



Mini-Guide

Having Difficult Conversations

Part 1: Lay The Groundwork

It's more than just HR.

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Lead Smarter. Grow Stronger.

The success of difficult conversations often hinges on the first few moments.

- **Reflect on *your* conflict management style** to set the right tone. The approach you choose greatly impacts your success in handling difficult conversations. By recognizing your style, you can establish the right atmosphere from the beginning. (See chart on pg. 4)
- **Understanding how the *other person* handles conflict** helps you adjust your approach for a better conversation. For example, if they tend to avoid conflict, you might need to gently encourage open communication. On the other hand, if they are more competitive, finding common ground and emphasizing collaboration could be key.
- **Know your objective beforehand.** Having a clear goal for the situation is key when getting ready for a difficult conversation. For example, if you want a team member to share their opinions more, think about the type of “yes” you expect based on what you know about them. If they’re open to feedback, you can count on their support and help them plan how to share their opinions effectively.



- **Your opening lines are crucial.** Decide whether to minimize or emphasize the topic based on their likely response. *Minimize* if you're concerned about their reaction: *"I want to talk about something that's bothering me. It's not a big deal, but I do want to discuss it."* *Emphasize* if they might dismiss the issue: *"I have a concern I want to address. This might be challenging, but I want us to be constructive."*
- **Invest time at the beginning of the conversation to create a positive atmosphere.** Approach the issue as a shared challenge to solve rather than a fight to win. Consider the way to give notice, the timing, and the Golden Rule of Influence: "Create rapport before you try to persuade."

There are two ways to create a feeling of rapport – with empathy and observation.

- **When empathizing,** you listen intently to the other person and try to understand how they feel and how the situation appears from their perspective.
- **When observing,** you carefully focus on body language, facial expressions, and gestures.



Did you know? Our assessment reports provide managers with great insights into how employees think and behave, helping them handle tough conversations smoothly. Schedule a [free demo](#) today!

Five Styles of Approaching Conflict

Style	Characteristics
Competitor	Meeting your needs is your priority. You're more concerned about winning the conversation and less concerned about the other person's feelings.
Accommodator	Your relationships take priority. You want the other person to feel good and are more concerned about meeting their needs.
Compromiser	You prefer to make a deal to resolve the issue. You agree to a practical solution that you can both live with.
Avoider	The name is just as it describes – you avoid difficult conversations! You don't have the conversation at all, and the issue doesn't get resolved.
Collaborator	You want your needs and the other person's needs to be met. You're prepared to invest the time and energy into resolving the issue.

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