

# 10 Top Tips

## On How To Manage

### DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

How often are you faced with a conversation you would rather not have? Typically, they relate to addressing colleagues regularly being late, tackling underperformance, or confronting behaviours that are impacting your team's performance. These conversations often feel awkward, uncomfortable, or even confrontational, so much so that people regularly avoid them altogether. A strategy that rarely makes things better and leads to issues festering, an increase in tension and toxic workplace cultures.

The alternative is to approach the conversation with clarity, care, and confidence—using it as an opportunity to strengthen working relationships, improve performance, and build a more open and supportive team environment.

This guide offers 10 practical tips to help you manage difficult conversations more effectively.

So you can move from avoidance to action and create the kind of workplace where challenges are addressed, not ignored.

#### 1 Plan Ahead

Be crystal clear about what you want from the conversation. Not having a plan is like going for a walk in the woods without a map. You will end up somewhere, but it is unlikely to be where you intended.

#### 2 Prepare For Two Perspectives

Accept that the other person also has a set of needs. This can be the hardest part of the process, seeing the situation from their point of view. You may well be certain you are right, but so will they. Understanding both sides helps you approach the conversation with empathy and confidence.

#### 3 Choose The Right Setting

Select a neutral, private space that allows for open and honest discussion. Confidentiality matters—find a discreet room with no glass windows and good soundproofing to help both parties feel comfortable and at ease.

#### 4 Practice Active Listening

Give the other person your full attention, acknowledge their perspective and let them speak freely without interruption. Active listening will help create a bridge of trust and rapport, even if you disagree. Learning how to fully attend and understand their perspective demonstrates you value what the other person has to say.

#### 5 Stay Open-Minded

Approach the conversation with curiosity and a willingness to learn. Despite your preparation and research, you probably do not have the full picture. An open mindset helps you understand the scope and depth of the issue—and ensures you are addressing the right issue.

#### 6 Look Beneath The Surface

What is said at first is unlikely to be the whole issue, especially if you hold a position of seniority or authority. The other person may say just enough to get through the process or tell you what they think you want to hear. Gently explore beyond their initial comments to find out what is really important. You will simply be back in the same place a few weeks later if not.

#### 7 Stay grounded

Recognise when you become triggered by another person's comments and stay calm. Emotional reactions are natural—they are part of how we keep ourselves safe. But in the moment, the emotional reaction may not be fully tuned into the correct context. Learning how to monitor and manage these reactions helps you stay in control and make effective decisions.

#### 8 Focus On The Future

Respond to challenging comments in a way that does not imply blame. Conversations are more effective when they explore the past only to make progress in the future. Develop ways to reframe negative comments into those that enable progress.

#### 9 Aim For Win Win Solutions

When looking at solutions, set your intent to go beyond compromise. Compromise can mean both parties walk away with less than what they wanted. Think creatively about solutions that meet everyone's needs, so everyone gains something worthwhile from the discussion.

#### 10 Reflect and Learn

After the conversation, take time to follow up and reflect on what went well and what you might do differently next time. The best way to learn about how to manage these conversations is through experience. Mistakes are an inevitable part of the learning journey - but so is progress.



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