

# 10 tips for having that difficult conversation



## Timing & Timeliness

### Before – plan what to say and when to say it

Choose the right time and place. Don't hold the conversation when the other party is upset or angry. Respect the other person's privacy by minimizing the chance that you may be overheard. Whenever possible, have these conversations face-to-face. As soon as you realise you need to have a conversation – do it! Don't dwell on it; leaving it too long only makes it more difficult. Never use email.



## Anticipate that you may not be on the same page

Different perceptions of intent, interpretations of the facts, and judgment about what is right or best are usually at the root of all difficult conversations. When you begin with this in mind, you will not be surprised when these root issues arise. Empathy - try to understand the point of view as well the emotional state of the other person. Understanding the other party's position helps you make better decisions on how to address the situation. When you show genuine interest in understanding the other person's side of the story, you are more effective in resolving the matter.



## Rehearse

If time permits, it is helpful to put the details of the situation in writing. Include what you wish both parties to achieve. Doing so gives you an opportunity to consider all views and nuances of the situation. Taking the time to properly prepare for any important conversation yields better results. Rehearsing in your mind and trying to anticipate how the conversation will go is often helpful.



## What & Why ask questions

Use specific examples, what is at stake? why does this matter?

Ask questions to establish what is going on in their eyes. We demonstrate respect for the other person when we acknowledge that we may not understand the full complexity of their situation. By asking for their input we acknowledge this eg: "I'd really like to understand what is important to you in this situation and what has occurred before."



## Identify your role in the problem

How have you contributed to the situation? Show some vulnerability, but be selective.

Eg: "my role in creating a growing rift between you and the others is that I didn't bring this to your attention earlier."



## Maintain eye contact and stay in control

As in any constructive face-to-face communication, maintaining eye contact helps you gauge the receptivity of the other person throughout the conversation and demonstrates your honesty and desire to listen to the other person. If you express anger, it is natural for the other person to respond accordingly to match your emotional state. Do whatever it takes to remain calm.



## Clarify

Confirm you understand what is being communicated and paraphrase to acknowledge their story. This behaviour helps them to see that you are listening and also clarifies your understanding of the situation. Example: "OK, so what I am hearing is that you are disappointed with X because of Y, is that a fair description of the situation?" Clarify your expectations and work together to identify options to meet those expectations.



## Don't interrupt

When the other person is speaking, never interrupt. Show the other person the respect you want to be shown when you are talking. In addition, don't appear like you are anxious to respond. People who can't wait to speak generally aren't listening because they are so focused on what they want to say.



## LADAR

Turn on your LADAR (Language Radar) and listen for the "ping" words – always, never, everyone, no one, can't, won't. Avoid saying things like, "Everyone in the department feels the same way," or "I have heard about this from countless people." Often when we hear these kinds of statements, we immediately discount what is being said because in most cases they are exaggerations. If the issue is so serious that you need to bring others into the discussion, make sure they are present. Listen to both yourself and the other person. If you exaggerate, quickly clarify. If they do, ask for specifics. Use facts.



## Follow-up

### After - consolidate and move forward

Try and speak to the person again within a day or two, even on an entirely unrelated matter. It keeps the conversation in perspective and shows you said what "you had to say" and are now prepared to move on.