

Handling Difficult Conversations

Jennifer Ott
May 19, 2022



Learning Objectives

Today we will:

- Identify the types of difficult conversations in the workplace
- Discuss the importance of setting ground rules in difficult conversations
- Establish productive techniques for addressing the issue(s)
- Create opportunities for resolving disagreements
- Explore the roles of empathy, listening and feedback

Why have difficult conversations?



**Better
Relationships**

**Improved
Collaboration**

**Conflict
Resolution**

**Increased
Communication**

**When we avoid
difficult conversations,
we trade short-term
discomfort for long-term
dysfunction.**

Peter Bromberg

Difficult Conversations may involve:



- Topics you don't want to talk about
- Situations where you're not sure what to say
- Conflicting opinions
- Circumstances where the outcome is uncertain
- Discussions which make you feel uncomfortable

Types:

- Delivering bad news
- Asking for a promotions or a raise
- Addressing performance issues
- Investigating complaints or misconduct
- Reporting a grievance
- Admitting a mistake
- Discussing a disagreement



How to Start

Set Ground Rules

- Pick an appropriate time and place
- Address issues immediately and calmly
- Maintain boundaries and resist bias
- Take turns speaking and listen
- Seek to be understood, not to be right
- Avoid “always” and “never”
- Stay on topic – focus on the problem
- No yelling or degrading language
- Use “I” statements to express feelings and needs
- Take breaks when needed

Productive Techniques for Addressing Issues

- Set goals for the conversation
- Prepare what you're going to say
- Keep it brief, but thorough
- Focus on the problem, not the person
- Listen, question, acknowledge
- Look for solutions
- Share the good, too



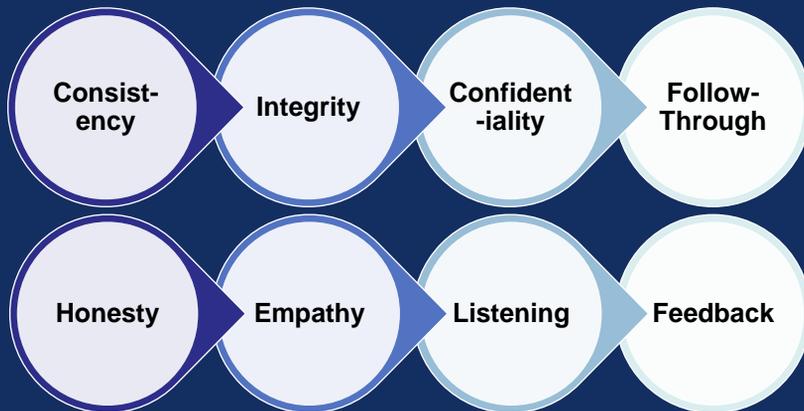
Productive Techniques for Receiving Feedback



- Listen – hear the person out instead of focusing on your response
- Resist / avoid interruptions
- Assume positive intent
- Avoid defensiveness
- Take time to process
- Ask clarifying questions
- Avoid making assumptions
- Ask for examples

How to Resolve

Resolving Disagreements



After the conversation...



Examples

What would you do?

An employee is consistently late

What would you do?

A co-worker is struggling at work due to personal issues

What would you do?

An employee is underperforming

What would you do?

A co-worker is having issues
with another co-worker

Bottom Line...



Questions?