



The conversations that matter

Supporting Workbook





Make every role feel vital

Insight one





'Without us providing everything, we can have the very best surgical teams, very best consultants, everything here. But without us making sure everything is there for that surgery to happen, for those pioneering medicines to be available, it doesn't happen. The hospital would eventually stop.'



People can lose sight of their contribution when much of their work happens behind the scenes. Hayley makes the connection unmistakable: logistics isn't separate from patient care. It's part of what allows that care to happen.

Helping colleagues see where their work fits can change how valued they feel and how they understand their responsibilities. This doesn't require exaggerating anyone's contribution. It means making visible the links that are easily overlooked, especially when someone's role is rarely seen by the people who ultimately depend on it.

When people understand why their work matters, an everyday task isn't just something to complete. It becomes part of a shared effort to keep the hospital functioning.



Try this in practice

- Connect a routine task to the people, service, or outcome that depends on it.
- Tell colleagues specifically what their work has enabled, rather than relying on a general 'thank you'.
- Share positive feedback with everyone who contributed, including those whose work happened out of sight.
- Ask your team where they struggle to see the value or impact of what they do.
- Notice whose contribution is easily overlooked, and make it visible to the wider team.



Quick reflection

Do your colleagues know who depends on the work they do?



Be present beyond the paperwork

Insight two



'I think it's very easy for managers to think, "I've got all this paperwork, I've got to hit this, I've got to do this", and shut the door. That door needs to be kept wide open. Spend time with your team.'

'That time is pivotal because you're sort of hearing, "I've got to get to school. I've got to go to..." So you start clocking dynamics of people without them knowing you're doing it.'



An open door means little if pressure and paperwork keep a manager behind it. Hayley deliberately spends informal time with her team because ordinary conversation can reveal things that a formal meeting might never reach.

Those small details help a manager understand the pressures people are carrying, the relationships within the team, and when someone might need more support. This is about being close enough to the everyday life of the team to notice what's changing.

Presence also lowers the threshold for speaking up. A colleague may find it easier to raise something with a manager they already talk to than with someone they only see when a problem has become formal.



Try this in practice

- Spend a few minutes in a shared space without bringing an agenda or turning the conversation into a meeting.
- Join colleagues during an ordinary break when it feels welcome, and take an interest in what matters to them.
- Protect some visible time with the team, even when paperwork is competing for your attention.
- Listen for recurring pressures or changes in mood across everyday conversations.
- Make yourself easy to approach through regular contact, rather than waiting for colleagues to come through your door.



Quick reflection

How often do your colleagues experience you as genuinely present?

Address the small things early

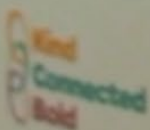
Insight three

It's okay to build close working relationships...
...it's not okay to form cliques.

Is anyone being left out?

It's okay to build close working relationships...
before
...it's not okay to form cliques.

What's the culture?



Connected

The connections we build with everyone around us
- We listen and nurture our relationships
- We are curious, fair and appreciate differences
- We work hard and listen to each other



'Spend time with your team, make the conversations happen. And I think meeting stuff like low-level problems and sort of nipping it in the bud much quicker. So that people understand, "This isn't a behaviour we're prepared to tolerate", or, "Let's have a conversation, let's sit down together, come on, let's grab a coffee, let's talk."'



Not every problem needs to become a major issue before it deserves attention. A timely, proportionate conversation can clarify expectations, uncover what's really happening, and give people a chance to change course.

Waiting can make a difficult situation harder for everyone involved. Unchallenged behaviour may begin to feel accepted, while misunderstandings can harden into conflict. Hayley's approach is direct without immediately becoming formal: name the issue, bring people together, and talk while there's still room to resolve it smoothly.



Try this in practice

- Raise a concern when you first notice a pattern, rather than waiting for frustration to build.
- Describe the behaviour you've observed clearly, without making assumptions about the person's intentions.
- Invite a conversation in a calm setting where everyone involved can speak openly.
- Restate the standard expected when a behaviour isn't acceptable.
- Check whether an apparent behaviour problem is connected to an unresolved pressure or misunderstanding.



Quick reflection

What are you allowing to grow by leaving it unspoken?

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black and white patterned top and a bright pink high-visibility safety vest. She has an NHS lanyard around her neck with a blue ID badge that reads 'Hayley Steward' and 'Patient Support & Transport'. A small heart-shaped badge is pinned to her vest. The background shows a modern building with large windows.

Let support fit the person

Insight four



'Sometimes as well, the time that I might think is right is not right for that person. So it's important to understand that when they are ready to come to you, that you tap in and actively listen to that conversation and understand, "Now is the right time for this to happen, this is the right environment."'

'There doesn't need to always be a conversation. If somebody feels more comfortable to just send a text, if that works for them and they're getting the support they need, let's do that.'



Offering support isn't the same as making it accessible. A conversation held at the wrong moment, in the wrong place, or in a form that feels uncomfortable may close someone down instead of helping them open up.

Hayley adapts to the person in front of her. Sometimes that means recognising when someone's ready to talk. Sometimes it means offering another route entirely. What matters isn't that support happens in the manager's preferred way, but that the colleague can reach it in a way that works for them.



Try this in practice

- Ask whether now's a good time before beginning a sensitive conversation.
- Offer a quieter or more private setting when the environment may affect what someone feels able to say.
- Give colleagues more than one way to make contact, where that's possible.
- Keep information about available support visible and easy to access without requiring someone to ask publicly.
- Pause other demands when a colleague chooses to open up, and listen to what they need before offering solutions.
- Revisit an offer of support without pressuring someone who wasn't ready the first time.



Quick reflection

Are you offering support in a way the other person can actually use?



Be honest about your limits

Insight five





'I have had colleagues come to me and say, "You care, you speak for us as well, you support us. And if you don't know and you can't get it done, you're honest." That transparency, I think, speaks volumes because if I can't do something, I want to be honest about that as well.'

'There's no point making all these massive promises [...] if I can't, especially with the constraints of the NHS. Sometimes things are harder. But what we do is we try and make sure that what we can provide and what I can do, we do.'



Trust doesn't depend on a leader being able to fix everything. It depends on colleagues knowing that what they're told is real.

An impressive promise may feel supportive in the moment, but it quickly becomes damaging if nothing follows. Hayley's clear about constraints while remaining committed to what's possible. That combination matters: honesty without effort can feel dismissive, while effort without honesty creates false expectations.

Being transparent about a limit isn't a failure of leadership. It gives people clarity and makes the commitments you can give far more credible.



Try this in practice

- Say clearly when you don't yet know the answer, and explain how you'll find out.
- Separate what you can influence from what sits outside your control.
- Avoid promising an outcome before you know whether it can be delivered.
- Give colleagues an honest update when circumstances or constraints change.
- Follow through on the actions within your control, however small they may seem.



Quick reflection

Can your colleagues rely on your 'yes' because they also hear an honest 'no'?

■ If you try one thing

Make time to be with your team.

Use ordinary moments to listen, notice what may sit beneath the conversation, and understand when someone's ready to talk.

That everyday presence helps concerns surface earlier, makes support easier to reach, and shows colleagues that their work and wellbeing matter.

Keep the door open, then step through it.

