

# HOW TO HAVE PRODUCTIVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

A W O R K B O O K

We are thrilled to welcome you to our Global Public Speaking community! This guide will help you sharpen your skills to have more productive difficult conversations.



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# A Framework for Difficult Conversations

## Step 1

### **Opening Statement: 60 seconds**

A prepared, thoughtful, practiced introduction to start a productive conversation.

## Step 2

### **Dialogue & Discussion**

Inquire into your partner's views. Ask questions. Listen. Dig for full understanding. Use paraphrasing and perception checks, such as: "Please say more about this, I see it quite differently so I want to make sure I understand your thinking. May I tell you what I am hearing?" Questions only in this stage. Make sure there is clear understanding.

## Step 3

### **Resolution**

Ask: "What have we learned? Where are we now? Has anything been left unsaid? What is needed for resolution? How can we move forward from here, given our new understanding?" Make an agreement and determine how you will hold each other responsible for keeping it.



# Preparing for the Difficult Conversation

## The issue is

Be concise. In one or two sentences, get to the heart of the problem. Is it a concern, challenge, opportunity, recurring problem?

## It is significant because

What is at stake? How does this affect dollars, income, people, products, services, customers, family, the future, timing, or other relevant factors? What is the current impact? What is the future impact if the issue is not resolved?

## Relevant background information

Summarize with bullet points: How, when, why, and where did the issue start? Who are the key players? What forces are at work? What is the issue's current status?

## What is my personal contribution to the issue, if any?

## How do I feel about this situation and the conversation?

## How do I think the other person feels?

## How might the other respond? What might they say?

## What is my ideal outcome? What specific results do I want?

## What action will I take?



# Preparing Your Opening Statement

- 1) **Name the issue.** The problem named is the problem solved. Name the behavior that is causing the problem and the area of behavior it is impacting. If you have multiple issues, ask what is at the core, the theme, the commonality of all or most of your issues with this individual.
- 2) **Select a specific example that illustrates the behavior or situation you want to change.**  
Keep it succinct; be specific.
- 3) **Describe your emotions about this issue.** "I feel angry that"....If you are sad or afraid, say so..."I'm deeply concerned and I am afraid about..." Let the person know you are affected.
- 4) **Clarify what is at stake.** Why is this important? What is at stake for the person whose behavior you are confronting? What's at stake for yourself, for others, for customers, the team, or family? What's at stake for the relationship? Use the words at stake. There's a great deal at stake. Talk about it calmly.
- 5) **Identify your contribution to this problem.** How have you behaved in ways that produced or influenced the very results with which you are unhappy? No long confessions. Acknowledge that you recognize any role you may have played in creating the problem and that you intend to do something about it. Examples: Not setting clear expectations. Lack of accountability to delineate expectations. I have contributed to this problem by not stating deadlines for the project. "I will correct this" – or – "I contributed to this problem by not letting you know months ago how upset I was. Instead, I withdrew and consequently, our relationship has deteriorated. For that, I'm sorry."  
*If you believe you did not contribute to the problem, leave this part out.*
- 6) **Indicate your wish to resolve the issue.** Say, this is what I want to resolve. Additionally, restate the issue. "This is what I want to resolve with you...the effect your leadership style is having on the team."
- 7) **Invite your partner to respond.** "I want to understand what is happening from your perspective. Please talk to me about what's going on."



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# Step 1. Your Opening Statement

- 1) **Name the issue**
- 2) **Select a specific example that illustrates the behavior or situation you want to change**
- 3) **Describe your emotions or feelings about this issue**
- 4) **Clarify what is at stake**
- 5) **Identify your contribution to this problem, if applicable**
- 6) **Indicate your wish to resolve the issue**
- 7) **Invite your partner to respond**



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## Step 2. Dialogue & Discussion

Inquire into your partner's views. Ask questions. Listen. Use paraphrasing and perception checks, such as: "Please say more about this, I see it quite differently so I want to make sure I understand your thinking. May I tell you what I am hearing?" Questions only in this stage. Make sure there is clear understanding.

**What open-ended questions can you ask your partner?**

## Step 3. Moving Towards Resolution

Once you've had a chance to listen to and summarize your partner's concerns, it's time to close the conversation by moving towards resolution.

### **You can ask**

What have we learned?

Where are we now?

Has anything been left unsaid?

What is needed for resolution?

How can we move forward from here, given our new understanding?

Make an agreement and determine how to hold each other responsible.

**Outline your ideal resolution: what are some next steps you or your partner could take? Timeframe? Accountability Plan?**



# Listening Use the LAPPST Method

## "WOULD YOU PLEASE JUST LISTEN?"

How often have you heard these words from your clients, colleagues, partners, or significant other? There is a world of difference between "hearing" and "listening." Listening is an art. It's the art of understanding through empathizing, leaving the comfortable habits of your own thinking and entering into the thought patterns and feelings of another person.

## Listen Attentively

Sometimes the most revealing part of a message isn't found in the words themselves but in the subtle messages wrapped around those words. Failure to pick up on these "secret messages" may leave you blind to what is really being communicated.

- Keep eye contact
- Nod, lean forward, and use facial expressions that indicate interest
- Keep an open mind: suspend judgement
- Stop other tasks (including cell phones)
- Watch the other person's non-verbal cues
- Listen between the lines. What's not being said?

## Acknowledge

Indicate understanding of the other's situation. Listen in a non-judgmental way and attempt to identify the underlying feelings:

- It sounds like you felt disappointed...
  - How did you feel when...?
  - I understand. I see. I know how you feel.

## Probe

Ask questions to clarify. Allow long pauses before asking questions; be patient. Ask WHAT questions. WHAT questions are keys to listening:

- What do you suggest I do to help you be a better performer?
- What would be most helpful at this time?
- What can we do to remedy the situation?

## Paraphrase

State in your own words what the other person has said and make sure to get feedback to confirm your impression.

- So, what I heard you say is\_\_\_\_. Is this how you are feeling?
- So, you really felt insulted, is that it?

## Summarize

Summarize key points. Identify any agreements that were reached. State ideas and feelings that you and the other person share. Check for understanding.

## Take Notes

Listen for main ideas and jot them down (not "court reporting").

**REMEMBER:** The contrast between hearing and listening is as different as night and day. Improving your listening skills may be the single most important thing you can do to improve your communication...and your life.



# 10 Ways to Make Difficult Conversations a Little Easier

## Checklist for Making Difficult Conversations Easier

- Address the matter as soon as possible
- Choose the right place and time
- Sit, don't stand
- Anticipate that you might not be on the same page
- Cultivate an attitude of discovery and curiosity; genuinely desire a win-win outcome
- Focus on the issue, not the person
- Be specific about the concern
- Be collaborative
- Avoid negative statements
- Listen actively, maintain eye contact, use empathy, ask open-ended questions, become comfortable with silences, and know when to stop talking

## Here are a few suggestions on how to begin

- I have something I'd like to discuss with you that will help us work together more effectively
- I'd like to talk about \_\_\_\_\_ with you, and first I'd like to get your point of view
- I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes to talk?
- I need your help with something. Can we talk about it?
- I think we have different perceptions about \_\_\_\_\_. I'd like to hear your thinking on this.
- I'd like to talk about \_\_\_\_\_. I think we may have different ideas on how to \_\_\_\_\_.
- I'd like to see if we might reach a better understanding about \_\_\_\_\_. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well.



# Role Play Feedback

## Step 1: Opening Statement

- Named the issue succinctly and clearly
- Selected a specific example that illustrated the behavior or situation participant wanted to change
- Kept it short
- Described emotions about this issue
- Clarified what was at stake. Used the words, at stake. Talked about it calmly.
- Identified contribution to this problem.
- Indicated wish to resolve the issue.
- Invited partner to respond.

## Step 2. Dialogue

- Asked questions
- Listened effectively
- Used LAPPST
- Made sure there was clear understanding

## Step 3. Resolution

- Asked: What have we learned? Where are we now? Has anything been left unsaid?
- Asked: How can we move forward from here, given our new understanding?
- Made an agreement and determined how they would hold each other responsible for keeping it.

**What other feedback do you have for this role play?**



