

Navigating Difficult Conversations

Say what matters. Strengthen relationships. Lead with intention.

QUICK RESET

Before you speak, ground yourself:

- Pause → Don't react, respond
- Check your intent → Is your goal to be right, or to make it better?
- Assume positive intent → Most people aren't trying to create conflict

Reminder: The first 30 seconds set the tone for everything that follows.

WHEN TO HAVE THE CONVERSATION

- ✓ Something is felt but not said
- ✓ Patterns are impacting outcomes
- ✓ Silence is costing trust or clarity

WHEN TO AVOID THE CONVERSATION

- High-emotion moments
- Public settings (when possible)
- Letting it build into resentment

A SIMPLE 4-STEP FRAMEWORK

1. START WITH CLARITY

"I want to talk about something so we can move forward better."

2. SHARE OBSERVATIONS

Focus on what happened. Do not make assumptions.

3. EXPRESS IMPACT

"Here's how it affected me/the team..."

4. INVITE PERSPECTIVE

"How do you see it?" (*Builds understanding*)

Join The Impact of Leadership Community For More!

LANGUAGE THAT WORKS

Instead of → Try this:

“You always...” →

“I’ve noticed a pattern of...”

“That was wrong” →

“Help me understand...”

“You need to...” →

“What would better look like?”

Power phrases:

- “I might be wrong, but here’s what I’m seeing...”
- “Can we work through this and figure out the best way forward?”
- “What’s your perspective?”

WHEN IT GETS TOUGH

Remain open-minded instead of defensive, and don’t hesitate to slow the conversation when necessary. Recognize the other person’s feelings by saying, “I can see this matters to you,” and continually refocus on your shared goal: “We both want this to go well.”

If needed, pause and revisit, as progress beats winning.

COMMON PITFALLS

Common pitfalls include waiting too long to address the issue and talking at someone instead of with them. It also happens when the conversation becomes personal or turns into an attempt to win rather than resolve the situation.

CLOSE STRONG

Close the conversation by aligning on clear next steps and making sure expectations are understood moving forward. Take a moment to reaffirm the relationship so both sides leave feeling respected and on the same page.

Difficult conversations aren’t a disruption. They’re a doorway.

Join The Impact of Leadership Community For More!