

Feedback Resilience: A Culture-Changing Program for Nurse Leaders

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Introduction

Creating and sustaining a healthy work environment is central to the mission of nurse leaders. Despite ongoing culture and professional practice initiatives, many leaders struggle to translate awareness into consistent action—particularly in delivering and receiving feedback (Emam, Fakhry, & Abdrabou, 2024). Within our organization, a persistent gap was identified through development conversations.

- Discomfort delivering actionable feedback
- Discomfort receiving feedback without defensiveness
- Avoidance of difficult conversations impacted trust and team effectiveness

Initiative focused on developing skills for both giving and receiving feedback
Goals: Move from feedback awareness to a sustainable behavioral change to feedback resilience.

Objectives

- **Improve** nurse leader confidence in delivering actionable, respectful feedback
- **Strengthen** leaders' ability to receive feedback with openness and humility
- **Reduce** avoidance of difficult conversations
- **Improve** and develop psychological safety and trust within teams
- **Promote** sustainable, positive culture change

Barriers

- **Discomfort** addressing challenging behaviors or performance concerns
- **Fear** of damaging relationships
- **Avoidance** or delay of difficult conversations
- **Defensiveness** when receiving peer or frontline feedback

Methods

Program Design

- Series of short, digestible learning sessions
- Combination of brief lectures and micro-learning sessions
- Designed to minimize cognitive overload and respect leader time

Educational Strategies:

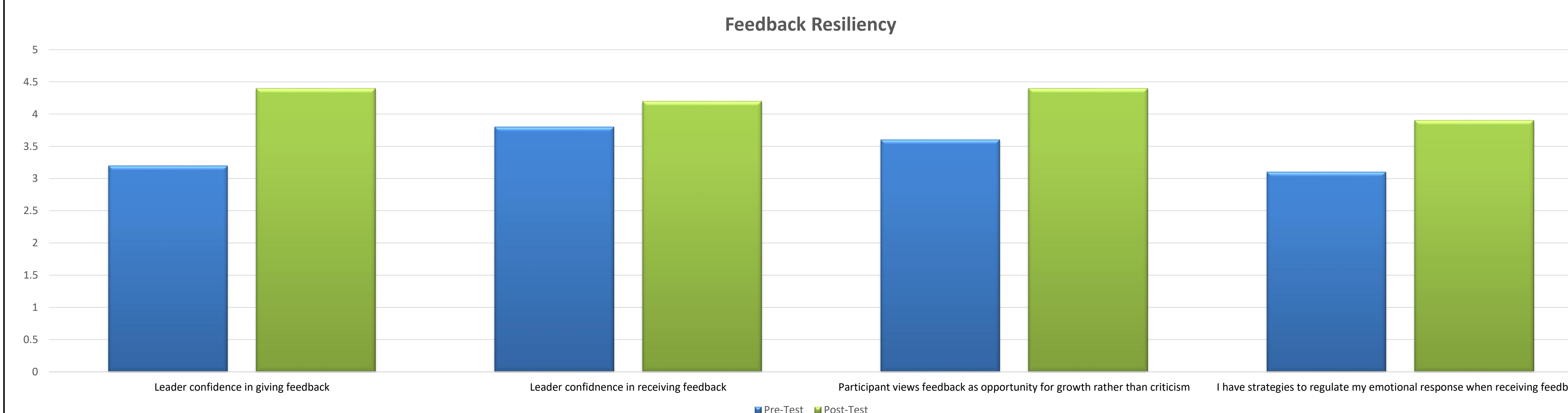
- Structured communication frameworks for giving feedback
- Role-playing scenarios
- Active listening and reflection techniques
- Peer discussion and coaching

Program Evolution:

- Initially focused on giving feedback
- Expanded to intentionally include receiving feedback skill development
- Emphasis on feedback as a two-way exchange
- Focused on creating and sustaining psychological safety for both giving and receiving feedback

Results

Evaluation data demonstrated meaningful improvements when comparing pre/post test survey results. Leaders reported increased confidence in both giving and receiving feedback and a reduction in avoidance of difficult conversations. Post-program surveys indicated improved self-reported psychological safety within teams. Qualitative feedback revealed stronger peer connections, increased leader support, and greater willingness to proactively address negative behaviors. Leaders also reported modeling openness when receiving feedback from frontline staff.



Qualitative Themes:

- Leaders felt more connected and supported
- Increased proactive addressing of negative behaviors
- Greater modeling of openness by leaders
- Feedback reframed from punitive to growth-oriented
- One of the most powerful outcomes was the shift in perception:
Feedback became viewed as a tool for growth and connection rather than correction.

Discussion

As the program evolved, it became clear that focusing solely on feedback delivery was insufficient. Leaders also needed explicit skill development in receiving feedback without defensiveness in order to model the culture they sought to create. Reframing feedback as a tool for growth and connection—rather than punishment—was critical. Sustaining momentum required embedding accountability into existing leadership structures, reinforcing feedback as an ongoing leadership practice rather than a one-time intervention.

This initiative highlighted that:

- Feedback resilience strengthens leadership credibility
 - Modeling openness reinforces psychological safety
 - Short, practical, immediately applicable learning drives sustainable behavior change
 - Culture change occurs through repeated, skill-based practice—not awareness alone
- The principles from this program are transferable to any organization facing feedback challenges.

Next Steps

- **Implement** clear feedback strategies that balance accountability and compassion
- **Explain** feedback resilience to reduce avoidance of difficult conversations
- **Design** short, focused sessions using real-world examples
- **Embed** reflection and peer feedback opportunities
- **Develop** skills for both giving and receiving feedback
- **Normalize** feedback as a two-way growth process

Conclusion

- Feedback resilience is a core leadership competency essential to sustaining healthy work environments
- Equipping nurse leaders with practical, immediately applicable skills to give and receive feedback strengthens trust and accountability
- Bidirectional feedback enhances psychological safety and team engagement
- Skill-based development moves organizations beyond awareness to measurable action
- Building feedback resilience supports sustainable culture transformation

References

- Emam, S. M., Fakhry, S. F., & Abdrabou, H. M. (2024). Leaders development program by 360 degree feedback: Reflection on head nurses' leadership practices. *BCM Nursing*, 23(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-024-02395-w>
- Rydz-Semmel, J., France, M., Bradshaw, R., Khan, M., Mulholland, B., Meucci, J., & McGrath, J. (2019). Design and implementation of a face-to-face peer feedback program for ambulatory nursing. *JONA: The Journal of Nursing Administration*, 49(3), 143-149. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NNA.0000000000000728>

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