

Managing in a clear and human way

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WHY MANAGING IN A CLEAR AND HUMAN WAY?

In most cases, communication automatically proceeds smoothly. Sometimes, however, it is difficult to communicate with people in one's working environment. What exactly does the customer mean? What is expected from you? And if things proceed contrary to what you want, or if they proceed very well, you want to have an opportunity to comment ...

Example

You came in at the office and are about to continue with a memo when your colleague walks in with information you want to include in the memo. He comes a day earlier than agreed and asks you kindly whether the information is suitable. You are happy with a colleague like this. He makes it possible for you to work towards a good result. You would like to show your recognition for that.

That same day, after lunch, you have a brief talk with your manager. She asks you to check something, but she is not really clear about what she expects from you. You decide to ask a few more questions to find out what she's driving at, so that you can comply with her request. When the matter still isn't clear after you have done so, you address her, indicating that you want her to be more precise.

You have frequent contacts with the people in your working environment. You see one another, make phone calls, send mail messages and you talk to one another during consultations or just in the corridors. Often, the way these people function and the way you communicate with them has a direct influence on how well you can function yourself.

At your company, functioning adequately means that you make the co-operation and the result of that co-operation subject of discussion with your principal, your internal customers, your subordinates and team members. The skill of addressing will be of assistance in this process.

What exactly is addressing, what do we mean by it? Addressing means that you give your opinion, in a constructive manner, to other people about their behaviour and the effect of that behaviour. Mostly, you will address a person when you wish the behaviour of that person to change. It also means that you should adopt a constructive attitude when you yourself are addressed in respect of your behaviour.

<p><i>Addressing: Constructively giving your opinion about other people's behaviour and the effect of that behaviour.</i></p>

By paying attention to the addressing discussion technique you will perform even better as an executive. Obviously, your company's employees and customers benefit from this as well.

WHAT DOES MANAGING IN A CLEAR AND HUMAN WAY IMPLY?

Within the skill of addressing we distinguish the following four derived skills:

Addressing

- active listening
 - complimenting
 - giving feedback
 - confronting
1. **Active listening**, listening to the people you work with;
 2. **Complimenting**, telling someone from your working environment what you're satisfied with;
 3. **Giving feedback**, indicating to someone from your working environment which suggestions you have to improve your co-operation;
 4. **Confronting**, giving a stronger form of feedback, which you use when the behaviour of someone from your working environment hampers your performance.

We first present the basics of addressing: a central principle with a number of statements on the subject. After that, more information is provided about the skill of addressing as well as the derived skills.

The basics of addressing

Addressing is based on a central principle: *everything that gets attention grows*. What does this principle mean?

“Everything that gets attention grows.”

Rewarded behaviour is reinforced

For people, attention is a very powerful form of reward. A person who receives recognition and attention for his work will do the same work with greater pleasure, and also better. This requires you to be alert to and pay constant attention to the desired behaviour of your employees, colleagues, internal customers, suppliers and principals. This attention may consist of a compliment, an understanding look, your presence or a phone call.

Punishment leads to evasion; the problem gets worse

Negative attention or punishment will not cure people of certain behaviour. Renewed punishment will be avoided, but the behaviour is repressed and will crop up again at a different time. So: If you criticise someone heavily and treat him sternly, he will avoid you, will hold information back from you and perhaps do exactly those things, which you didn't want him to.

Negative attention is better than none at all

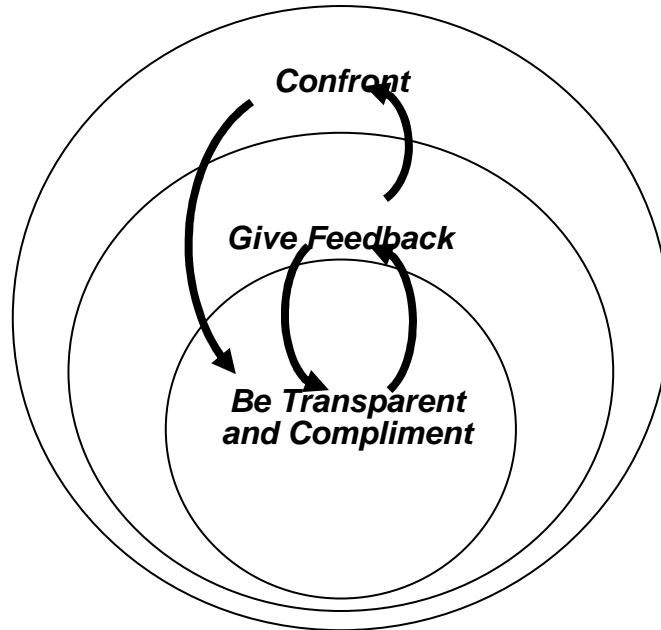
Attention is important to people and therefore some people prefer negative attention to none at all. By giving a lot of negative attention to matters or behaviour which you are not satisfied with, that behaviour is likely to grow.

Behaviour that attracts no attention will die out

Ignoring undesired behaviour and paying no attention to it is often a good option. As soon as the undesired behaviour stops you will, of course, start paying positive attention again.

The Addressing Circles

These principles constitute the ideas underlying the concept of addressing. On the basis of these ideas a model has been developed: the Addressing Circles. In these circles, three derived skills can be distinguished. In the following part we elucidate the various circles and their contents; the derived skill of Active Listening is elucidated later.



We start with Being Transparent; then follow Complimenting and Giving Feedback, and we end with Confronting.

Being Transparent

To be able to work in accordance with the principles of the model, you have to be transparent. You are transparent when you communicate on your own initiative, i.e. proactively, what you want and what you don't want. Complete with the underlying intentions: why do you want it, what is the idea behind it?

By being transparent about what you want from someone, chances of him/her complying are greater. People mostly cannot guess what you want, and why you want it. When people do what you like them to do, it is important that you pay attention to this. This attention will reinforce the behaviour and it will improve the working atmosphere.

Being transparent: proactively communicate what you want and what you don't want.

We are used to addressing people about their behaviour when things go wrong in the co-operation. You expect colleagues to supply their products or services to you at the agreed time. When this does not happen, you have a choice: either you make a remark about this or you keep your mouth shut although you're angry.

You should, preferably, devote a lot of your time, to being clear and transparent about the matters you desire or advocate. When the desired behaviour is displayed, it is very important to notice this and to pay attention to the situation. A lot of time means here even 80% or 90% of your available time.

When the people around you do not function well you should ask yourself: "Was I transparent?"

So, being transparent about your expectations is preferably done before misunderstandings develop. In doing so, you also allow a person a chance to meet your expectations.

Also, extensively inform your employees, colleagues, principal and customer why you think a certain solution or working method is important. When the underlying intentions are clear, other people can act in the spirit of your wishes in unprecedented situations.

When you address a person about behaviour that was not clearly communicated in advance (transparency), the person concerned will perceive this as unjust: He is unable to guess what you wanted. In such a case it is more effective to explain what was meant, together with the underlying intentions, based on the assumption that the employee meant well.

When an employee, your colleague or your principal does something that irritates you, the important question that you should first ask yourself is: have I been transparent? Does he know how I think about this?

As soon as you ask yourself this question, you will blame people less frequently, and you stay calm yourself.

"Small wonder he does that, I have omitted to be transparent so far".

In a next talk you tell him what you would like. Please note that this is not yet addressing: you're telling something for the first time. The other person is not expected to guess what you want.

Examples of being transparent, giving your opinion:

Example: "I want our project group to really read documents in advance, so that we can get to work straight away when we meet."

Or: "For me it is very important that I am at all times informed of how this problem is proceeding. This means that I'd rather get ten times too much information from you than that you try to spare me and I am informed of something important too late."

Complimenting

In the circles model, a circle is shown around 'being transparent' and 'complimenting': they go hand in hand.

When you are clear about your expectations and the method of co-operation with your colleagues or employees, and when the person complies with your wishes, you show your recognition. You say what was pleasant or what you liked, and you may specify this by describing what the other person's behaviour meant to you. Giving a compliment is a good way to reward effective behaviour. Behaviour that is rewarded will increase.

Giving feedback

When the behaviour or the result does not come up to your expectations or agreement, you may wish to give feedback. This indicates that giving feedback is the next step after being transparent or complimenting. You may give feedback when repeatedly being transparent does not result in the desired behaviour.

Example 1

You tell your employee Frank to stop asking question after question while you are writing a report. You perceive his behaviour as disturbing.

Frank regards your reaction as unjust. "How was I to know that you find this disturbing and want to continue working without being interrupted?"

The example shows what happens when you give feedback without having been transparent first. In what way could this have been dealt with differently? Take a look at the second example.

Example 2

You are transparent and tell Frank at the start of the day: "I want to concentrate on my work this morning without being interrupted."

But Frank continues to disturb you although you have been transparent. You decide to give him feedback on his behaviour. "Frank, I notice that that you walked into my room a couple of times, asking questions; I can't concentrate when you do that. I suggest that you save your questions until after lunch."

Frank gets the message and in the afternoon he approaches you with a few questions. You appreciate his behaviour: "Frank, I am glad that I could continue with that job this morning. Now let's have a look at your questions."

The second example shows that being transparent precedes giving feedback. Yet, it is possible that being transparent does not result in the desired behaviour. In that case you can give feedback, meaning that you proceed to the next circle. Your purpose in doing so is to change the undesired behaviour.

As soon as the other person shows the desired behaviour after the feedback, you change back to transparency and complimenting again.

When giving feedback, it is important to be precise about what you want to say. To this end, you may use the three-stage method below.

Three-stage method

You indicate...

what you perceived (I saw/heard..),
the effect of what you perceived,
what you suggest or how you want things
to go in the future.

When you made your point using the three-stage method, the other person will often respond by giving his opinion. If you want to achieve that the other person changes his behaviour, it is no use to continue mentioning that you want things to go differently without allowing the other person a chance to say what he thinks of the matter himself. You can show understanding for the other person's opinion and describe his feelings.

Confronting

Confronting is the most drastic form of addressing a person. That is the reason why confronting is located in the outermost circle of the figure above. It means that you only resort to the skill of confronting when repeated transparency and feedback have not had any effect on the behaviour to be changed.

In short, also when you confront a person you continue to try and find a solution together with the person with whom you have a problem. Only when your feedback and confrontation do not have a positive effect and the problem persists, can you consider steps that go even further. This may result in a bad-news conversation.

The relationship between the circles

In summary: When addressing a person, you change over from explaining and being transparent to giving feedback. From giving feedback you can change back to being transparent or opting in favour of confronting. Since your discussion partner does not like this, you put the relationship under pressure. This pressure can be reduced again by active listening, particularly by describing the other person's feelings. More information on this is contained under the heading Reflecting.

What do the Addressing Circles offer you?

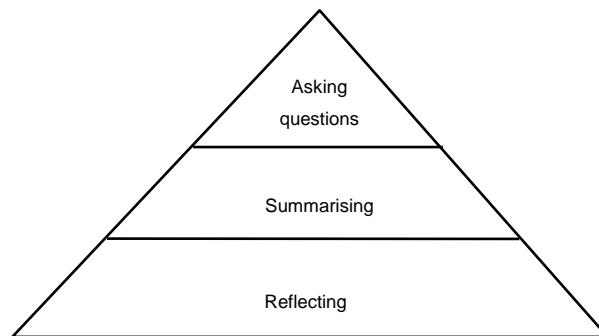
The circles model results in a pleasant and relaxed working atmosphere. The people you work with can direct all their energy towards their work. You prevent them from expending their energy on coping with hurt feelings, solving riddles, gossiping and grumbling.

Instead of spending energy on criticising and correcting what you do not want you can focus on consulting, informing and paying attention to what you do want. This will result in a relaxed working atmosphere and better relationships.

Active listening

Performing successfully also means: listening actively to the people you work with. Active listening can be subdivided into three techniques, the relationships between the layers of the pyramid.

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Understanding the essence of the message by asking questions ; | CONTENT |
| 2. Checking that you have understood the message by summarising ; | PROCEDURE |
| 3. Showing that you understand the other person's feelings by reflecting . | PROCESS |



Procedure and process are central in addressing exercises. This is also the case with active listening. Particularly the techniques of summarising and reflecting are used when complimenting, giving feedback and confronting.

Listening to the other person is a seemingly passive skill. The opposite is true: listening requires a major effort. To properly understand the other person's message, it is important to trace the essence. People easily think that they understand the other person, whereas they are interpreting the story in their own way.

When you receive an order from an internal customer or principal, discussion and agreement are essential.

When an employee approaches you with a question, you can clarify that question by listening actively.

Asking questions

Asking questions is a technique that allows you to obtain information, such as about the contents of an order, a possible solution or an approach.

Questions make the other person think, and assist in clarifying an issue and in formulating thoughts, wishes, motivation or ideas. By asking the right questions you are better able to trace the essence of what a person means.

The effect of a question is strongly dependent on the type of question. Described below are a few types of questions, illustrated by examples.

Questions make you think.

Open questions

Open questions allow ample room for the answer. Hence the name. Open questions offer the other person a lot of freedom in formulating the answer. Thus, he can explain his thoughts in his own words.

Examples:

- "What do you think is important for the period ahead?"
- "How can we solve this?"
- "Which are the most important developments in that project?"
- "Can you tell me something more about"
- "What do you expect from me?"

Open questions frequently start with 'what', 'where', 'when' and 'how'. Be careful with 'why'-questions, however. They may sound threatening and they may give the other person a feeling of being admonished.

Asking follow-up questions

As the name says, follow-up questions follow previously asked questions. If you want to know more about a subject, you ask a follow-up question, which connects to what the other person just replied. It is also possible to ask more specific questions.

Stimulating: open questions and follow-up questions.

Examples:

- "What other ways are there in your opinion?"
- "On what aspect is this solution better than the other one?"
- "Which is your common interest in this situation?"
- "You mention an 'innovative approach'. What do you mean by that?"

Apart from open questions there are also questions, which rather curb or hamper the speaker in providing relevant information. These are questions, which you asked on the basis of your views and feelings.

Questions you'd better NOT ask are closed and leading questions.

Closed questions

The closed question is the opposite of the open question. A closed question is limiting, whereas an open question offers space. When asked a closed question, the other person will tend to give brief answers. To get more information, the person asking the questions has to think of a new question.

Hampering: closed questions and leading questions.

Examples:

- "Was this a useful discussion?"
- "Don't you think the co-operation with Charles is proceeding pleasantly?"
- "Is the work at your department nice?"

Leading questions

Leading questions contain your concealed opinion. When asking these questions, you do not allow the other person a chance to give information. The other person may sometimes even tend to evade your suggestion.

Examples:

- "So you guys had to cope with these difficulties before?"
- "I presume once again that you haven't read this letter?"

A special type of leading question is the “either-or” question. These questions allow the discussion partner to choose from two opinions or solutions.

Examples:

- “Have you discussed this with your boss or with your colleague?”
- “Was it you who sent this e-mail, or was it your colleague?”

Summarising

When you summarise you express, in your own words, the essence of what the other person told you. You do not simply repeat what was said.

You reflect your interpretation of the message. Even though you use your own words, a summary reflects what the other person means and is consequently free from your own opinion or judgement. The effect of summarising is that the other person is allowed an opportunity to adjust the interpreted message, to supplement it or to confirm that it indeed represents the essence of what he is saying.

Summarising is reflecting essence.

The result of a summary during a conversation is threefold:

1. The other person notices that he is actually being listened to;
2. The other person can expand on what he is saying, resulting in more detailed information;
3. You have checked that you have understood the essence.

The other person's reaction to a good summary on your part will be that he replies ‘Yes’. When you make a series of to-the-point summaries, you will receive a series of ‘yes’ replies. A series of such replies will create a constructive atmosphere.

Example

Other person: “Well, finally I want to ask you something. Maria is ill and tomorrow we have this important meeting, which she promised to attend. Perhaps you can inform me about the most important developments of the project. I would like to use this information to keep those involved informed of the state of affairs.”

You: “If I understand you correctly, you want information from me today about the state of affairs, so that you can brief the participants tomorrow during the meeting.”

Other person: “Yes, exactly,”

After you have heard what the other person has said and after you have shown that you have understood what has been said, you may end the discussion. In doing so, you may mention the most important conclusions, decisions, consequences or measures, and make a follow-up appointment, if required.

Reflecting

Reflecting is expressing or mirroring the other person's feelings. You try to understand how the other person feels, and you tell him or her. By reflecting you show that you understand the other person's feelings. You choose to reflect when you notice that the other person is overwhelmed by emotions, which make it impossible for him or her to think.

Reflecting: expressing or mirroring feelings.

Example

Other person: “I keep trying, but I can't reach Elise. She doesn't call back and she doesn't respond to my e-mail either.”

You: “You are irritated because she doesn't reply.”

Other person: “Yes,”

By issuing a series of consecutive reflections you help a person to express his motivations and emotions. Expression of emotions will relieve and empty a person. The thing is that you are unable to

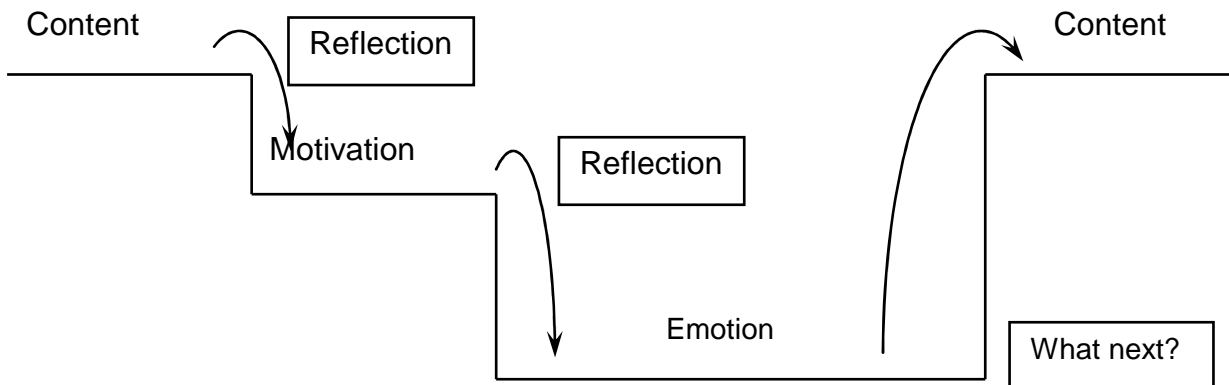
think or work properly when you are full of emotions. Only when the other person has been able to express all that is important at a given moment will he be open to possible solutions or alternatives. Often you can hear him asking the question: "What now?" This is a sign that the person is able to think again. Only then can a good talk about the contents of the subject be started.

Example

You want to address your colleague because he always arrives late at appointments. Your colleague has a good day and is overjoyed. He scored a major success in an ambitious, large-scale project. His customer is very satisfied with this and your colleague is beaming with joy. He will not be open to your message until after he has first had a chance to express his own emotions (his joy).

The figure below shows what happens when you reflect. In most cases, a person will start by telling about the mere contents of a matter. When you react with a reflection, an expression of his emotions, you will often notice that the person concerned starts to tell more: details about the motivation behind the story will follow. By reflecting again you allow your discussion partner to provide even more details, and he will also disclose the feelings he has about it. After that, your discussion partner is likely to be 'empty'; he will probably say "what next?". That is precisely the moment to return to the contents and to resolve the problem.

When your discussion partner again shows emotions during the solution phase, it is recommendable to reflect again.



Feelings and opinions of the person you're addressing may be expressed directly in words, but they may also be shown non-verbally, through posture, loudness or speed of speech.

Example

(Other person leans forward, resting his forehead on his hand)
 Other person: "The work is piling up tremendously and I am constantly behind schedule with this project."
 You: "You are worrying whether you are able to complete the project at the agreed time." content
 Other person: "Yes, and I do want to deliver a quality product".
 You: "You feel that you're stuck between more work and doing a good job." motivation
 Other person: "I really don't know how cope with this".
 You: "You have tried everything, but you feel desperate". feeling / emotion

Reflecting is sometimes difficult, since the other person does not always use words expressing feelings. When reflecting, you express what the other person feels, so you yourself choose a word to

express his feelings. It is not really a problem if you reflect by using a word that does not fully cover what the other person means. In such a case, the other person himself will say what he does mean.

Example

Other person: "I don't know how to cope with this."

You: "You have tried everything, but you feel desperate."

Other person: "Well, not exactly desperate, I just feel powerless."

Sometimes, you yourself are the source of the unpleasant feelings your discussion partner perceives. This may happen when you give someone feedback about his behaviour. Then, too, it is essential to reflect these feelings. When giving feedback, the technique of 'reflecting' comes in very handy. You start your feedback by introducing the three-stage method.

Example of giving feedback

You: "I want you to know that it bothers me very much that you keep sending me work at the very last moment, and this hasn't changed even though I asked you a couple of times. The result is that I have to work weekends, and I'm fed up with that. I want better agreements on this, so that it doesn't happen anymore."

Other person: "Hey, wait a second, who is sending me extra work all the time and who wants me to attend each and every meeting? You! If only you'd let me work, I'd be able to finish things during normal working hours!"

You: "You're angry because it is my fault that your work is always ready late, you think that I have no right to address you about that."

Other person: "Yes, exactly. The thing is that I keep saying 'yes' to you, I can't say 'no'. But you never think about how I should get things done."

You: "You feel that I treat you unjustly. You had hoped that I would have some consideration for you, and I keep only thinking of myself."

Other person: "Yes, I know that you have too much work and that we're under pressure. I'm really worrying about that project. What can we do about it?"

At a given moment, the other person is 'empty': all feelings have been expressed and heard and he is capable of thinking again. Then follows the question: What next? and you can start solving the problem.

The example shows that reflecting in a manner mirroring how the other person feels often results in the other person answering 'Yes'. Just as is the case with summarising, multiple reflections may result in a whole series of 'Yes' answers.

Summary - Active Listening

Below, the subject of Active Listening is summarised again.

Asking questions

⇒ Ask open questions

- Ask for clarification or for more detail.

For instance: 'What do you mean by...?' 'What do you think of...?'

⇒ Ask follow-up questions in a questioning way

- Do not interpret too quickly, but ask specific questions.

For instance: 'What other ways are there according to you?'

⇒ Repeat words

- Repeat words which are not explained.

For instance: 'what situation?', 'she?' or 'not good?'

Summarising

⇒ Summarise what the other person is saying.

- Show to the speaker that you have understood him/her by summarising the essence of what has been said.

For instance: 'I hear you say that...'. 'If I understand you correctly you think that...'

- When your discussion partner tells you the same thing a few times over, it is certainly important to start summarising; apparently, he feels that his message does not come across.

Reflecting

⇒ Feelings prevail. Stop dealing with content when you notice that someone is becoming emotional.

⇒ Don't add anything. Try to describe the feelings that you perceive in the other person without expressing your own opinion.

⇒ It doesn't matter when your reflection is not completely correct; the other person will notice that you are making an effort to understand him and he will provide a further explanation.

⇒ "I understand you" is not perceived as understanding; describing a person's emotion is, however.

Tips

- Give the other person your full attention;
- Stimulate by nodding, smiling or assenting ('I see');
- Allow to other person to have his say, don't interrupt;
- From time to time, allow for a moment of silence, some time to think things over;
- Maintain eye contact with the other person.

HOW DO I ADDRESS A PERSON? (3 MODELS)

You now know why addressing is important, and what it is about. To help you with the subjects of complimenting, giving feedback and confronting we give you the following three models.

Complimenting

Phase 1	Establishing contact
Establish contact	Judge whether the situation is right. Make eye contact.
Announce compliment	Tell the other person that you are about to say something pleasant.
Be consistent in your attitude	Use your facial expression and posture to show to the other person that you're pleased.
Phase 2	Give compliment
Give compliment	Give the compliment a personal touch: use the word "I": "I'm pleased with.... " "I like it that you...." If necessary, make the compliment more specific by using the three-stage method: (1) Say what you perceived (I saw/heard that you did ...); (2) The effect of that, (3) What this means to you (I like that very much, it makes me feel...). Note what the compliment evokes in terms of emotions and accept these by reflecting.

Source: Kessels & Smit, *The Learning Company*

Giving feedback

Phase 1 Establish contact	
Establish contact	Judge whether the situation is right. Make eye contact.
Announce feedback	Tell the other person that you want to give him feedback on a subject.
Be consistent in your attitude	Use your facial expression and posture to show that you are serious.
Phase 2 Give feedback	
Give feedback	Use the three-stage method: tell (1) What you perceived (I saw/heard..), (2) What the effect of that is/was, and (3) What you suggest and how you want things to go in the future.
Allow for a moment of silence	Allow the other person an opportunity to react.
Phase 3 Listen and solve	
Listen actively	Reflect and summarise. Suppress your inclination to talk about your own experiences.
Offer a way out	<i>Back to work:</i> Indicate that things clearly have to change. If necessary, outline a few options.
Allow to formulate a suggestion Listen actively	Ask the other person to come up with ideas and solutions. Summarise and assist. Make sure that the other person remains owner of his problem. Refrain from offering solutions yourself!
Make an appointment	Allow the other person to indicate a follow-up appointment.

Source: Kessels & Smit, *The Learning Company*

Confronting

Phase 1 Establish contact and confront	
Establish contact	Ensure privacy and sufficient time, make eye contact.
Announce confrontation	Tell the other person that you're about to say something that's been bugging you for some time, and that he won't like.
Be consistent in your attitude	Use your facial expression and posture to show to the other person that you're very serious.
Confront: be specific, ensure impact	Formulate your confrontation very clearly: say what problem you mean and how you feel about it.
Limit the subject	Deal with one problem at a time.
Emphasise change	Be future-oriented: indicate that you wish to continue co-operating AND that you want things to change (don't ask <i>why</i> things went wrong).
Phase 2 Listen: collect information and restore relationship	
Listen actively	Take your time to summarise and reflect until the other person is 'empty'. Also reflect anxiety directed towards you. Ask follow-up questions if you don't understand what is meant.
Reflect feelings	Delay giving your own opinion. Reformulate the confrontation when new information requires this and start again.
Summarise the various points of view	Now summarise the problem for both parties: "so you say it'sand I think that....."
Ask whether the summary is agreed	Ask the other person whether he agrees to the summary (you can also agree about the fact that the two of you disagree). Express your appreciation for the openness.
Phase 3 Solve	
Develop a strategy Agree on subsequent steps	Jointly think of what could be done next and how you are going to deal with this in concrete terms. Allow the other person to come up with a solution.
Plan follow-up	Check whether it is clear who is going to do what, who the owner of the problem is and make follow-up appointments.
Express recognition	State that you are confident about the follow-up as well as the working relationship with the other person; indicate what you appreciated in the conversation.

Source: D.C. Kinlaw. Confronting: a coach's most difficult skill (In: 'Opleiders in Organisaties', Capita Selecta, Aug. 1994). Deventer: Kluwer. Also in your DC literature booklet.