of advice and growing in confidence as a result.

Why is it that this sports analogy does not naturally translate into a business environment?

Taking the (wrong) path of least resistance

I know in my head that feedback makes me better, but in my heart, I'm still afraid of learning things about myself I might not like.

Organisations made up of people like me don't transform themselves naturally – we take the path of least resistance, and save the feedback for the mandatory HR process at the end of the year. And it does us little good, as we tend to approach all criticism with a defensive mindset, looking to argue why it's wrong, and how we've been misunderstood. We focus on the negatives and completely miss the positives – but they're so much more powerful in helping us to blossom and grow.

But the problem does not stop there – we can even shy away from giving constructive feedback to our colleagues. If I put up a barrier to receiving it, I'm unlikely to take the time to give it with true honesty and care (just in case they give it back).

How much help and support could I have given others over the years, if only I'd invested properly in their feedback? How much encouragement could my appreciation for the things they do well have made a difference?

The change I'm making

So how am I tackling this and what change am I making? I realised that the source of my issue is a fear of discovering something about myself that I do not like or cannot change.

I want to be an authentic leader, but I can only be true to myself to the degree that I know myself. The more we expand our self-knowledge and self-awareness, the more open we can be, and the more scope there is for demonstrating authenticity. Unconscious incompetence is blissful, but ultimately the road to nowhere.

So I'm going to be brave and make a conscious effort to invite continual, honest feedback from my colleagues and friends. I know I will not like it all, and I suspect some of it might hurt, but I simply cannot afford not to.

My personal growth depends upon it.

Purposeful, positive feedback – every day!

And in turn, I'm going to commit to being like Fred for others. I want to give my time and attention to helping people to make small changes, so they can get better and achieve more of their goals. I'm going to focus on finding the great things people are doing that I would have taken for granted.

I believe that, together, we can change the culture of a team, a department or an organisation. Let's work to make the old appraisal system defunct and revolutionise the quality and trust in our relationships – purposeful,

positive feedback every day – ball by ball, shot by shot.

#LifeatBPDTS

Connect with Loveday through [LinkedIn](#).