

Give people room to grow

Supporting Workbook



Let other people know more

Insight one

‘As a leader, you need not know everything, isn’t it? It’s more to do with people. And I have always believed that there’s always something to learn from somebody. I try and sit with my team and try and understand how do I go about in certain things?’

When people look to you for direction, admitting that someone else knows more can feel uncomfortable. Pearl felt some anxiety joining experienced colleagues, but she didn’t try to become the expert in everything. She asked for help where they were stronger and contributed the skills she already had.

That gives everyone’s experience a place in the work. If you always supply the answer, colleagues have fewer opportunities to shape the approach. You don’t have to be the best at every part of the job, but you do need to notice who can help with what, including where your own contribution matters.

Try this in practice

- Ask a colleague with relevant experience how they’d approach a task before you settle on a method.
- Explain which part you’re unsure about, so your colleague knows where you need help.
- Invite someone else to explain a process they know well, and give them time to finish before adding your view.
- Explain what you can take care of and where you’d welcome their help.
- Tell a colleague when their advice has changed your approach, so they can see how you’ve used it.

Quick reflection

Where are you expecting yourself to have every answer?



Back people without taking over

Insight two

‘I think the job of a leader is to just stand behind them and say, “I’m here. I have your back.” Allow them to do something. Allow them to make mistakes. Don’t be there to just intervene every single time. Help them to learn through those mistakes.’

‘I have a manager who has my back, and I think it gives me that confidence to do my job better, and I think that needs to be passed on to my colleagues who are working with me.’

You’ve agreed that a colleague will take something forward, but they’re approaching it differently from you. It’s tempting to step in, especially when you could do it more quickly yourself. Pearl asks us to leave room for people to work things through, with support they can count on.

She knows the difference that support makes. Having her manager behind her gives her confidence to do her job, and she wants to pass that experience on.

Handing over a task isn’t enough on its own. The person needs to know when they can come to you and what help they’ll get. Once that’s clear, pay attention to your own involvement. Are you helping them make progress, or leaving them waiting for you to make the next decision?

Try this in practice

- Agree what a colleague will take forward and where they’d like your support before the work begins.
- Tell them how to reach you if they need help, rather than relying on a general offer of availability.
- Pause before taking over an agreed task. Ask what they’re trying to achieve and what help they need.
- Talk through work that hasn’t gone as intended, exploring what happened and what they’d change next time.

Quick reflection

Does your help leave people more confident to act?



Let learning travel beyond one person

Insight three

‘There was a conference which was coming up in Sweden, the European Haematology Association. And I felt like this is probably something that needs doing. I need to send my people there to learn about what’s happening. […] I think all that knowledge is really going to help our team.’

What happens when someone comes back from a learning opportunity? Pearl wanted colleagues to gain knowledge they could bring into the team’s work, and she describes considering how to use what they brought back. Without that follow-through, useful learning can stay with the person who attended. Give colleagues a chance to hear it, ask questions, and decide whether there’s something they could use. The opportunity then reaches beyond one person’s development.

Try this in practice

- Ask someone returning from a learning opportunity what they learned that could help the team’s current work.
- Make space in an existing team conversation for them to explain it and answer colleagues’ questions.
- Discuss one idea you could use, rather than trying to absorb everything they learned at once.
- Come back to the idea and agree whether there’s something the team could try.

Quick reflection

Whose recent learning has yet to reach the wider team?



A step back can open doors

Insight four

‘But yeah, it was all about learning and to be honest, it felt very thrilling actually, you know, to be among this young crowd, learn things all over again and to understand how things are done in the UK. Yeah, it’s [...] starting all over again. But I think to understand a system you need to start from the ground level.’

Pearl’s move meant starting again in a new working system after holding senior leadership responsibility. Along the way, she checked in with herself about whether the move felt right. As the journey unfolded, the learning and opportunities helped her enjoy the new direction.

Work wasn’t the only consideration. During the pandemic, she’d felt she was missing time with her daughters and husband while carrying substantial responsibility at the hospital. Her decision reflected what she wanted from life as well as her ambitions at work. That matters when we think about progress: a title or level of responsibility can’t tell the whole story.

Starting again can feel unfamiliar, even when you’ve chosen the change. Pearl makes room for that honest adjustment while recognising what the experience is opening up for her.

Try this in practice

- Notice whether you’re judging a change only by the responsibility or status you previously held.
- Identify something your current work is helping you learn, particularly where the experience is new.
- Ask an experienced colleague to explain a part of the working system you’re still getting to know.
- Consider how a possible next step fits with the parts of your life that matter to you, alongside what it offers professionally.

Quick reflection

What could trying something new or unfamiliar help you learn?



Turn doubt into useful feedback

Insight five

‘Sometimes we just go into that shell and think, you know, maybe I’m not fit enough to be here or maybe nobody will really help me. Trust me, at least in UHB, when you ask somebody for feedback, they’re more than happy to give you feedback and work on that feedback. I feel that’s very important. Work on the feedback, come back stronger, and I’m sure you’ll get where you need to.’

Quietly wondering whether you’re good enough doesn’t tell you much about what to do next. Asking someone about a specific piece of work can give you a clearer view of what needs attention. Pearl’s experience is that people are willing to help when you ask, even when doubt has made you reluctant to start the conversation.

Then comes the part that’s easy to miss. You can thank someone for their feedback and carry on exactly as before. Pearl puts the emphasis on using it: choose something to change and try it next time. You’ve then got something concrete to build on, rather than the same worry going round again.

Try this in practice

- Choose one piece of work you feel uncertain about and ask someone who’s seen it for feedback.
- Focus your request on a specific behaviour or part of the task, so the conversation can move beyond general reassurance.
- Ask for clarification if the feedback leaves you unsure what to change.
- Choose one thing from the feedback to try next time you do that work.
- Return to the person after trying the change and ask what they noticed.

Quick reflection

What could you ask for feedback on instead of quietly worrying about it?

If you try one thing

Ask someone you work with for help with something they know more about than you do.

You might be unsure how to approach a task or want to understand how they do it.

Give their answer a chance to change your approach.

You get to learn, and they get to see that you value what they bring to the team.

