

LEADERSHIP DEFINED

You're more than a number

HOW WERE THINGS BEFORE?

As a NUM I noticed many workplace practices focusing on processes over staff. Staff were being referred to as a number before their name; like staff phone enquiry conversations starting with *What's your payroll number?* I also saw staff having to fit into the annual performance review script rather than it being a person-centred experience. This didn't sit right for me, I wanted to do things a bit differently.

WHAT DID I DO?

What I hoped for was to create a valued experience with staff I worked with, placing their well-being at the heart of processes, & doing this through an appreciative approach to conversation. To support this I tried using visual imagery cards in the annual performance review.

Using the image cards in the review discussion I invited staff to choose cards that summed up how they felt about their role. I picked a card as well & shared a bit about myself.



WHAT DID I LEARN?

NUM'S EXPERIENCE USING THE IMAGE CARDS

I found using the cards in the review generated real, honest discussion & drew out development aspects that my colleague & I could work together to enhance. I felt the conversation drawn out from the cards offered a way to personalise the review experience for both of us.

STAFF EXPERIENCE USING THE IMAGE CARDS

Staff felt the cards helped open up conversation & they were able to share so much more about themselves that they would not have said with questions on paper alone:

"The cards opened a doorway to express myself freely."

Staff valued how I chose a card as well to share how I felt about my role. They felt this small act gave them permission to also share.

Staff felt I understood what they had to say, simply by the way I was listening intently to them while they were talking & also how I was asking curious questions to help them explore their thoughts & ideas. They said this helped them feel heard & confident to share more.

Staff noticed that I was learning new things about them:

"When the NUM heard me sharing new things about myself he commented 'oh, I didn't know that'.....I could see these were light bulb moments for him as the things coming out from my conversation were new to him."

Staff also remarked how the conversation helped to further develop a rapport with me, their manager.

WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS THE NEW APPROACH MADE?

The old performance review approach was like a mechanical cog that forced the NUM & staff to go through the motions of the process. Whereas the new approach opened up caring conversations that helped to humanise the person. It enabled staff to be themselves, more than just the role label itself. The conversation offered a sense of significance & belonging; staff felt valued, heard, had purpose in their role, & felt part of the manager's team. One staff member summed it up by saying:

"I walked out of the review knowing I had shared so much more than I would of with the old review process alone which was more of a tick & flick process. The new process made a difference, it was out of the box thinking, it was much more personalised & made me feel that I mattered."

WHAT NOW FOR THE FUTURE?

I've found the cards resonate for some staff but not all. So I'm curious to try out other caring conversation methods to keep the process relational; finding out what matters to staff, what they value & what they hope for.

