



Tips & Tricks: Succeeding at Difficult Conversations

What is the Issue?

What is the other person doing or saying (or not doing or saying) that is causing a problem? This requires you to separate fact from fiction. Be aware of how your assumptions, beliefs and judgments affect how you view the situation=your story.

Clarify your Goal

Think through a clear and achievable goal. Is it productive and in your control? A clear goal will help you to stay focused and in control if things heat up in the conversation.

Plan Ahead: Follow the Scout motto: Be prepared

- *Have a Back up Plan:* answers the question what happens if nothing changes
- *Anticipate their reaction:* Think about how the other person might react
Attack Embarrassment Defensive Argumentative Withdraw

The Message: Prepare & deliver the message so that it is **Accurate, Brief and Clear (ABC)**

Accurate

- Use “I” statements (I think, I am, I need, I believe, I noticed, I feel)
- Be as factual as possible. Describe what you saw, heard or experienced
- Share the impact of their actions without assuming negative intentions on their part
- Provide a concrete example if necessary
- Focus on behaviour not character
- Avoid “hot” and judgmental language –e.g. Rude, disrespectful, unprofessional etc.
- Avoid words that exaggerate-never, always, nothing & everything

Brief:

- Avoid long-winded explanations
- Less is more – 30 second rule

Clear:

- Deliver the message directly rather than through hints and innuendo
- Avoid blaming others
- Don’t be afraid to make requests or set expectations. Just make sure you are specific.

Allow for Silence

The moments following the delivery of your message are often the most difficult. It is the quintessential awkward moment. You may be tempted to keep talking, back down or compromise. Hold the space.

Give Them The Floor=Listen Attentively

- Listening is more than “not talking” it is about being present and curious
- Listen to try to understand how the other person is thinking and feeling. What are their concerns?
- Resist the temptation to *interrupt* and dispute what they are saying even if you strongly disagree (you will have a chance to clarify and problem solve later)
- Remember not to assume anything. Assumptions get you into big trouble

Acknowledge the Other

You can acknowledge someone else’s perspective, concerns and feelings without agreeing with them. Acknowledgment is not about compromising or backing down; it is about showing you are paying attention, listening and trying to understand them.

It tells the other person “I hear you” or “I got it”

- “I sounds like...”
- “It is a difficult time...”
- “So your concern is...”

Manage Emotional Reactions

- Expect an emotional reaction when you respond to concerns, set expectations or confront behaviour
- Give the person the space to have their reaction
- Remember: their reaction is about them and not about you. It’s not personal.
- Choose not to react; you will have an opportunity to respond. Stay: calm, cool and confident

Respond Powerfully

Make sure the other person is done talking before you jump in

- Take a deep breath before you respond and remind yourself to keep the big picture in mind
- When you respond:
 - 1) Resist the urge to react defensively
 - 2) Pare down your message to the bare essentials. Brief is still best.

Wrap it Up

- This is your opportunity to restate your message, clarify any misinformation/misunderstandings or to reiterate expectations and boundaries
- If appropriate, clarify what you have agreed to: who is going to do what by when

~Be Concise. Be Calm. Be Confident~