

Steps for a Difficult Conversation



Identifying Your Desired Outcome

Ask yourself:

- What's the best case scenario in having this conversation?
- What's the worst case scenario if we don't have this conversation?
- What is my personal motivation for this conversation? Can I keep this in mind as the conversation unfolds?
- Am I being fair to others as I pursue my own goal?



Have an outcome prepared as you decide how to approach the conversation:

- What reaction are you looking for from the other person?
- What do you need the other person to remember?
- What do you need the other person to do after your conversation?

What To Do When Things Don't Work



If your safety is threatened by the person angrily entering your space (shaking a fist in your face or trying to physically dominate you, for



When they start throwing things



When they make a threat ("If you don't stop telling me what to do, I will...")



If you are arguing and unable to move the conversation ahead



When you ask the other person to reset the approach and they refuse; in other words, when you are not getting anywhere ("Kim, we're arguing and I'd like us to have a conversation about this. Can we reset the conversation please?")

Choosing the Place for a Conversation



If you feel the need to assert your authority, you may want to meet in your office. Remember that the setup of your office will influence the conversation.



If the idea is for a neutral meeting place, book a meeting room that has suitable light and furniture.



Avoid the temptation to have this conversation in a public place like a restaurant or coffee shop. If things get heated, you'll be making a scene. If either of you are worried about being overheard, things that should be said may go unsaid, leading to an underlying current of conflict that does not get resolved.

Template for Difficult Conversations

Planning and Preparation

Define the Purpose:

- Inform/Direct
- Teach
- Persuade

Outline the details of:

- My Side
- Three F's: Facts, Frequency, Frustrated Relationship

My Checklist

Complete this part during the conversation.

- Ask permission and make sure they are ready
- State purpose
- Ask their side
- Tell my side
- Get to the third side
- Evaluate the three F's
- Create an action plan
- Follow up

Next Steps

Who

What

Where

When

List dates for follow up

Probing Techniques

One of the most common ways of probing is to ask an open question, such as:

"Can you describe that more clearly?"

"Would you give me a specific example of what you mean?"

"What do you think we should do?"



The difficulty here is that if you ask too many of these probing questions, the other person begins to feel like they are under interrogation. Be thoughtful about what and how you ask. Consider how many probes you really need to offer.



A second, very effective way of probing is a pause. Stop talking. Let the other person fill the silence.



A third way is to ask a reflective or mirroring question. For example, let's say the person has just said, "What I really want is fairer vacation policies." You may respond by just reflecting back to them, "Fairer?" The reflective question usually provides you with an expanded answer without you needing to ask more questions. Of course, it is best used in conjunction with a pause.



A fourth method that is particularly useful to make certain you are clear about what the individual has said is paraphrasing what has just been said, in your own words. An example: "So if I understand you correctly, you..."



The last method, most often used as a conversation is winding down, is the summary question.

Active Listening Tips and Techniques

Active listening means that we try to understand things from the speaker's point of view. It includes letting the speaker know that we are listening and that we have understood what was said. Here are some ways to do that.



Responding to Feelings

The content (the words spoken) is one thing, but the way that people feel really gives full value to the message. Responding to the speaker's feelings adds an extra dimension of listening. Are they disgusted and angry or in love and excited? Perhaps they are ambivalent! These are all feelings that you can reply to in your part of the conversation.



Reading Cues

Really listening means that we are also very conscious of the non-verbal aspects of the conversation.

- What are the speaker's facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture telling us?
- Is their voice loud or shaky?
- Are they stressing certain points?
- Are they mumbling or having difficulty finding the words they want to say?



Demonstration Cues

When you are listening to someone, these techniques will show a speaker that you are paying attention, providing you are genuine in using them.

Physical indicators include making eye contact, nodding your head from time to time, and leaning into the conversation. You can also give verbal cues or use phrases such as "Uh-huh," "Go on," "Really!" and, "Then what?" You can also use questions for clarification or summarizing statements. Example: "Do you mean they were charging \$4.00 for just a cup of coffee?"