CUNA
HR & ORGANIZATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

23rd Annual Conference

Conducting Fearless Performance Reviews

Transforming Performance Progress Reviews into Powerful Coaching Conversations

Jeffrey Russell
Russell Consulting, Inc.

Russell
consulting, inc.

Helping Build and Sustain GREAT Organizations!

Jeffrey L. Russell

Jeff Russell, co-director of **Russell Consulting, Inc. (RCI)** with his wife Linda, specializes in helping leaders build productive, supportive, and motivating work environments. *RCI* helps companies develop their leadership and strengthen team performance to achieve their great performance goals and outcomes. By guiding the exploration of key values held in common by organizational members and developing strategies and actions to express these values-in-action, *RCI* helps organizations achieve their strategic vision.

Through processes that include "visioning" retreats, Future Search conferences, process redesigns, improving decision making processes, implementing quality improvement strategies, and providing a variety of skill-building seminars, *RCI* enhances long-term organizational effectiveness and performance.

Consulting Expertise

Jeff consults with companies in the areas of:

- Visioning and strategic planning
- Leadership development
- Leading and implementing change
- Performance management systems
- Employee engagement assessment
- Customer and employee focus groups
- Team assessment and intervention
- training needs assessment
- Organizational design
- Self-managed teams
- Problem solving and decision making

Training Expertise

Jeff conducts an array of leadership and team development seminars on such topics as:

- Surviving difficult conversations
- Fearless performance reviews
- Leadership and strategic thinking/planning
- Leading fearless change
- Communication skills
- Dealing with difficult people
- DiSC Behavioral Profiles
- 360 leadership assessment and development

- Effective meeting management
- Decision making and problem solving
- Managing conflict and win/win negotiations
- Performance management and coaching skills
- Team building fundamentals
- Team leadership and facilitation skills
- Customer service

Professional Background

Jeff serves as an adjunct faculty member at University of Wisconsin-Madison and UW-Milwaukee. He also teaches for the UW-Madison and UW-La Crosse Small Business Development Centers.

Jeff has a bachelor's in Humanism and Cultural Change and a Masters of Science degree in Industrial Relations from UW-Madison.

Jeff has worked with credit unions throughout the country and has presented at CUNA schools. He authored two books in the CUNA MERIT series: *Managing the Problem Employee* and *Managing Change*.

Jeff is a past president of the Board of Directors for the Greater Madison Area Society for Human Resource Management serving over 800 HR professionals in the Greater Madison area.

Conference Presenter and Author

Jeff is a sought-after speaker at state, national and international conferences. Recent presentations include:

- ASTD International Conferences — 2001 through 2011
- Jamaica Employer's Federation Conference, Ocho Rios, Jamaica, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009
- 2005 Minnesota Quality Conference
- Minnesota Project Management Institute, PDD 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017
- Wisconsin SHRM Annual Conference, 2004 through 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2017
- Wisconsin Child Welfare Annual Conference, 2012
- *Leading Change*, Shanghai, China
- *Emotional Intelligence in Action*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Jeff and his wife Linda have co-authored nine management books including **Leading Change Training, Strategic Planning Training**, **Change Basics, Strategic Planning 101, Ultimate Performance Management,** and **Fearless Performance Reviews** (McGraw-Hill, 2014).

Helping Create and Sustain *GREAT* Organizations!

1134 Winston Drive
Madison, Wisconsin 53711-3161

tel (608) 274-4482

RCI Online: www.RussellConsultingInc.com
E-mail: Jeff@RussellConsultingInc.com

Russell
consulting, inc.

Characteristics of Fearless Performance Reviews

What Makes a Performance Review Fear Inducing or Fearless?

Reflect on your experience with both fear-inducing and fearless performance reviews. What causes a review to go badly? What are the factors that contribute to a positive, productive, and truly fearless review?

Work with two or three people around you to identify characteristics of both the *fear-inducing* and the *fearless* performance review . . .

Characteristics that Led to a Fear-Inducing Performance Review	Characteristics that Enabled a Fearless Performance Review

Seven Reasons Why Performance Reviews Often Create Fear

Why do People Fear Reviews (Whether Giving or Receiving)?

Too often the traditional performance review is approached with anxiety and dread by both supervisors and employees. Some of the most common reasons why *both* parties in a review tend to fear them is because . . .

1. **It feels as though there is a lot at _____.** Our reputation, status, professional credibility, career future, bonus, and job security can all hinge on this crucial conversation.

2. **The process feels overly _____.** It's uncomfortable to have your worth or value being "judged" by another person and, if you are doing the judging, you may not feel fully informed or qualified to do so.

3. **The process sometimes raises uncomfortable _____.** A mistake someone makes is pointed out. An oversight is exposed. A decision made results in a less than desirable outcome. All of these suggest that we are only human, but none of us wants to make mistakes or be exposed by others as less than perfect.

4. **People may feel "_____" for a problem** — whether they were the cause or not. Blame never really moves any conversation toward a positive outcome. While it might get people's attention, it usually just results in defensiveness and denial. When people feel blamed they tend to go under cover.

5. **People aren't _____ at it.** It's actually quite rare for someone to sit us down and teach us how to either give or receive feedback gracefully or effectively. And, because people aren't very skilled at it, they don't know how to start such conversations or how to navigate them toward constructive outcomes.

6. **There's too much _____.** Too often reviews are filled with surprises that catch both the employee and manager off-guard. If reviews occur only once or twice a year or if the relationship between the players is strained, this is even more likely to occur. Each party may be anxious and fearful because of not knowing what might come up during the review.

7. **People feel a loss of _____.** Performance reviews often create situations (due to the issues cited above) where one or both parties to the review feel that their ability to maintain control over their work life or future is likely to be impaired.

Ten Characteristics of Fearless Reviews

Effective performance progress reviews are effective as a result of a conscious effort to *design* the review in such a way that the resulting *Performance Coaching Conversation* facilitates important insights in both the employee and the coach.

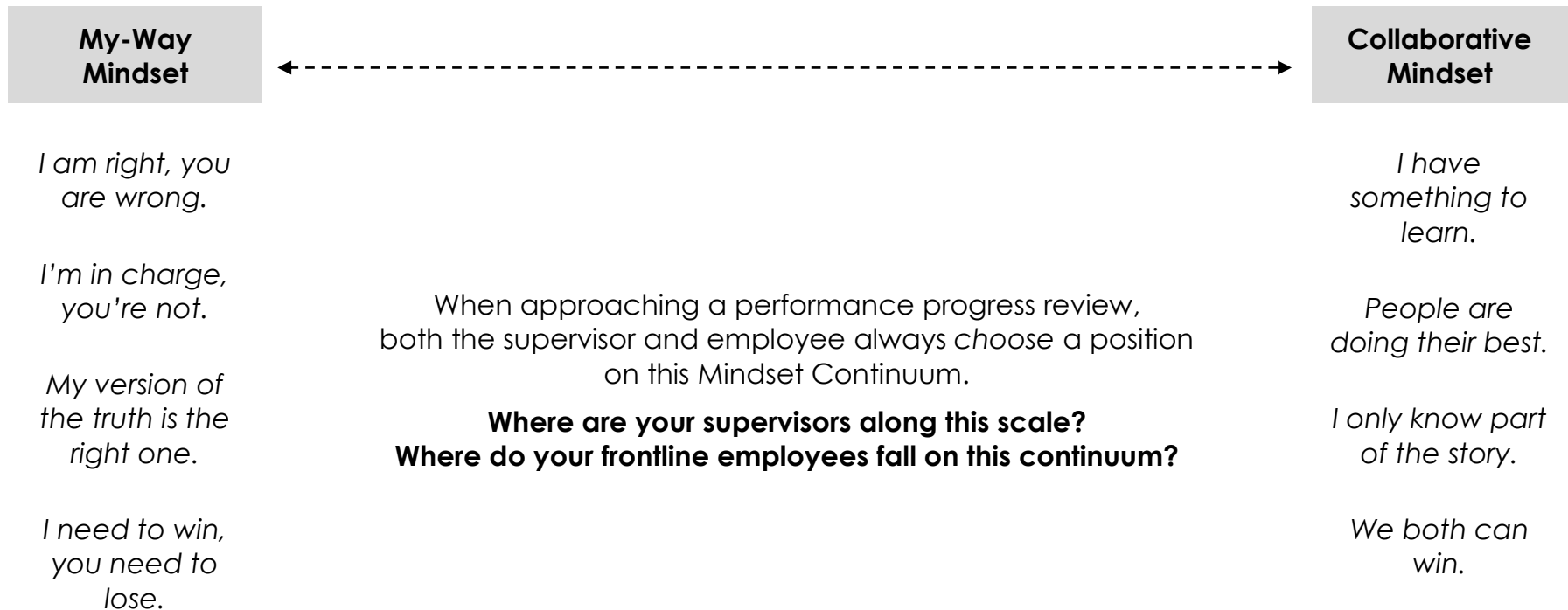## An Effective Fearless Performance Progress Reviews are . . .

1. _____ **looking.**

2. More _____ than evaluative.

3. **Focused on** _____ in performance behaviors and outcomes.

4. **Anchored to "Great Performance"** _____ **and goals** that are defined early in the performance cycle.

5. _____-**centered** — the employee should take the lead in assessing his or her own performance and in creating an improvement plan.

6. _____ — conducted as often as necessary to keep performance on track and getting it back on track if and when problems occur.

7. **Conversational** and _____ and leading to a shared understanding vs. highly structured, formal, and focused on filling in the "form."

8. Based upon a _____ ***Mindset*** vs. a more unilateralist *My-Way Mindset*.

9. **Objective and** _____-**based** — using observable and countable behaviors and results as its foundation.

10. _____ . . . both the employee and the coach have learned something about themselves and each other that they otherwise wouldn't have known and which enables each to perform at a higher level in respect to each other following the review.

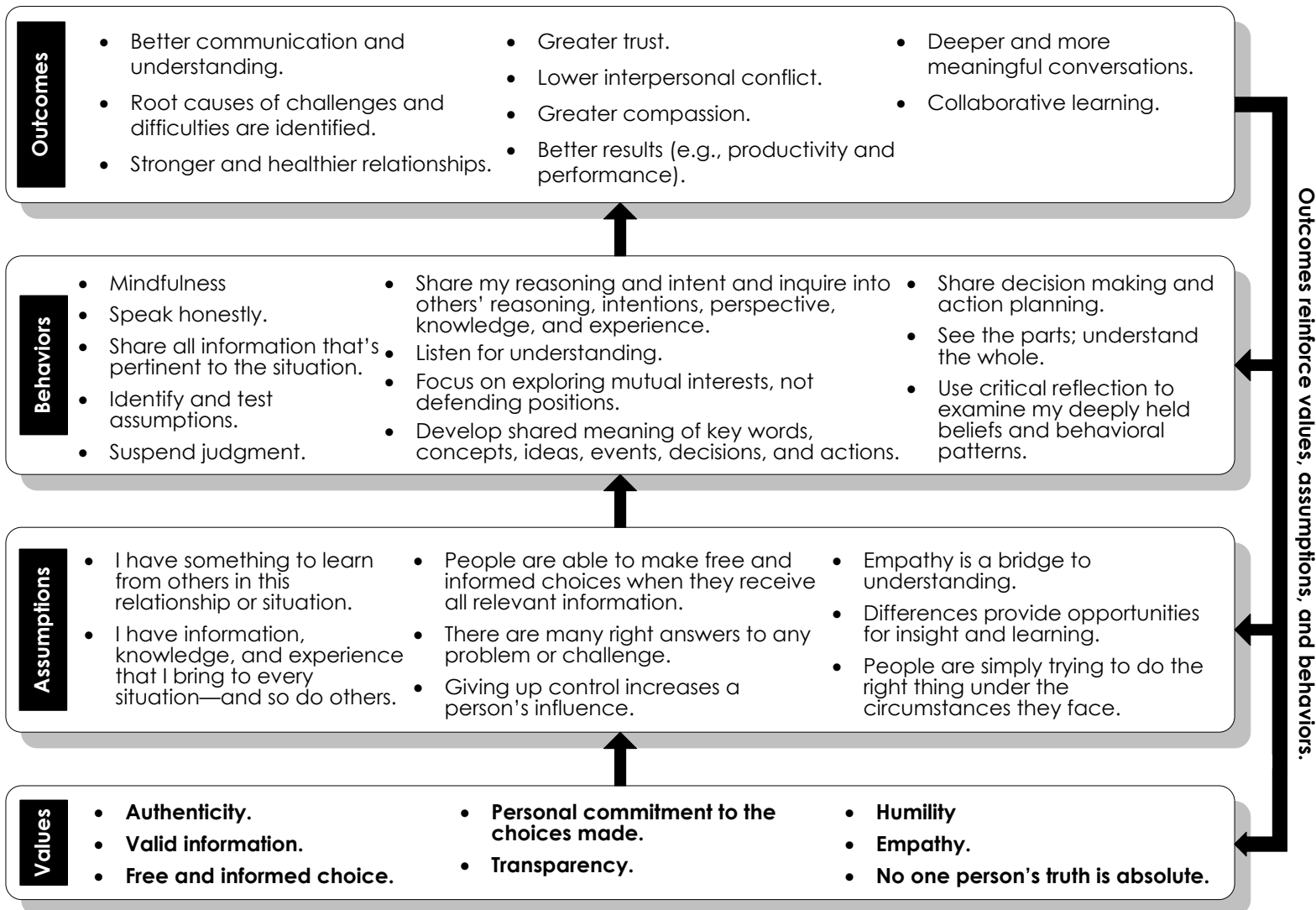# Developing the Right Mindset for Fearless Reviews

Whether a performance progress review is fearless or fear-inducing comes down to the "mindset" of both the supervisor and the employee.

What is a Mindset? A mindset is a mental model or way of thinking and seeing that people often unconsciously adopt that influences how they interpret and respond to others and the world. It is a fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines a person's interpretations of and responses to different situations.

A Mindset Continuum

My-Way Mindset	← - →	Collaborative Mindset
I am right, you are wrong.		*I have something to learn.*
I'm in charge, you're not.	When approaching a performance progress review, both the supervisor and employee always *choose* a position on this Mindset Continuum.	*People are doing their best.*
My version of the truth is the right one.	**Where are your supervisors along this scale?** **Where do your frontline employees fall on this continuum?**	*I only know part of the story.*
I need to win, you need to lose.		*We both can win.*

The Collaborative Mindset: A Winning Approach

Outcomes

- Better communication and understanding.
- Root causes of challenges and difficulties are identified.
- Stronger and healthier relationships.
- Greater trust.
- Lower interpersonal conflict.
- Greater compassion.
- Better results (e.g., productivity and performance).
- Deeper and more meaningful conversations.
- Collaborative learning.

Behaviors

- Mindfulness
- Speak honestly.
- Share all information that's pertinent to the situation.
- Identify and test assumptions.
- Suspend judgment.
- Share my reasoning and intent and inquire into others' reasoning, intentions, perspective, knowledge, and experience.
- Listen for understanding.
- Focus on exploring mutual interests, not defending positions.
- Develop shared meaning of key words, concepts, ideas, events, decisions, and actions.
- Share decision making and action planning.
- See the parts; understand the whole.
- Use critical reflection to examine my deeply held beliefs and behavioral patterns.

Assumptions

- I have something to learn from others in this relationship or situation.
- I have information, knowledge, and experience that I bring to every situation—and so do others.
- People are able to make free and informed choices when they receive all relevant information.
- There are many right answers to any problem or challenge.
- Giving up control increases a person's influence.
- Empathy is a bridge to understanding.
- Differences provide opportunities for insight and learning.
- People are simply trying to do the right thing under the circumstances they face.

Values

- **Authenticity.**
- **Valid information.**
- **Free and informed choice.**
- **Personal commitment to the choices made.**
- **Transparency.**
- **Humility**
- **Empathy.**
- **No one person's truth is absolute.**

Outcomes reinforce values, assumptions, and behaviors.

Adapted from the work of Chris Argyris, Donald Schön, Action Design (Robert Putnam, Diana McLain Smith, and Phil McArthur), William Isaacs, Susan Scott, and Roger Schwarz

Collaborative Mindset Values and Behaviors

Governing Values

- **Authenticity** — Being honest with oneself and others, acting with integrity, demonstrating congruence between one's inner thoughts and external expressions.
- **Valid Information** — All relevant information is shared so that everyone understands what they need to know in order to make decisions and take actions based upon a . . .
- **Free and Informed Choice** — People make their independent decisions based upon good information, not due to coercion . . . which enables them to have . . .
- **Personal Commitment to the Choices Made** — Individuals have greater ownership and take greater responsibility for the choices that they participate in based upon . . .
- **Transparency** — Everyone feels comfortable with open, honest, and direct communication with no "hidden agendas" or undiscussables …which is best done with . . .
- **Humility** — A deep belief that we are no better than others. Rather, we are grounded in an understanding that we are not above others in value which, in turn, enables us to have . . .
- **Empathy** — Individuals have compassion for others and differing viewpoints and a genuine interest in understanding another's perspective . . . which is made possible because . . .
- **No One Person's Truth is Absolute** — Each person's truth is a reflection of his or her own reality, how he or she perceives and interprets the world. Discovering a holistic truth emerges from respecting and integrating others' truths.

Enacting Behaviors

1. **Mindfulness** — Being present, self-aware, and fully attentive to the moment helps us better understand and manage our emotional responses to difficult situations – and to be tuned into others emotional states and responses. This, in turn, enables us to navigate relationships with others with greater authenticity, transparency, and empathy. Being mindful reminds us to slow down, create space for critical reflection, and then make intentional, thoughtful choices.
2. **Speak honestly** — This behavior involves speaking with integrity, telling the truth in a respectful way, and using the power of our voice/words to build up vs. tear down. When we speak honestly, we speak from the heart in ways that work to inform and strengthen others and our relationships. Our authenticity and genuineness can enlighten, refresh, and disarm.
3. **Share all information that's pertinent to the situation** — People can only make informed choices or decisions when they have all of the useful and relevant information in front of them. This requires us to actively participate in dialogue with each other to say what we're thinking and what we know. Sharing all useful information includes saying "I don't have an opinion" or "I don't have anything to add to the discussion" rather than remaining silent (and causing people to *wonder* what we are really thinking!).
4. **Identify and test assumptions** — When you observe others making statements, taking actions, and making decisions, it's natural/inevitable to make assumptions about their intentions/motivations. This enacting behavior first involves you *identifying* when you are making an assumption or inference about another person and then testing the assumption or inference directly by asking the other person for more information. Verify your "story" before you run with it!
5. **Suspend judgment** — In our normal conversations we tend to make quick judgments about what others have said or done. We view others' statements or actions as good, bad, right, wrong, foolish, bold, brutish, bullying, caring, and so forth often without hard data behind our conclusions. With the *Collaborative Mindset*, we test out our assumptions and suspend our judgments about others. By suspending judgments, we put our judgments on hold—creating enough distance between our judgments and ourselves to free us from having to act upon or be influenced by them and perhaps form *new* judgments, but this time informed by new information.

---

6. **Share your reasoning and intent and inquire into others' reasoning, intentions, perspective, knowledge, and experience** — This enacting behavior enables others to see how you reached the conclusions and judgments you did and to then explore areas of your reasoning where they reasoned differently. When you explain to others *why* you think the way you do about something or why you made the statement you did, it enables them to better understand the basis for your words and actions and your purpose or reasons for doing something. The second half of this behavior involves actively *inquiring* into others' reasoning, intent, perspective, etc. When you genuinely inquire into others' reasoning, intentions, etc. you are able to better understand and appreciate what lies behind others' words and actions. Collaboration naturally evolves from the rich dialogue that emerges from this sharing of reasoning and intentions and an appreciation of divergent experience and backgrounds.

7. **Listen for understanding** — The *Collaborative Mindset* depends upon the skill of reflective listening with a focus on understanding and appreciating another's perspective. Reflective listening involves listening to what lies behind the words of others and then "mirroring" and paraphrasing what is learned back to the speaker in such a way that demonstrates your understanding. Reflective listening enables the speaker to confirm or disconfirm what you heard . . . leading to a deeper understanding of what the other was saying/thinking.

8. **Focus on exploring mutual interests, not defending positions** — Rather than focusing on positions (which, by definition, never intersect and which we tend to defend and hold), focus on better understanding and sharing your *interests* and exploring the interests of others. Our interests reflect the underlying needs and desires we have in a given situation. When we focus on *interests* it is far easier to find a solution. When, however, we focus on *positions*, we tend to *defend* and protect these positions — which profoundly limits understanding, agreement, and learning. [Note: adapted from *Getting to Yes*, by Roger Fisher and William Ury, 1991]

9. **Develop shared meaning of key words, concepts, ideas, events, decisions, and actions** — Creating a shared meaning and understanding around specific dates, times, places, and key words ensures that relevant information is available to all and enables people to make free and informed decisions and choices. When we have a shared understanding of key events and decisions we are more able to have an informed discussion on the issues before us. When we agree on the meaning of key terms (e.g., quality, learning, consensus, conflict, opportunity, etc.) we work from a shared understanding of the word/idea vs. drawing different meanings of these words and going off in different directions.

10. **Share decision making and action planning** — When we act unilaterally from a My-Way Mindset we attempt to impose our will onto others. The *Collaborative Mindset* involves working *with* others to jointly decide on what will happen and how to implement the decision. So, rather than imposing our way of thinking, we share our own ideas about next steps (and our reasoning behind them) and then invite others to share their thoughts (and the supporting reasoning). Based upon this valid information, we can then make informed choices on what to do next.

11. **See the parts, understand the whole** — By gathering all valid information in a given situation we can appreciate the pieces to the puzzle and make an informed choice about what to do next. The *Collaborative Mindset*, however, moves beyond just the parts to see the larger context and the fabric of the whole. People are moved to make decisions and take actions in their lives based upon the pieces *and* the whole. By understanding the whole vs. just looking at the parts, we can begin to appreciate why people do what they do. The larger context of their lives is as much responsible for their decisions and actions as a specific event or circumstance. When we see things holistically we tend to be more empathetic and understanding toward others and, therefore, more open to their experience, perspective, insights, and so forth.

12. **Use critical reflection to examine deeply held beliefs and behavioral patterns** — Critical reflection is the capacity to think deliberately about something in such a way that our underlying beliefs are open to challenge and change. Socrates once said that "an unexamined life is not worth living." He challenges us to critically examine our deeply held beliefs and behavioral patterns in such a way that we (1) are aware of their power and role in our life and (2) are then able to entertain and explore alternative beliefs and behaviors that may be more facilitative of understanding and learning.

<div align="center">
Adapted from **Fearless Performance Reviews** by Jeff and Linda Russell, McGraw-Hill, 2014,
and based upon the work of Chris Argyris, Donald Schön, William Isaacs, Susan Scott, and Roger Schwarz
Rev. 10.16.2017
</div>

Facilitating a Collaborative Mindset

Transformative Values/Behaviors of the Collaborative Mindset

Which two or three Collaborative Mindset values and behaviors are likely to transform performance reviews into fearless performance coaching conversations?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Developing a Collaborative Mindset in <u>Supervisors</u>

Ideas for developing a Collaborative Mindset in supervisors to enable a more collaborative approach to performance management and reviews include . . .

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Developing a Collaborative Mindset in <u>Employees</u>

Ideas for developing a Collaborative Mindset in frontline employees to lay the groundwork for a constructive collaborative performance conversation include . . .

_____

_____

_____

_____

The *Performance Coaching Conversation*: A Fearless and Employee-Centered Process

1. **The employee is responsible for his or her own performance**. The supervisor plays a facilitative role in guiding an employee toward great performance outcomes but, in the end, it is the employee who has to "own" this.

2. The employee's ownership/responsibility for performance **includes conducting a self-assessment** of his or her own performance. The supervisor assists the employee in preparing for the *Performance Coaching Conversation* by **asking the employee to consider the following**: (these are the core questions)

    1. **What's going well in your job?** What are you proud of? What are your accomplishments? **Why is it going well?** What are the likely *causes* of performance successes?

    2. **What isn't going well?** What is frustrating you? Where are you failing to meet your own expectations? **Why isn't it going well?** What are the likely *causes* of performance problems?

    3. **What changes/improvements could you make to enhance your job performance?** What actions can you take to address performance areas that aren't going well? **What will you keep doing in areas that are going well?**

    4. **How can I, as your supervisor, best help you achieve your performance goals?** What can I do more or less of to support your performance/performance improvement?

3. The **supervisor independently conducts his or her own analysis of the employee's performance**. This pre-work is essential to ensure that the supervisor considers and is aware of performance strengths, performance gaps, potential causes of performance problems, and has identified goals for continuation, improvement, or new performance directions.

4. **The employee leads the way!** At the beginning of the *Performance Coaching Conversation* the supervisor invites **the employee to present his/her analysis first** — explaining *why* he or she wants the employee to lead the way. If the employee agrees, the employee starts with "*What's going well and why is it going well?*" The supervisor reinforces the employee's self-assessment — and offers his/her own perspective and additional strengths. The supervisor then guides the employee into "*What's not going well and why isn't it going well?*" — and offers additional areas for improvement. The fearless conversation continues . . .

5. **Collaboratively developing a path to success!** Through skillful questions, the supervisor explores the employee's ideas for sustaining successes and addressing improvement areas by tackling the root causes of problems. Employee and supervisor discuss what the employee needs from the supervisor and others to ensure success.

6. **The employee or supervisor sends a summary e-mail to the other party following the** *Performance Coaching Conversation* **that highlights what was agreed to and next steps.** This ensures that both the employee and supervisor are on the same page in terms of expectations.

7. **If appropriate, the supervisor completes the review form following the** *Conversation* **and schedules a follow-along meeting** — this enables the supervisor to integrate the insights/perspective resulting from the conversation and then discuss the final review.