



## Mini-Guide

# Having Difficult Conversations

## Part 2: Maximize Your Impact Efficiently

*It's more than just HR.*

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## There is no getting *around* a difficult conversation—only through it.

While delaying or avoiding these conversations might spare feelings in the short term, it can result in poor performance, ongoing workplace conflict, and a decline in company culture.

### Confidence, persuasion, and motivation are key to ensuring people take you and the conversation seriously.

As the leader, you'll set the tone for the meeting. The calmer you are, the better you'll handle the conversation and can create a space where team members feel comfortable expressing their concerns without fear of retaliation.

- **Be confident**, but empathetic. Approach discussions with empathy, respect, and compassion, but stay objective. Pay attention to your body language: leaning back in your chair shows confidence, while fidgeting can signal nervousness. Some might even see nervous gestures as a reason to dismiss your points.
- **State your intentions** – both what you want or are trying to convey or accomplish as well as what you are not. Doing so will not only help you to communicate well and be understood, but also help you to not be misunderstood.

- **Ask purposeful questions** to explore the other person's perspective. This encourages them to justify their position and be more open to discussion. For example, if one of your team members is regularly missing deadlines avoid saying, 'You're regularly missing your deadlines, you need to do better.' Instead, ask specific questions like, 'How did you view the deadline?' or 'How can we ensure you meet deadlines in the future?'
- **Use 'I' statements** and a neutral tone of voice to reduce defensiveness and foster understanding. 'You' statements often place blame, making the listener feel attacked and defensive, which hinders a constructive resolution. Tailoring your language to capture someone's attention can motivate them to engage with you.
- **Identify and build on common ground.** Focus on a shared goal that both parties care about. For example, if both parties are committed to the success of a project, emphasize how their collaboration can lead to better outcomes. This approach resolves conflicts and strengthens team unity and commitment.



*Using 'I' statements such as 'I noticed that deadlines have been missed, and I'm concerned about how we can improve this' is more effective than 'You always miss deadlines,' which can make the listener feel attacked.*

- **Active listening** involves giving the other person space to express their thoughts and feelings without interruption. Slow down the conversation and take a moment to pause before responding. Putting away distractions like your phone, maintaining eye contact, nodding and appropriate facial expressions show that you are engaged and are listening.
- **If a conflict isn't resolved in a one-on-one setting**, consider exploring other options like negotiation, mediation, diplomacy, or counseling. For example, if peers can't resolve a conflict, they might need a manager to step in. If the conflict is between a manager and a direct report over a performance issue, the next manager in the chain of command would likely get involved.

### Common Examples of Difficult Conversations

Addressing negative feedback

Owning up to a mistake

Providing feedback to a direct report

Discussing workforce reduction and terminations

Reporting a colleague's misconduct

Investigating inappropriate behavior

Establishing boundaries with a colleague

Asking a manager or superior for a raise or promotion

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