Managing Difficult Conversations in the Workplace

Managing Ourselves When We Are With People Whose Behaviors We Find Frustrating
Learning Objectives

Increase
- Increase confidence and competence in conducting difficult discussions with others

Identify
- Identify areas that might cause hesitation to have these conversations

Develop
- Develop plan to utilize skills presented in working with others
Wanted: Difficult Conversations

- Topic?
- How did you feel during the conversation?
- How did you feel after?
Difficult Conversation Topics:

- Aren’t meeting job expectations
- Refuse to cooperate/collaborate
- Disregard policies
- Think they know best
- Spread rumors/gossip
- Don’t do their share of work
- Put a negative spin on everything
- Expect failure
- Create hostile work relationships
- Make others look bad
Emotional Intelligence
Emotional Intelligence

Refers to the capacity for:

• **Recognizing** our own feeling,
• **Managing** emotions well,
• **Understanding** emotions of others,
• **Connecting** in our relationships.”

~ Goleman, 1995
Emotions are contagious

• The brain has an ‘open loop’ system.
• We are ‘wired’ to pick up subtle clues from one another.
• Resonance is contagious...so is dissonance.
Start with Self Reflection

- Have I been avoiding this conversation? Why?
- Am I feeling angry?
- Have we been butting heads?
- Am I discouraged?
- Would I like to get back at the other person?
- Could my judgment be clouded?
- Am I being objective or subjective?
EI Domains

- Self Awareness
- Self Management
EI Domains

Self Awareness

Self Management

Social Awareness

Relationship Management
11 Tips for Handling Difficult Conversations at Work
1. Determine The Purpose Of The Conversation

- Consider two key issues:
  - **Purpose (reason)** – why you need to have the conversation
  - **Outcome (resolution)** – what you hope to achieve.
2. Reframe The Conversation In Your Mind

- If you think it will be difficult, dreading it is unavoidable.
- We must, as effective team members, act in a respectful and trustworthy manner.
Extinguish Inflammatory Thinking:

- What am I saying to myself?! 
- Is it helping me? 
- What are the facts? 
- “Is there a baby in the back-seat?” 
- What’s reasonable & realistic? 
- Believe that EVERYONE is flawed so what’s the point to getting indignant!
3. Understand Your Fears

- Sometimes we are worried that the other person will react badly – as well they might.
- By preparing well you will drastically reduce the chances of things going wrong. Relax!
4. Choose An Appropriate Setting

- Where you meet sets the tone for the conversation.
- Make sure it’s private and out of earshot of other colleagues.
- No one who is not directly involved or affected by the situation should know what’s happening.
5. Plan, But Do Not Script

• Plan and practice what you’re going to say in advance so that you get the point across fairly without being condescending or accusatory.

• You don’t need a script but preparing answers to possible questions or objections will keep you cool, calm and collected in the moment.
6. Listen To Their Side Of The Story

• Make sure not to dismiss their point of view.
• Giving them the opportunity to talk and paying attention when they do will allow them to be less defensive.
• Help create a dialogue of open communication.
7. Give Them Time And Space

• Give the person plenty of time to consider what you’re saying by speaking slowly and pausing regularly.

• Will end up with fewer indignant excuses and more reasonable, thought-out responses.
8. Specific and Objective – “Own It”

- Only use your own observations as a backup during a difficult conversation.
- The more objective, specific facts you have, the easier it is to state your case.
9. Avoid Emotional Language

• Don’t focus on how you ‘feel’ or express personal disappointment.
• This adds unnecessary emotional drama to an already charged conversation.
• Remain as neutral as you can to create the best outcome for everyone involved.
10. Create A Plan For Progress

- **Where** do I want the relationship to go and **how** do we get there?
- Remember – Collaboration!
11. Reflect and Learn

• After a difficult conversation, it’s worthwhile to reflect and consider what went well and what didn’t.

• Think about why you had certain reactions, and what you might have said differently.

“Handling a difficult conversation well is not just a skill, it is an act of courage.”
Constructive Conversation Tips
1. Focus on specific problem, not some obscure personality trait.
“You never do what you promise to do!”

**Desired:**
You assured me you would have your part of our project done today.

**However,**

**Actual:**
You came to the meeting and did not have anything to present to the leadership.
2. Gain agreement that the behavior is a problem and has impact and consequences on the relationship.
Impact And Consequences

• **IMPACT** is the various ways the behavior is negatively affecting the relationship
  • Helps gain a better understanding of the problem.
  • provides good reasons why the issue must be solved.
• **CONSEQUENCES** are the negative outcomes the behavior may cause us to experience if the problem isn’t satisfactorily resolved.

• Don’t mistake these as threats.

• Consequences are logical, predictable outcomes.
3. Identify specific strategies that will lead to concrete change in behavior in a collaborative way.
3 Key Questions

- What specifically **can** you/I do?
- **Will** you/I do that?
- Any Obstacles?
4. **Follow up** to ensure that the new behavior is honored, and the relationship is improving.
Principles to Remember

Do:
• Take regular breaks during the day.
• Slow down the pace of the conversation.
• Find ways to be constructive by suggesting other solutions or alternatives.
Principles to Remember

Don’t:

• Label the discussion as a “difficult conversation.”
• Bother writing a script for how you want the discussion to go.
• Ignore the other person’s point of view.
Questions?
Thanks for your Participation and Attention. Enjoy the rest of the Conference!

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