

Tips for Handling Difficult Conversations

Having difficult conversations in the workplace is unavoidable, but when handled correctly, they can strengthen employees and the environment of your company.

Whether they involve addressing performance issues, resolving conflicts, or giving feedback, it's important to have these conversations with care and empathy. Learning how to approach these conversations with preparation and a focus on the solution is vital to strengthening the relationships and environment of your workplace.

Why Having Difficult Conversations is Important

Conflict Resolution

- Conflicts left unresolved can lead to tension and make the workplace environment feel toxic
- Addressing these issues before they fester allows for open communication

Performance Improvement

- Giving constructive feedback allows employees to learn and grow
- Acknowledging issues with performance allows for skill development

Build Trust

- Being honest with feedback and communication creates an environment of trust and fairness

Strategies for Navigating Difficult Conversations

Preparation

- Identify the issue that you are looking to resolve before beginning the conversation to ensure you are delivering a clear and respectful message

Time and Place

- The timing and setting of a conversation can impact the outcome
- Ensure you are in a private location where there will be no interruptions

Be Collaborative

- Ensure that you are framing the conversation as a way to work together to find a solution
- Use inclusive language like “we” and “us”

Practice Active Listening

- Allow the person you are speaking with to express their feelings and opinions without interruption
- Use empathy and acknowledge their concerns

Remain Composed

- Stay focused on the solution you are looking to reach
- Avoid personal attacks on the person and avoid being defensive

Keep Focus on the Solution

- Avoid dwelling on the issue, instead focus on the solution you would like to reach
- Discuss different solutions and agree on steps that need to be taken in order to reach it

Follow Up

- Continuously follow up after the conversation to ensure the necessary changes are being made

Examples

Addressing a colleague who took credit for your work

- Answer the following questions before talking with them
 - “Do you want acknowledgement in the next team meeting?”
 - “Do you need them to correct the record with leadership?”

Taking a tough correction from your manager

- Visualize the comment falling to the ground and letting it go

Giving feedback as a leader

- Use “I” statements to avoid placing blame
- This allows for feedback to be framed around expectations and actions
 - “I need the report by Tuesday” rather than “You haven’t completed the report yet”
 - “I noticed the report was submitted after the deadline” rather than “You missed the deadline”

Someone has an emotional reaction to something you’ve said

- Focus on not shutting down or lashing out, instead redirect the conversation towards finding a solution
 - “I appreciate your thoughts, tell me more about your concerns”
 - “Let’s stick to the facts”

References—read the following articles to learn more:

<https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2024/08/05/navigating-difficult-conversations-in-the-workplace-strategies-for-success/>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/melodywilding/2025/03/18/tiktok-star--trial-lawyer-reveals-how-to-master-difficult-conversations/>

www.SalesClubUSA.com