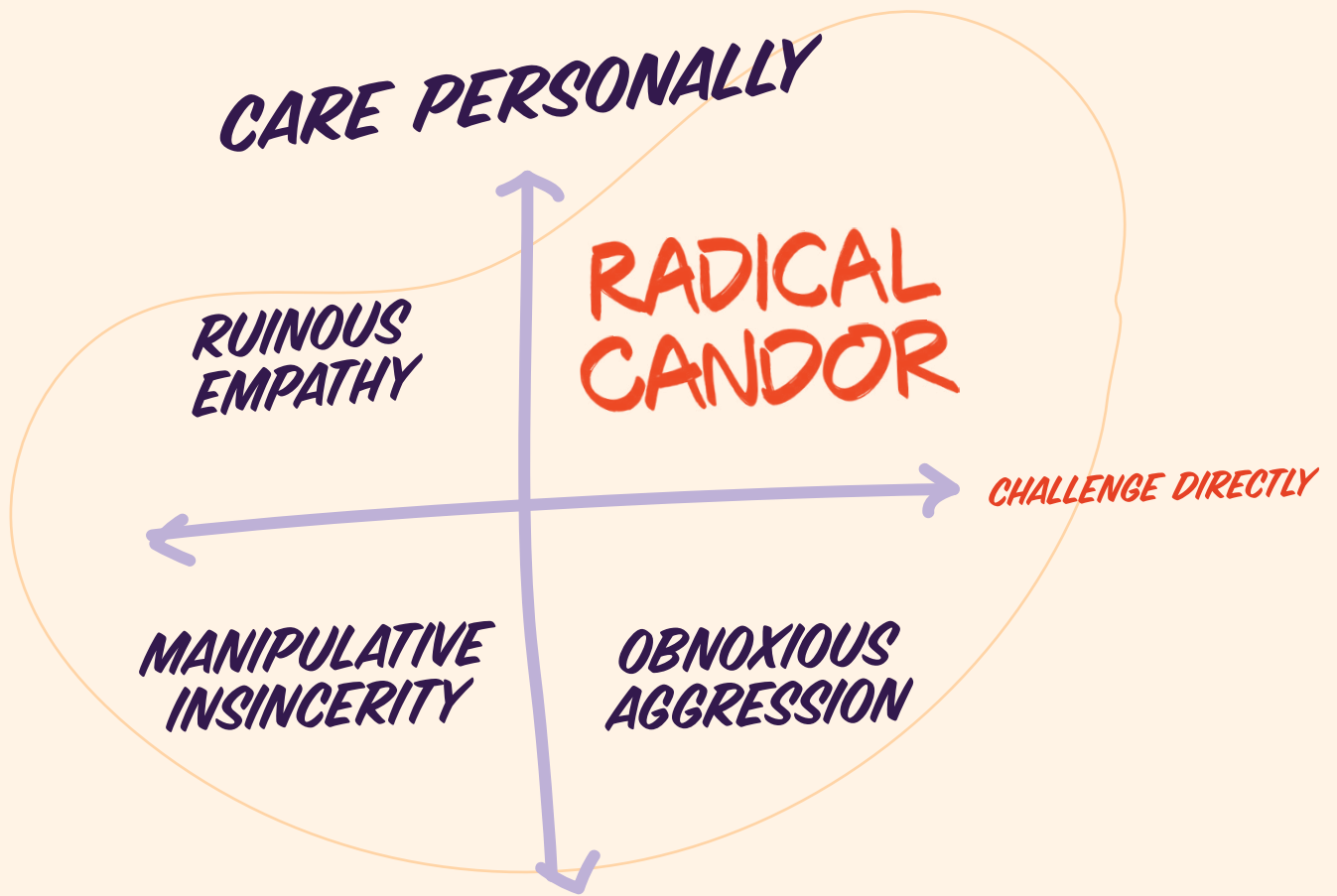


RADICAL CANDOR

PRACTICE PLAYBOOK

**CARE**  
**PERSONALLY,**  
**CHALLENGE**  
**DIRECTLY**

RADICALCANDOR.COM



## Practicing Radical Candor

Do the best work of your life and build the best relationships of your career.

This practice playbook will show you how to:

**SOLICIT CRITICISM** → **GIVE PRAISE** → **GIVE CRITICISM** → **GAUGE FEEDBACK**

# Myth Buster: *RADICAL CANDOR* **IS NOT** *BRUTAL HONESTY*

The whole point of Radical Candor is that it really is possible to Care Personally and Challenge Directly at the same time.

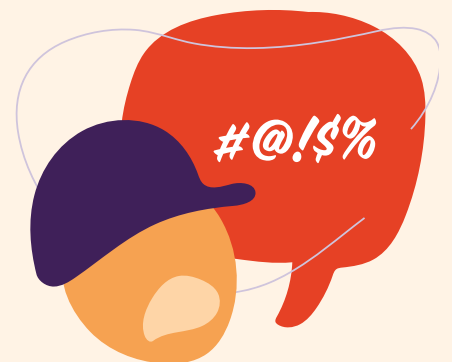
**Radical Candor** is kind, clear, specific and sincere. There is a world of difference between Radical Candor and brutal honesty, or as we call it, **Obnoxious Aggression**.

The “direct” in “Challenge Directly” does NOT mean to be brutal. Radical Candor is not brutal honesty. It means to share your (humble) opinions directly, rather than talking badly about people behind their backs.

Radical Candor happens at the intersection of **Care Personally** and **Challenge Directly**.

**Care Personally** means that you care about the other person, not about whether you are winning a popularity contest.

**Challenge Directly** means that you share your perspective and invite the other person to do the same.



- 📖 [Read about Radical Candor vs. Brutal Honesty](#)
- 📺 [Watch Kim explain Care Personally & Challenge Directly](#)

# BUILD YOUR SKILLS

**Spoiler alert! We're giving you the answers to this one to help you get started.**

Imagine that a colleague has an important meeting coming up, and they have spinach in their teeth. Practice with another person what you would say to this colleague, demonstrating your understanding of each of the Radical Candor 2x2 quadrants.

## RUINOUS EMPATHY

*Silent —  
worried about  
your feelings.*

They would be too reluctant to tell you because they might make you feel embarrassed and it would be awkward for both of you. You wouldn't learn about the spinach in your teeth until much later, maybe after many more people had noticed it.

## RADICAL CANDOR

*Whisper, "You have  
spinach in your teeth."*

They would pull you aside and tell you quietly and kindly. You would learn that you had spinach in your teeth and be able to fix the problem with minimal embarrassment.

## MANIPULATIVE INSINCERITY

*Silent —  
worried about  
their feelings.*

They wouldn't tell you, but would talk about it with others to make themselves look "cool." You wouldn't learn about the spinach in your teeth until much later, and even more people would know about it.

## OBNOXIOUS AGGRESSION

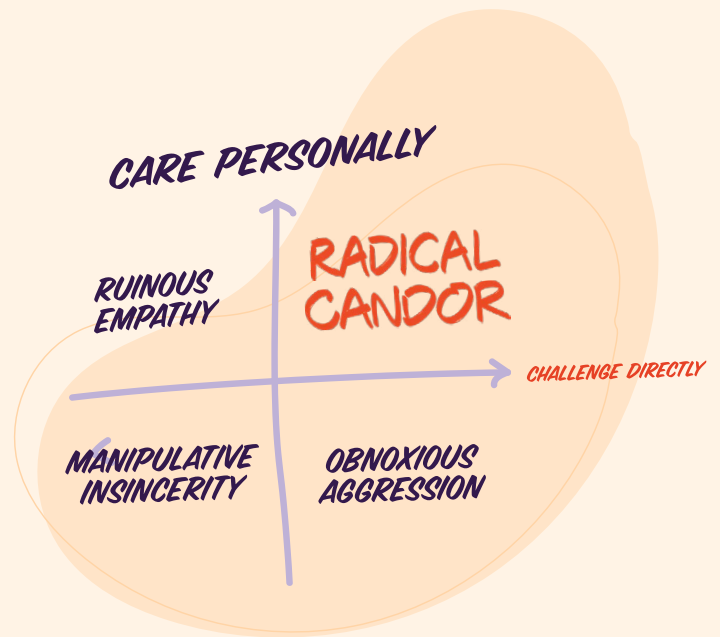
*Shout "Look, they have  
spinach in their teeth!!"*

They would call you out loudly in front of everyone. You would learn that you had spinach in your teeth and be able to fix the problem, but you would feel pretty embarrassed.

# RADICAL CANDOR REFLECTION

Write it down on your own and/or discuss as a group

**Radical Candor** is what happens when you show someone that you Care Personally while you Challenge Directly, without being aggressive or insincere. Radical Candor really just means saying what you think while also giving a damn about the person you're saying it to.



Can you remember a time when you were screwing up, someone told you, and it helped you in the long run? Who was this person?



How did it feel in the moment when you received the feedback — defensive, upset, judgmental? What was the person's direct challenge to you? How did they demonstrate that they cared about you personally?



Looking back, over time, do you feel grateful you received this feedback, even though it might have been difficult to hear at the time?

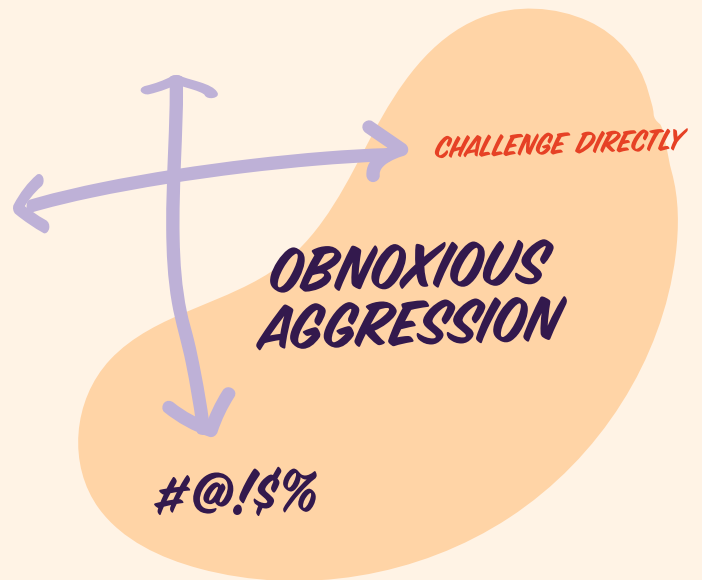
▣ [Read about how to give feedback to direct reports](#)



# OBNOXIOUS AGGRESSION REFLECTION

Write it down on your own and/or discuss as a group

*"Radical Candor is not a license to be gratuitously harsh or to 'front-stab.' It's not Radical Candor just because you begin with the words, 'Let me be radically candid with you.' If you follow that phrase with words like, 'You are a liar and I don't trust you,' you've just acted like a garden-variety jerk. It's not Radical Candor if you don't show that you Care Personally." — Kim Scott*



**Obnoxious Aggression** is what happens when you challenge someone directly, but don't care about them personally. It's being clear, but not kind; praise that doesn't feel sincere or criticism that isn't delivered kindly. Obnoxious Aggression is also called "brutal honesty" or "front stabbing."



Was there a time when you offered criticism, just trying to be helpful, but the other person experienced you as obnoxiously aggressive?



Or maybe there was a time when you were offering someone criticism, but you were really seriously angry and perhaps your intentions weren't so pure.



What happened? Dig deep here to identify a moment you cringe looking back on. What could you have done differently?

📖 [Read about why acting like a jerk is not Radical Candor](#)

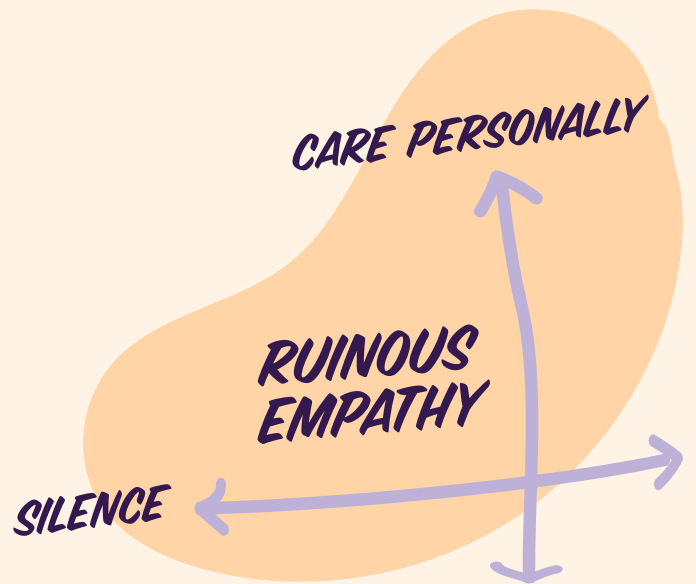
🎧 [Listen to a podcast about Obnoxious Aggression](#)

📺 [Watch Kim explain Obnoxious Aggression](#)

# RUINOUS EMPATHY REFLECTION

Write it down on your own and/or discuss as a group

**Ruinous Empathy** is “nice” but ultimately unhelpful or even damaging. It’s what happens when you care about someone personally, but fail to challenge them directly. It’s praise that isn’t specific enough to help the person understand what was good, or criticism that is sugar-coated and unclear.



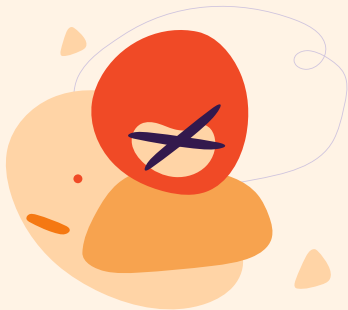
**Ruinous Empathy** is seeing somebody with their fly down, but, not wanting to embarrass them, saying nothing, with the result that 15 more people see them with their fly down — more embarrassing for them. So, not so “nice” after all.



When did you fail to give someone feedback, just to be nice, only to see the person suffer as a result of failure to correct bad behavior?



When were you trying to be nice, only to realize you’d been inadvertently cruel? For example, when did you fail to tell someone they had spinach in their teeth?



📖 [Read about 4 ways to succeed as a manager](#)

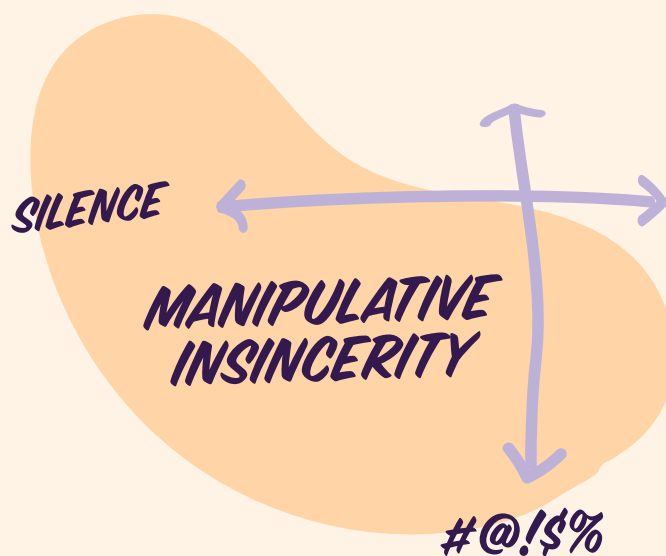
📺 [Watch Kim explain Ruinous Empathy](#)

# MANIPULATIVE INSINCERITY REFLECTION

Write it down on your own and/or discuss as a group

Manipulative Insincerity is what happens when you neither Care Personally nor Challenge Directly. It's praise that is non-specific and insincere, or criticism that is neither clear nor kind. It's the kind of backstabbing, political, passive aggressive behavior that might be fun to tell stories about but makes for a toxic workplace, ruining relationships and ruining work.

People give praise and criticism that is manipulatively insincere when they are too focused on being liked or they think they can gain some sort of political advantage by being fake, or when they are too tired to care or argue any more.



**When did you fail to tell a person directly about a problem, but instead you talked about it to others? Or was there a time when you told a person their work was good while undermining it behind their back?**



**It's really hard to see yourself as backstabbing, passive aggressive or political, but we are all guilty of these behaviors from time to time. Reflecting on these stories can help you avoid repeating similar behaviors in the future.**

📖 [Read about Manipulative Insincerity](#)

🎧 [Listen to a podcast about Manipulative Insincerity](#)

📺 [Watch Kim explain Manipulative Insincerity](#)



## OPTIONAL COMMITMENT

**If you feel comfortable**, share your Radical Candor stories with your team, a family member, a friend or a colleague. When you show a little vulnerability by telling your Radical Candor stories, you are doing several important things at once.

You are demonstrating self-awareness and humility, and you are showing that you genuinely appreciate criticism. This will make it easier to solicit feedback — and the more feedback you solicit, the more self-aware you become.

In order to keep yourself accountable, **add a reminder to your calendar** to share your stories.

You can also read the book on your own or with a group and use these [discussion questions](#) to test your knowledge.

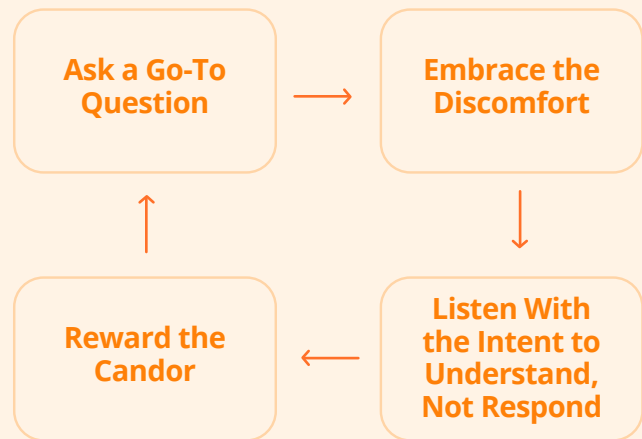
# SOLICIT CRITICISM

## PRACTICING RADICAL CANDOR

*SOLICIT  
CRITICISM* → *GIVE  
PRAISE* → *GIVE  
CRITICISM* → *GAUGE  
FEEDBACK*

Read on your own or in a group

# KNOWLEDGE CHECK



Whether you're a manager or an individual contributor, it can be difficult to get others to tell you what they think about your performance. If you are a manager, it's crucial you solicit criticism in order to demonstrate you are willing to lay your power down and prove you can take it before you start dishing it out.

This is why it's important to have a **Go-To Question** that demands a response other than "yes" or "no."

However, some people will find it difficult to stay silent until the other person answers.

If you're one of these people, count to seven and commit to allowing the other person to speak first. When it's clear you're not going to break the silence, the other person will speak up to fill the silence.

It will be easier for them to say something than to say nothing. Once the person starts talking, **Listen with the Intent to Understand.**

When they're finished speaking, check for understanding. You can say something like, "*So what I hear you saying is ...*" Repeat back to them the issues they have raised, as you understand them. Ask, "*Do I have that right?*"

Finally, you want to **Reward the Candor** in a way that's specific and sincere. First, thank them for the criticism.

If you agree with the criticism, make visible changes based on the feedback. If the change is hard or will take some time, show them you're working toward it. If you disagree with the criticism, try finding something they've said that you do agree with and point it out. Offer your full, respectful explanation of why you disagree with their other statements.

This is a way to reward their feedback and gives them an opportunity to consider your perspective.

Following these steps will help you create a culture of **Psychological Safety** where people will feel comfortable raising important issues.

# BUILD YOUR SKILLS

## Practice Embracing Discomfort

The **Go-To Question** can make things awkward, at first.

In order to get comfortable embracing discomfort, you have to practice it — which means you need to put yourself in a place where you feel safe being a little bit uncomfortable.

Work with a friend, colleague or family member to practice getting comfortable being uncomfortable before you ask your boss, colleagues or direct reports your Go-To Question.



📖 [Read about 11 ways to get feedback](#)

🎧 [Listen to a podcast about how to ask a Go-To Question](#)

📺 [Watch Kim explain how to solicit feedback](#)

# BUILD YOUR SKILLS

## How to Practice Listening With the Intent to Understand

To be in the best mindset to accept feedback, you have to learn to replace blame with curiosity.

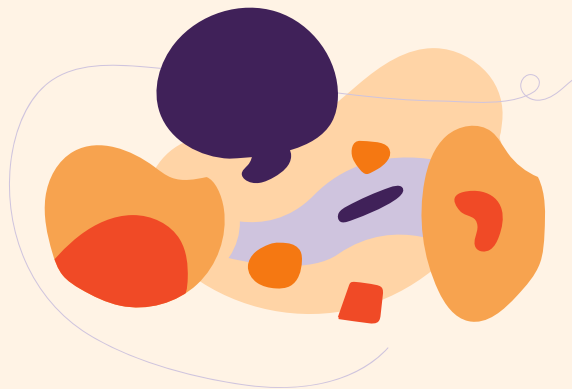
This shifts feelings like, “They are out to get me,” to a growth mindset, oriented more toward, “That’s interesting information for me to have.”

With this in mind, start small. Ask a friend, family member or colleague to give you feedback on something you’re not emotionally invested in, like your office supplies.

Try reflecting on the feedback and replacing blame with curiosity before responding.

### 3 Prompts to Practice Listening With the Intent to Understand

1. At your next meeting, respond to others by first summarizing what they just said to you before you begin your response.
2. In conversation, allow for some silence in the room. Really think about what someone has just said, versus what you want to say, before you respond.
3. When you enter a conversation, listen as if you are wrong. Replace blame with curiosity.



# BUILD YOUR SKILLS

## Mindful Listening Practice

Find a partner to practice with (co-worker, friend, family member). Have one person speak for three minutes uninterrupted while the other person listens.

If you're the listener, you're giving the speaker the gift of your full attention.

You can nod, or say, "I understand," but this is not the time for questions, or for you to relate their story to something you care about, like your favorite summer vacation story, or to give the speaker that one tip that's going to forever change their life...Your job is not to give advice, it's to listen.

During this exercise, co-workers who have been on the same team for more than 10 years often learn more about each other in three-minutes than they have in a decade working together. Listening, really listening, is incredibly efficient!



# BUILD YOUR SKILLS

## Practicing Rewarding the Candor

Google researched the elements that make for successful teams. They called this effort “Project Aristotle” and after two years, they discovered that the key ingredient for successful teams was “Psychological Safety,” a term coined by the behavioral scientist Amy Edmondson.

**Psychological Safety** means that employees are not afraid to speak up, share their opinions — good and bad — and that the inevitable mistakes that happen on the job are responded to with support and understanding. In a culture of Psychological Safety, Radical Candor encourages people to look at feedback as a gift.

### 3 Prompts to Practice Rewarding the Candor

1. Start your response to someone’s feedback with “So, what I’m hearing is...”
2. Start your response with the words “Thank you, because...”
3. Make a conscious effort to appreciate three different people each day. Making gratitude a habit will engender warmth and set the stage for more caring and candid conversations.



*Psychological Safety means that employees are not afraid to speak up, share their opinions — good and bad — and that the inevitable mistakes that happen on the job are responded to with support and understanding.*

📖 [Read about how to reward Radical Candor](#)

**GIVE  
PRAISE**

PRACTICING RADICAL CANDOR

*SOLICIT  
CRITICISM* → ***GIVE  
PRAISE*** → *GIVE  
CRITICISM* → *GAUGE  
FEEDBACK*



Read on your own or in a group

# KNOWLEDGE CHECK

## When Praising, Remember **CORE**

- C** — **Context** (What's the context for the feedback?)
- O** — **Observation** (Describe what was said or done.)
- R** — **Result** (What is the consequence that is most meaningful — to you and to them.)
- E** — **nExt** (What steps will you take next?)

Praise, like criticism, includes caring and a challenge. For example, **CORE** praise that includes both caring and a challenge looks like this.

"I asked you to help us be more efficient (**context**), you went above and beyond by implementing Slack (**observation**), the team is spending less time on email but more time communicating, which allows us to get more done in less time (**result**)."

**nExt:** "We'd love for you to explore other tools that can help streamline communication in the office."

## A Few More Tips On Praise

- Just like criticism, praise can be awkward; but it's important to know what we do well and should continue doing.
- We need to push through our discomfort with praise, especially when praising others requires us to recognize our own failures.
- Being specific and sincere is a real relationship-building opportunity. It helps people feel seen and appreciated while also getting a new perspective on their work. These moments act like deposits into the relationship bank.
- Praise includes a challenge as well as caring; the challenge for praise can be simply for that person to continue doing what they did well, or it could be to take that experience to a new project. Or teach what they did to others!
- Finally, praise in public. Public praise allows not only the recipient to know what to do more of, but also the rest of the team. There are a small number of people who are not comfortable with public praise. Honor that when it emerges.

# GET PRAISE REFLECTION

**(Write it down on your own and/or discuss as a group)**

1. When was the last time that you offered someone praise? In your assessment, was it specific? Was it sincere? How could you have made it better?

2. Pretend someone gave you the praise, "That was a really solid business performance you gave last quarter."

What questions would you have to ask to make it so that you could learn from and repeat that in the future? How might those questions help when you need to give praise in the future?

3. What's a piece of praise you could offer your manager? How about a peer? Your group or partner? Someone else?

When would be your next opportunity to offer them that praise? Will you commit to offering it?

If you're game, add these "Praise Dates" to your calendar

📖 [Read about how to give helpful and humble feedback](#)

📺 [Watch Kim explain how to give praise and criticism](#)

# GIVE CRITICISM

## PRACTICING RADICAL CANDOR

*SOLICIT  
CRITICISM* → *GIVE  
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FEEDBACK*

Read on your own or in a group

# KNOWLEDGE CHECK ✓

## How to give HIP feedback

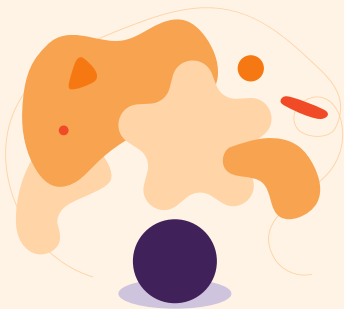
### HUMBLE

Remember, when you are having a conversation with someone, you are only 50% of the story. It is important to walk into a feedback conversation with a sense of humility, knowing that your point of view is an important piece of a larger puzzle. Speak from your point of view, but leave space for them as well.

*"I observed ..."*

*"Did you observe the same thing?"*

*"Can we talk about ...?"*



### HELPFUL

We have all been part of that situation where someone is pissing us off and we can't wait to give them that piece of feedback so that they can finally feel the pain of their mistakes! Slow your roll and consider the goal of the conversation. Are you having it to win, or are you having it to help? Make sure your goal is to help the other person succeed, otherwise it's not helpful.



Read on your own or in a group

# KNOWLEDGE CHECK ✓

## How to give HIP feedback

### *IMMEDIATE*

Give feedback immediately, or as close to immediately as possible. Ever waited six months until someone's annual review to give a piece of much needed feedback? "One hundred and eighty days ago, you did something that I want to discuss..." When you wait too long, you can get caught up in debating details versus immediately nipping something in the bud.



### *IN-PERSON OR ON VIDEO*

Remember, these are conversations that we are co-creating. If you have feedback conversations over the phone or email, you lose much if not all of your ability to get a sense of how your words are landing, as well as an opportunity to hear the full extent of the other person's experience.

Radical Candor is measured at the listener's ear, not the sender's mouth, so while it is not always possible to be in person, the closer you can be to in person, the better.



Read on your own or in a group

# KNOWLEDGE CHECK ✓

## How to give HIP feedback

### IN PRIVATE

The part of your brain that interprets physical threats is the same part that activates when you feel a threat to your identity or ego.

So, if you criticize someone in public, chances are they will go into fight, flight, freeze mode and be unable to take in what we are saying. Try to find as private of a place as possible in order to create a supportive environment for your conversation.



### NOT ABOUT PERSONALITY

Make sure to focus on the behavior, not the person.

For example, would you respond better to someone giving you feedback about the need to show up to work on time, or would you prefer that they give you the feedback by calling you lazy



# RECEIVING CRITICISM REFLECTION

**(Write it down on your own and/or discuss as a group)**

Think about a time where someone gave you a piece of criticism that you are grateful for.

How did it feel to get it? What did they do that made the experience successful?

What would have happened had you not received that feedback?

- 📖 [Read about the HIP approach to feedback](#)
- 🎥 [Watch Kim explain why you should eliminate "Don't Take It Personally" from your vocabulary](#)
- 🎧 [Listen to a podcast about Radically Candid criticism](#)

# GAUGE FEEDBACK

## PRACTICING RADICAL CANDOR

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Read on your own or in a group

# KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Gauge the other person's response by listening to what they say, observing their body language, look them in the eye and asking yourself, "How do

they seem to be feeling?" If you're not sure, you can always ask how what you said landed.

If the person you're talking to seems sad, this is your cue to take a moment to show you Care Personally.

This is hard because when confronted with someone who seems upset, it's our natural inclination to back off what we were saying — to move the wrong direction on the Challenge Directly dimension of Radical Candor (increasing the challenge). Instead, now is your time to show that you care — increase the care.

Similarly, when you get an angry response from the person you're talking to, it's your cue to move up on the Care Personally dimension.

This is hard because when the other person is angry, it's natural for you to get angry, too. But remember, nothing will move you down on the Care Personally axis faster than anger.



Read on your own or in a group

# KNOWLEDGE CHECK

One great way to show you care when confronted with negative emotions from another person is to acknowledge the emotion, for example:

*"I'm noticing some strong emotion, what's coming up for you?" "My goal was to be helpful, seems I've missed the mark."*

*"How can I help?"*

*"What can I do to help get our conversation back on track?"*



Often, simply acknowledging the emotion can help someone feel more understood. This is more difficult than it sounds because most people tend to pretend emotions aren't happening.

You might misunderstand the emotion you are seeing; be humble when naming the emotion. And whatever you do, don't judge the emotion or tell the person they "shouldn't" be feeling it.

🎥 [Watch Kim's Talk](#)

📄 [Test your knowledge](#)

# RADICAL CANDOR

[RADICALCANDOR.COM](http://RADICALCANDOR.COM)