

Tough Conversations

1. Verify the Need

- When a leader refuses to take responsibility in a tough moment, he or she loses leadership. If you do that often enough, over time, you will no longer be the leader. The person who will step up becomes the leader.

2. Tackle Your Insecurity

- We avoid tough conversations for natural and normal reasons. Fears and insecurities are in the mix. We love people. We don't want to hurt or disappoint anyone. But in the big picture, far more harm is done by not rising to the leadership need of the moment.

3. Clarity in Conversation

- The power of one sentence

4. Goal is Redemption and Reconciliation

- *Reconciliation* is a Jesus word. The apostle Paul tells us that Christ “gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

5. Measure the Outcome by Your Peace not their Performance

- Outcomes are never guaranteed. The other person or group can choose their response. When you are clear, and at peace before God, you have done your best and need to leave the outcomes to Him.

6. Follow up.

- Don't let too much time go by before following up on your conversation. This can be informal. Follow-ups let the person know you are watching, praising progress and providing additional guidance where necessary. It also reminds them you care!

What a Tough Conversation is Not

A good way to learn how to have a constructive conversation is to first recognize what it is *not*:

Emotional or a reaction

While emotions can run high in troublesome situations, a corrective meeting must never be held when you are in an emotional state. It should never be held as a knee-jerk reaction. You are the leader. It is your job to communicate in a reasoned and caring manner.

Winning and losing

A successful difficult conversation is not one where you win and the other person loses. It is your responsibility to skillfully communicate. You are there to help the other person win and to bring improved results to the organization.

Personal

A difficult talk is never about diminishing a person as a whole—it is only about improving a specific behavior/situation or conveying a bad piece of news.

Damaging

Leaders who improperly handle situations create “scar tissue” ... and cause long-lasting damage to relationships. A certain amount of discomfort will be involved when having a difficult conversation. However, any pain should have a constructive outcome and not create permanent relational scarring. Of course you cannot control a person's reaction. You may present everything well and still get an unusually bad reaction that causes damage. Your role is to do the best job possible with your part of the conversation.