When Someone Raises a Concern

Leader Rebellion · Responding to a concern

Someone has taken a risk by telling you. Your first response is part of what happens next.

Use this when: A colleague brings a mistake, a disagreement, or news you were hoping not to hear.

Leave with: A first response, a practical next step, and a promise to close the loop.

Open the interactive tool — free to use, no login needed.

Start here

Try the small rehearsal. Notice the difference between explaining your intention and hearing their experience.

Write an opening you could say honestly. You do not need to agree with every interpretation to take the concern seriously.

Check immediate needs, decide who should act, and say when the person will hear back.

Your situation

A rehearsal you can use on paper

Someone says: “I stopped raising this because nothing changed last time.” Read each opening and consider what it makes possible.

“We have an open-door policy.”

A policy does not answer the experience they named. Ask what happened last time, then explain what you can actually do now.

“Thank you for trying again. What happened when you raised it before?”

This acknowledges the history and asks for context. The next step is to be clear about action, limits, and when you will return.

“Why did you wait so long?”

You may need the timeline, but this opening can make speaking late the new problem. Start with the concern and any immediate need.

What did they tell you?

Record the concern without adding a judgment about their motive.

What can you say first?

Acknowledge the effort of speaking. Invite the part you may have missed.

What do you need to understand?

Ask for context without making them build a courtroom case.

Is anything needed right now?

For immediate danger, follow your workplace emergency route. For sensitive concerns, use the appropriate confidential route.

What can you promise—and what can't you?

Do not promise secrecy or a particular outcome you cannot deliver.

What will happen next, and who owns it?

Name an action you have authority to take, or the person who can help.

When and how will you close the loop?

Even "I am still checking" is an update. Protect other people's private information.

A question to keep

What might my usual reaction have taught people to keep to themselves?

Worked example — fictional

What did they tell you?

The new rota repeatedly leaves one person covering the late handoff alone.

What can you say first?

Thanks for telling me. I had not seen what the late handoff was becoming. Can we look at a recent shift?

What do you need to understand?

Where did you need another person, and what happened when no one was available?

Is anything needed right now?

Check today's cover with the shift lead before the late handoff starts.

What can you promise—and what can't you?

I can check staffing and explain what changes. I cannot promise the exact rota before speaking with the team.

What will happen next, and who owns it?

I will review the last two weeks with the shift lead and include the people doing the handoff.

When and how will you close the loop?

I will come back by Thursday afternoon, even if the review is not complete.

Where this tool comes from

This is an original Leader Rebellion rehearsal for receiving difficult information. It turns the Holistic Shaping question—what are our everyday interactions forming in people?—toward the person with authority. It is a conversation aid, not a reporting or investigation procedure.

The thinking behind it

An invitation to speak matters less if your next response makes speaking expensive. Listen for what your routines, reactions, and follow-through are teaching people to expect.

You Have a Culture Problem — by Nic Payne

Thanking someone for speaking is a beginning. Following through makes it credible.

The web tool contains the interactive lesson and calculations. Use this worksheet for written notes.

Get Nic's notes — optional.

Hope is rebellious.