



How to Tackle a Difficult Conversation and Achieve the Best Possible Outcome

How do you tackle a difficult conversation that you are facing a difficult conversation with someone, such as a colleague in the workplace, a client, your boss?

Does it fill you with dread or make you feel anxious? Perhaps you see it as confrontation, ending in arguments, disputes and bad feelings.

Rather than have that difficult conversation you would rather avoid the issue, hoping it will go away.

“Confront - to face, meet, or deal with a difficult situation or person”

Things we are likely to experience when thinking about having that conversation

- Physical feelings: - such as sweaty palms, racing heart, dry mouth, shaking
- Negative chatter in our heads
- Playing out the conversation in our heads, which is full of assumptions
- Memories of previous times when we had a bad experience

What happens if we fail to confront the problem?

- The issue gnaws away at us
- It causes resentful feelings, or an atmosphere
- The relationship between those involved deteriorates
- We make sarcastic comments alluding to the issue, instead of addressing it
- We bottle up our feelings until we just spew it all out in anger
- We are seen as someone who cannot deal with issues in a professional manner
- It eats away at our self-confidence, unable to stand up for ourselves in the future

As professional women, if we don't face up to difficult situations or conversation it is likely to have adverse effects. We need to build good, strong and sustainable relationships. This is not only important for our own self-esteem and confidence, but having the ability to talk to anyone on any issue will enhance our careers, either as employees, or in our own businesses.



How to approach a difficult conversation

Preparation

Find a suitable venue

Choose a quiet venue where you won't be disturbed to have the conversation as you want the other person's full attention

Timing is important

Choose a suitable time, when each of you are able to give your full attention to the conversation. Don't try and talk to someone if they have to rush off, or if they are distracted.

Choose ONE issue to discuss.

If you try to address more than one, it will dilute your point, and confuse the other person. Be clear on what you want to achieve and the best possible outcome. Otherwise you won't resolve the problem, and you may be seen as ranting.

Write down all the points you want to make

Again make sure they relate to the ONE issue that you want to discuss. Ensure you have the other's attention, by being clear, concise and succinct. You don't want to lose them!

Practise

Practice in front of the mirror, record the conversation on your phone or with a friend. Visualise the conversation going well. This makes a huge difference as you will be entering the conversation in a positive way.

Additional techniques to aid you

Visualisation

Effective breathing techniques



The Conversation

Start the conversation with a positive statement. For example, empathise with the other person, pay them a compliment, and assure them you value them.

Then state the ONE issue you want to discuss with them.

Don't play the Blame Game

Avoid making accusations, as the other person is likely to feel defensive and respond by attacking you. It's much more effective to own your feelings and thoughts and use phrases such as -

I think

I feel

I am uncomfortable

I am unhappy

Be prepared to listen, without interrupting

However difficult that may feel. Then be curious and interested, asking the other person to explain if you don't fully understand. It's better not to make assumptions, as it can lead to misunderstandings.

Be aware of triggers

Things that push your buttons, and not necessarily relevant to this situation. If that happens take a deep breath – and don't react. If you should be met with accusations, or hostility, stay calm and try to listen to their side attentively.

Empathise

But that doesn't mean you have to agree or back down. Only then put forward your side, in a calm way.



The Outcome

Be prepared to negotiate in a way that you don't leave feeling defeated. At the end of the conversation thank the other person for listening. This is more likely to encourage future positive and meaningful discussions. By practicing beforehand, and visualising a positive outcome, and following these guidelines you are greatly increasing your chances of achieving a positive outcome.

If I can help in anyway, feel free to contact me.

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