# EMPOWER!

*Why it's Time for Managers to Stop
Feedback Conversations
(And what they must do instead)*

*You can't win a race if you drive looking in the rear-view mirror!*

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**Actuate Microlearning**

Chapter 01

# "Junk feedback conversations!"

# "It's time for managers to stop conducting feedback conversations!"

Does the statement above sound blasphemous to you?

After all, isn't regular feedback supposed to be the mantra for exceptional performance?

We'll answer that question by looking at this conversation between Sharad, a manager, at an international logistics and freight forwarding company and Manish, his team member.

# Manish gets an email from Sharad...

I want you to meet me for a feedback discussion this evening.
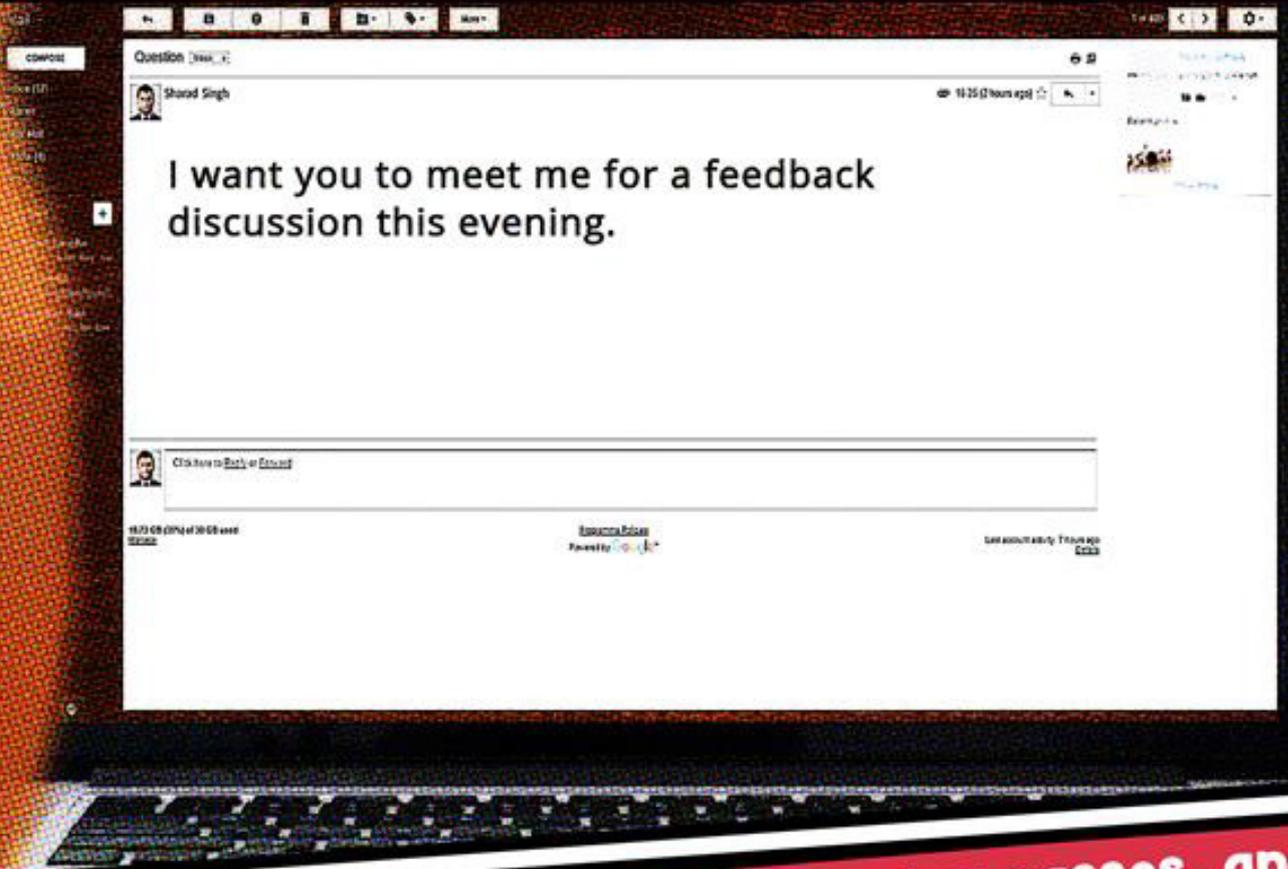
Manish, is seen getting nervous... the day passes, and Manish is seen nervous and edgy.
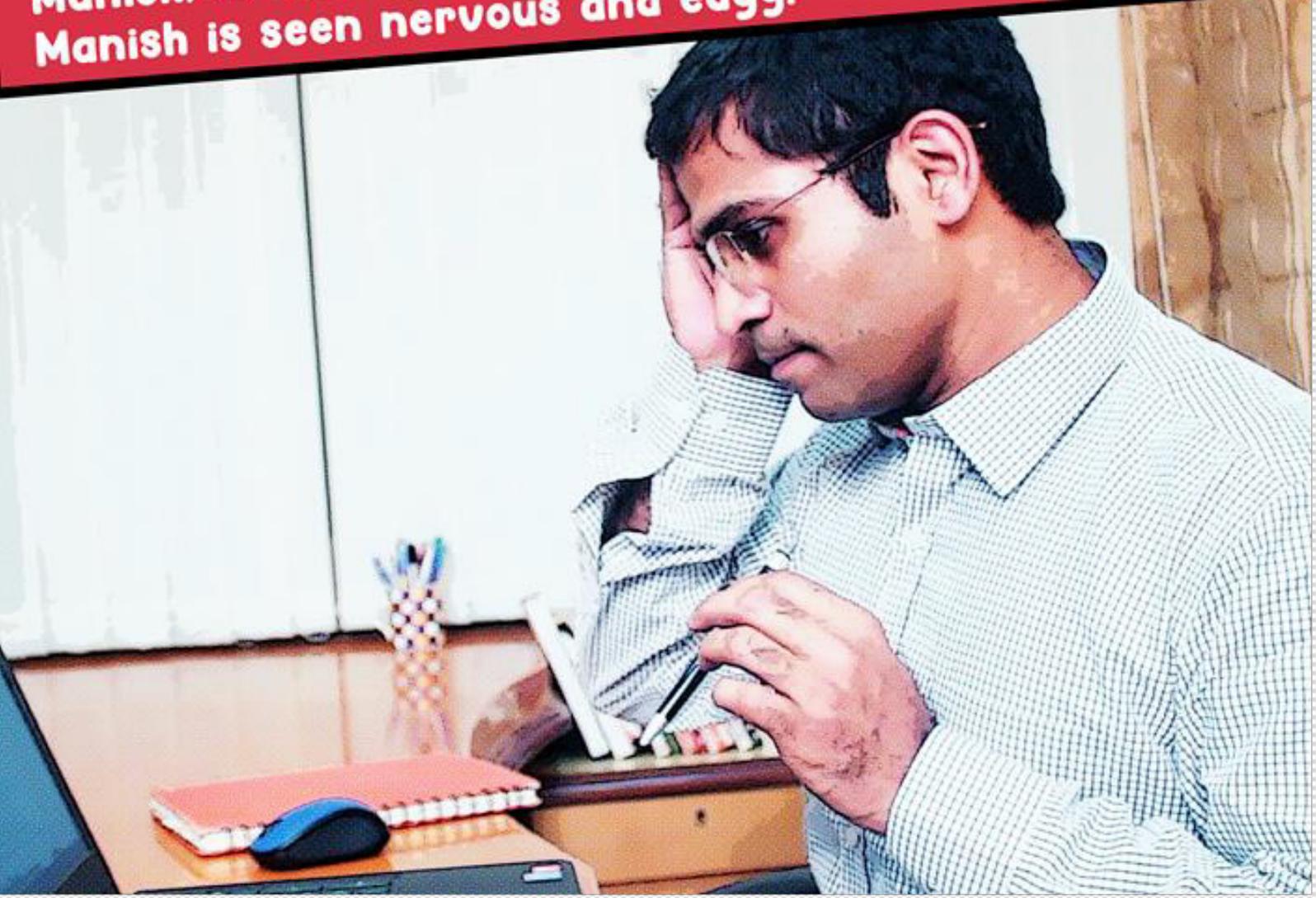
The feedback meeting:
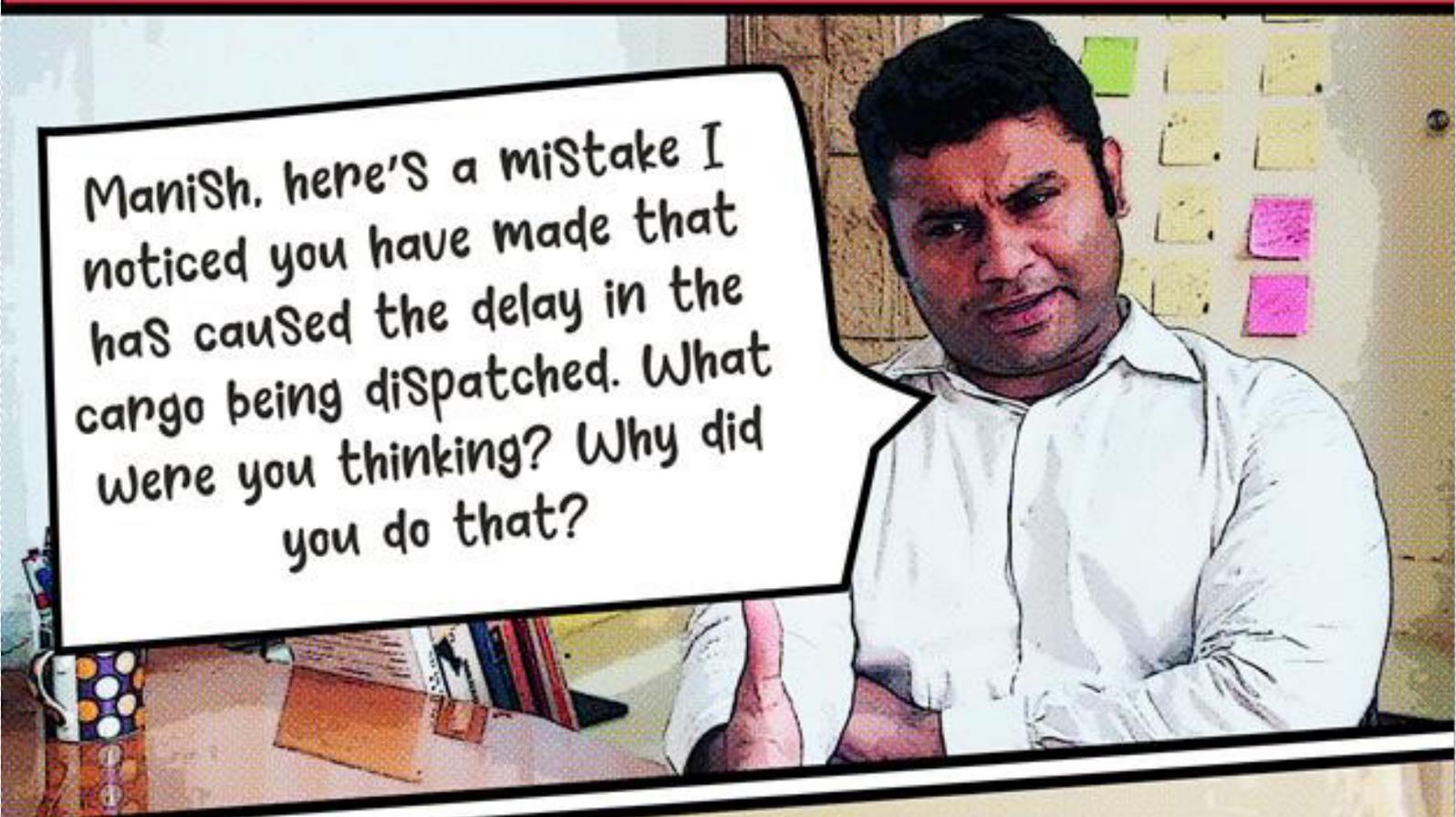
Manish, here's a mistake I noticed you have made that has caused the delay in the cargo being dispatched. What were you thinking? Why did you do that?

Eh, boss, the reason that happened was...

Manish lists a couple of reasons

Sounds familiar?

Remember how anxious and edgy you felt the day you knew you were due for feedback from your manager

Also, if you are a manager, have you been anxious and nervous about giving feedback to your team members? Worrying perhaps about how they would take it and how the conversation might transpire? Most managers, we at Actuate Microlearning have experienced, feel likewise.

Here's what we at Actuate Microlearning have found is...

## ...the issue with feedback conversations:

- These conversations often morph into an exercise in "Let me prove to you that you are useless" rather than a means of finding a way to bring about change or improvement

- They mostly leave people feeling abused and demotivated

That's terrible!

The prospect of receiving feedback:

- Puts the person at the receiving end of feedback on their guard

- Leads to this individual spending more time composing a defence of self, rather than listening attentively to what the manager is saying can be done to improve matters

Feedback conversations, consequently, end up doing little good to anyone concerned.

What might help is understanding why this happens, and a better approach that managers can adopt.

Chapter 02

# The Fight or Flight Response

David Rock is the co-founder of the NeuroLeadership Institute and credited with coining the term 'neuroleadership'.

His research, which is referenced below shows that..

**When we at the receiving end of a 'rating' or 'appraisal', feedback, our brain goes into the 'fight or flight' mode.**

Now, we won't delve too much into this subject here. Suffice it to say that the fight or flight response is how the brain responds to stressors. It will counterattack – fight – or it will choose to escape it completely – flight. When the brain is in this mode, it is not open to critical evaluation of feedback, nor learning and understanding

Rock's research shows that when faced with the prospect of receiving feedback, we shift into fight or flight mode instead, of a learning or creative mode. As a result, unless conducted correctly, the act of providing feedback, or performing a performance appraisal can actually be counterproductive.

Terrible, no?

Feedback sessions and the appraisal process are meant to help people do better and grow in their work. Unfortunately, these conversations usually end up having the opposite effect.

One reason for this relates to....

## ...when Feedback is Usually Given

Feedback, we, at Actuate Microlearning, have seen, are generally reserved for occasions when something has gone wrong. Also, appraisals and ratings deal with the past, and - contrary to its originally intended purpose – often ends up being about why someone does not deserve a better rating.

**In our experience of working with managers, we have seen that there is often little or no *developmental* focus on the part of the manager during the performance discussion or appraisal process.**

**Not much time – if any at all - is spent on the creation of a developmental plan for the individual concerned.**

*So, what then are managers to do?*

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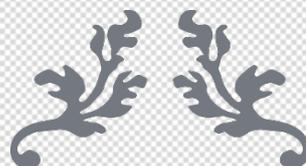
Chapter 03

# Think Feed*forward*, not Feedback

Feedforward conversations focus on the solutions and not problems. Paraphrasing the oft-quoted proverb, we can't change the past, but we can always impact the future. Drawing a parallel for managers,

**Instead of dwelling on the mistakes of the past:**

1. **It makes more sense to consider the future**

2. **Set goals that impact this future**

3. **Devise plans to achieve them**

*Feedback focuses on the past, what occurred and what went wrong.*

**Feedforward, on the other hand, is future-focused; about what could be done right, and how.**

This difference in perspectives – from feedback to feedforward - has been shown to have a profound effect on how the conversation transpires and therefore on the team member's acceptance of the inputs provided.

In the next chapter, we will explore just what a feed-forward conversation looks like.

Chapter 04

# What a Feed-Forward Conversation Looks Like

Manish gets an email pop-up in his mailbox
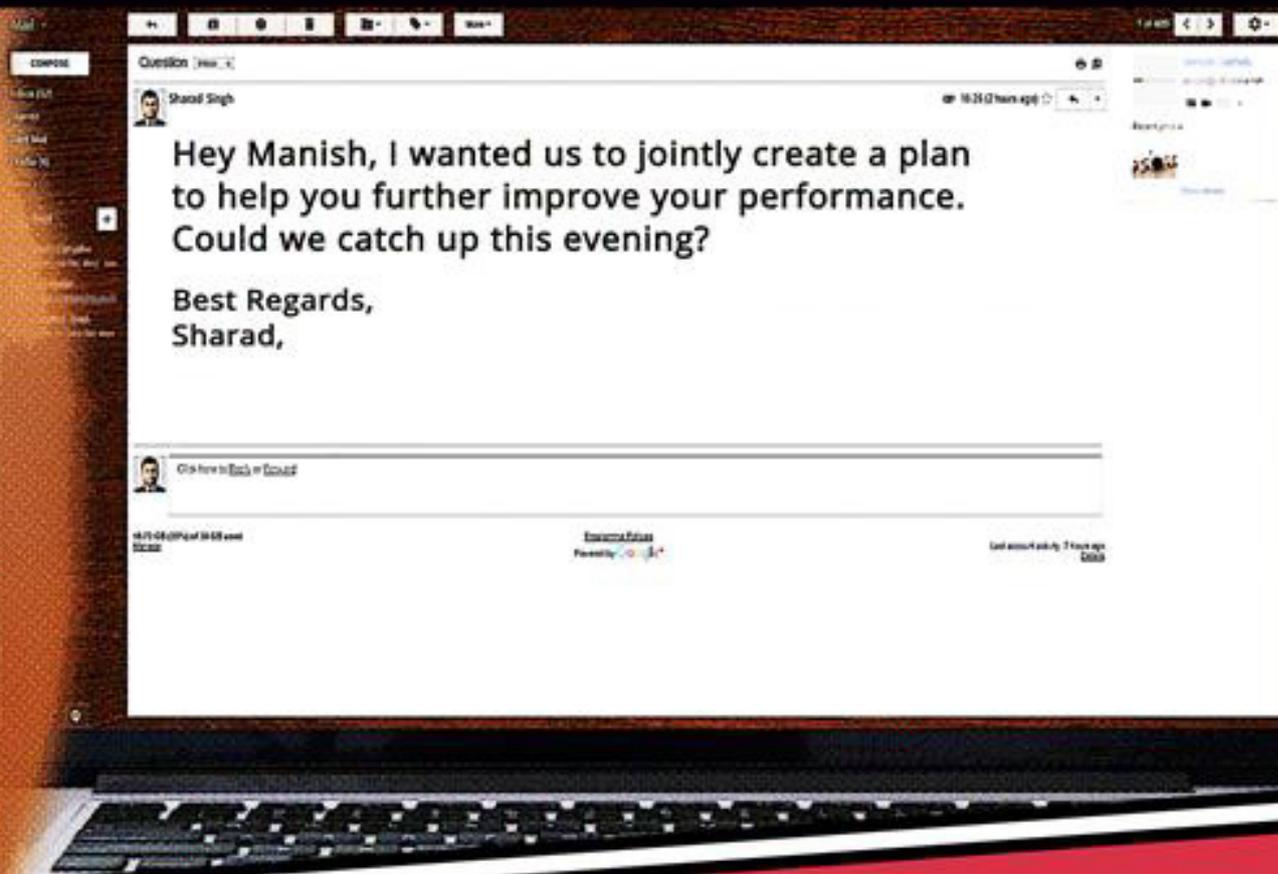
At the meeting...
After identifying the cause of the issue through a respectful dialogue with the team member

How might you avoid committing this mistake in the future?
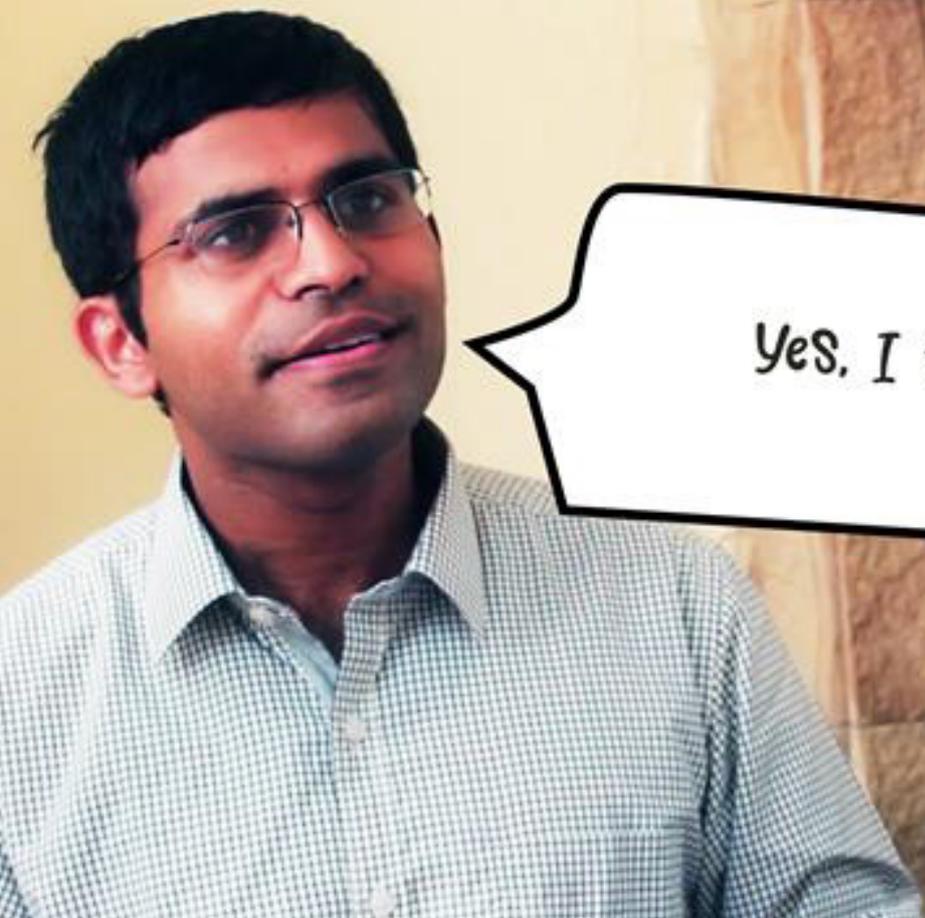
Can I get your commitment that you will work on getting it right the next time?

Expressing gratitude
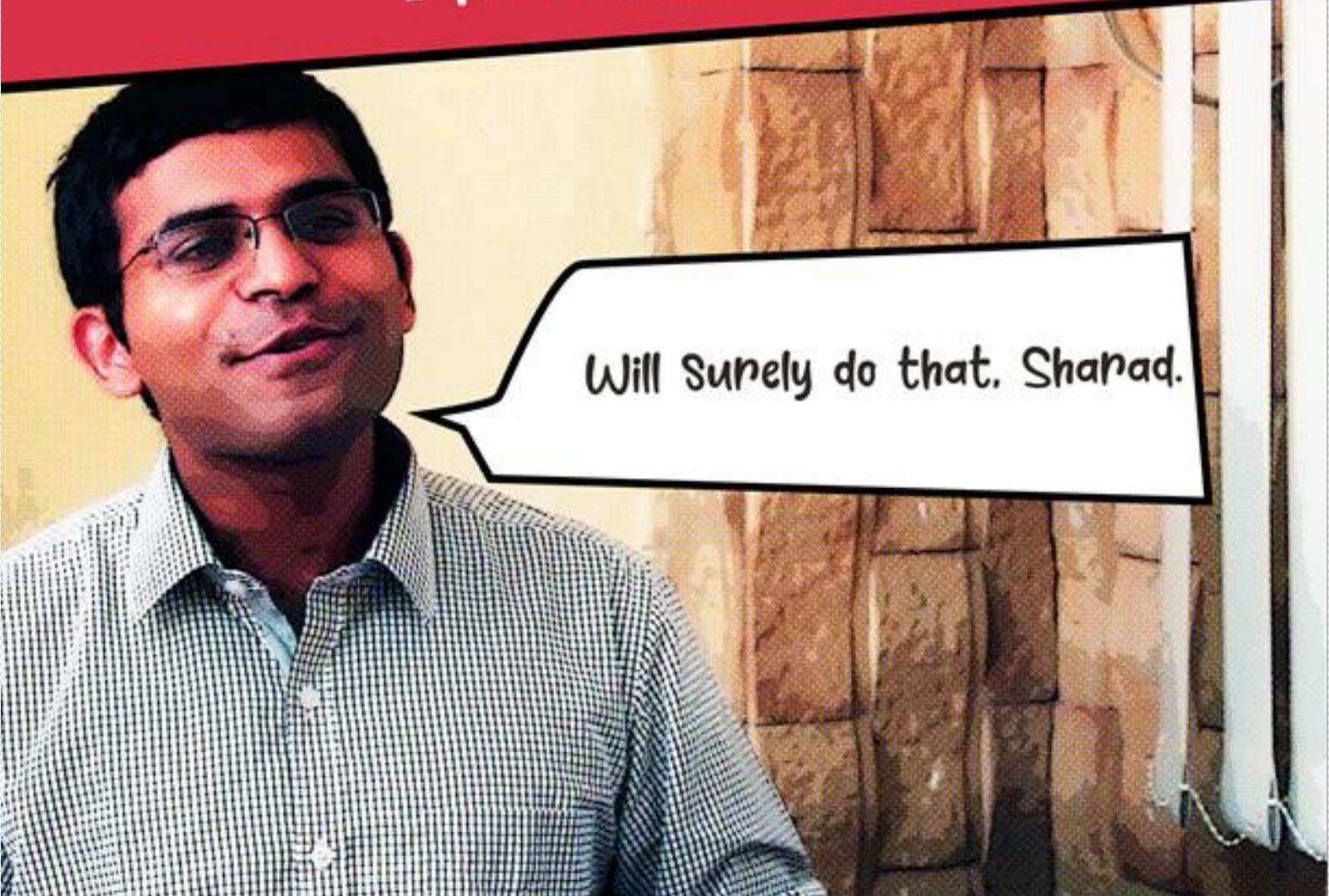
Will surely do that, Sharad.
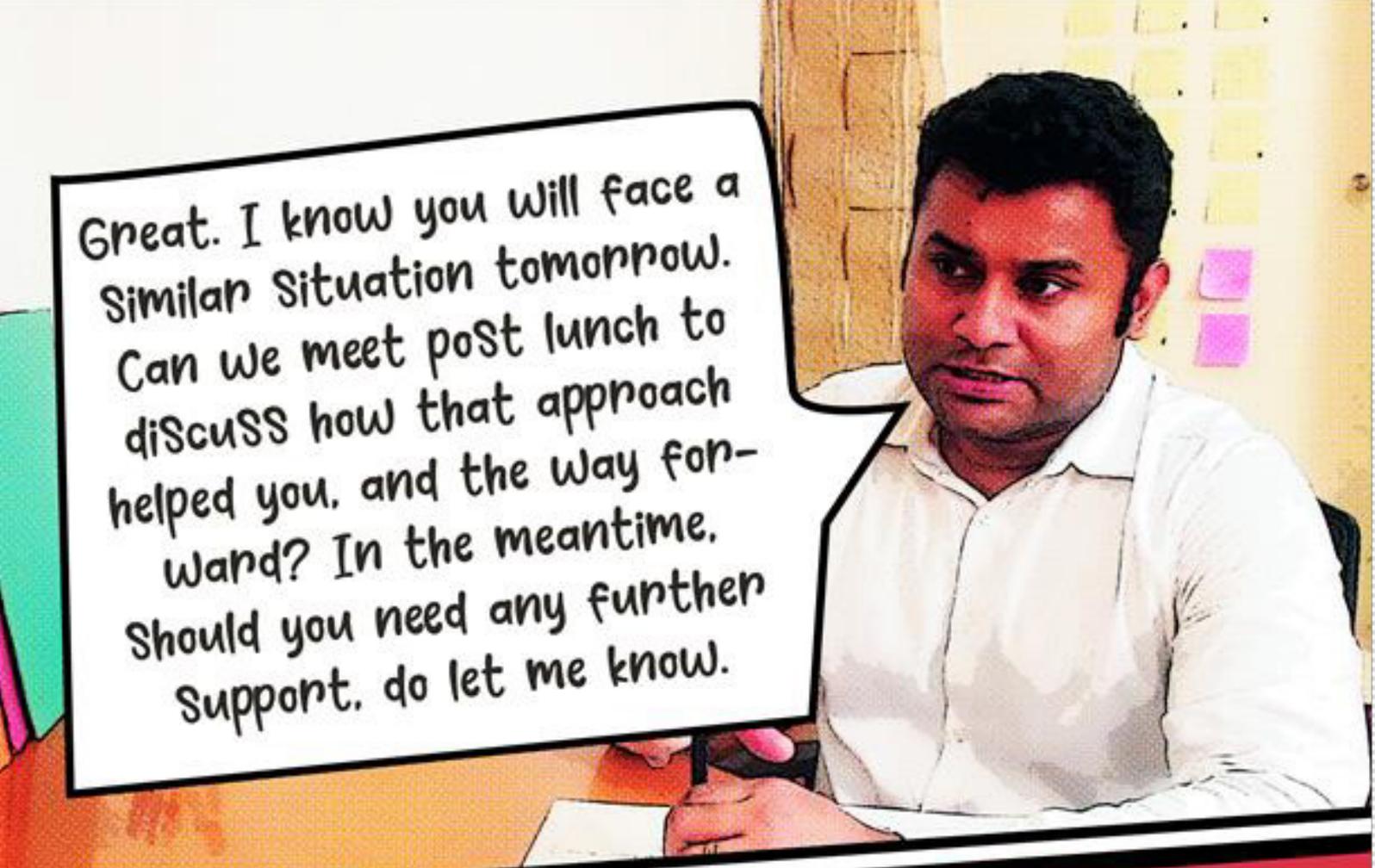
Great. I know you will face a similar situation tomorrow. Can we meet post lunch to discuss how that approach helped you, and the way forward? In the meantime, should you need any further support, do let me know.

Feeling positive

That sounds like a plan. Thank you for your help.

Chapter 05

# How Feed-Forward Conversations Help

As you can see, the outcome of the feedforward conversation between Sharad and Manish is far more positive and effective. As compared to the feedback conversation that we had seen earlier, which involved accusations, the consequent excuses, and no concrete plan on how future mistake could be avoided, in the feedforward conversation Sharad not only highlighted the issue, but they jointly arrived at a plan to prevent the error from being repeated.
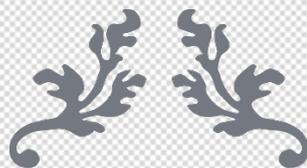
Chapter 06

# Feedforward conversations – A process that builds champions

**Feedforward conversations:**

- Are improvement-oriented

- Fuel the process of development

- Can be implemented by employees at all levels in the organisation

**If institutionalised, feedforward conversations can define the very culture of the organisation and have a tremendous impact on business metrics**

It is about time that we start employing feedforward conversations. It has the power to turn regular employees into workplace superheroes who can drive extraordinary business results.

It's time we junked feedback conversations.

**You simply can't win a race if you drive looking in the rear-view mirror.**

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## Do Get in Touch!

If you'd be interested in knowing more, please suggest a date and time we could possibly speak/ meet. Thirty minutes should suffice for our discussion.

You could reach us at:

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