

Managing Difficult Conversations



Deborah Dalley

Key areas for today

Recognise what makes some conversations difficult

Identify the questions to ask when preparing for a difficult conversation

Use a structured framework to conduct the conversation

Explore different ways to deal with defensive reactions

‘Our lives begin to end the day we become
silent about the things that matter the most’


Martin Luther King





What does difficult mean?

- Not easy
- Hard to be done
- Arduous
- Demanding considerable effort



A conversation is a talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings and ideas are expressed, information is exchanged and questions are asked and answered.

Think back to any conversations that you have had (or avoided) that you considered difficult and discuss:

- What were they about?
- What made them difficult?

These situations usually have several things in common:

There are high stakes and potential consequences



There are opposing viewpoints



There is uncertainty about how the conversation will play out



There is often historical baggage



There are powerful emotions involved

What were the main reasons for putting it off?

- Didn't want to create a bad atmosphere 29%
- To avoid confrontation 18%
- Didn't know how to say it 16%
- Worried about the reprisals 11%
- Thought it might make the situation worse 11%
- Didn't want to upset someone 8%
- Other reasons 7%
 - lack of back up, lack of time

Did the issue:

- Resolve itself 4%
- Get worse 43%
- Stay the same 49%

The other 4% reported that someone else had tackled the issue

Have you ever:

Sent an e-mail or text to someone because you did not want to say something face to face.

Delivered a message to the whole team or group that was really intended for one person.

Complained or gossiped about someone's behaviour but not spoken to them directly about it.

Asked a leading question in the hope that someone else will raise the issue that you want to talk about.

Incident

Repeated
Incident

Pattern

Relationship

Incident

Notice it

**Repeated
Incident**

Give feedback

Pattern

*Initiate a
conversation*

Relationship

CRASH!

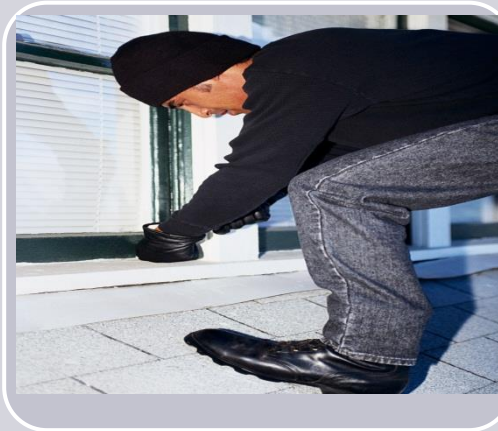
Internal
dialogue

CRASH!



Internal
dialogue

Mental
picture



Internal
dialogue

Mental
picture

Your
body's
reaction

Preparation

What is happening?



What are my reasons for having this conversation?



What has contributed to the issue?



What do I want?



Evaluate and Explain

Translate and Label

Observable Behaviour

What is happening?

She is really disorganised

He is so behind with his research and just isn't doing enough

He lets himself and the team down with his attitude to work

She is so disorganised

- Her desk is always covered in papers and she struggles to find things when asked.
- It often takes her over a week to answer e-mails.

He is so behind with his research and really isn't doing enough.

- He has been back from his sabbatical for 6 months and has not produced a paper yet.
- At his last PDR we agreed some interim deadlines but he has not met them.

He lets himself and the team down with his attitude to work

- He regularly uses Facebook during working hours and it is clearly visible to other people
- On three occasions this week he has complained that he has too much work to do

Preparation

What is happening?



What are my reasons for having this conversation?



What has contributed to the issue?



What do I want?

Shift from the Blame to Contribution

How I
contributed to
the problem

- I forgot to
- I thought that
- I assumed
- I neglected

How others
contributed to
the problem

- They said.....
- They did.....
- They denied.....
- They promised.....

What do I want?



What do I want?

Is it possible?

A light gray downward-pointing arrow is positioned to the right of the teal box, pointing towards the dark blue box below.

Is it realistic?

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Is it negotiable?

Preparation

What is happening?



What are my reasons for having this conversation?



What has contributed to the issue?



What do I want?

The Framework

Opening the conversation



Invite discussion



Discuss alternatives



Agree a way forward



Close

Opening the conversation

The 30 second introduction



The 30 Second Introduction

Open the conversation

Describe what is happening

Describe the effect it is having

Identify what has contributed to the problem

Invite discussion:

- Tell me how you see the situation?
- How do you feel about what I have just said?
- What is your perspective on this?
- What do you want to happen?
- How do you feel we could move forward from here?
- What options do you think are open to us?

