

S P E A K E A S Y



NAVIGATING CONFLICT

HANDLING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS
IN THE WORKPLACE

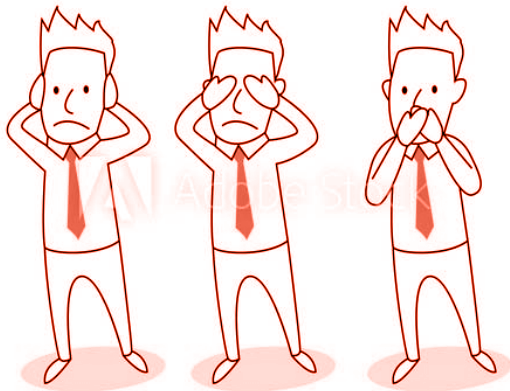
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Conflict in the workplace is unavoidable, but handling conflict in a productive manner is key in maintaining healthy and positive business relationships.



#56308540

In fact, over

77%

of managers and supervisors commonly report that they avoid conflict and difficult conversations in the workplace because they lack enough evidence to address the issue.¹

Miscommunication and conflict in businesses can lead to²:



Increased costs due to lost work time;



Missed project deadlines;



Lack of collaboration between team members; and



Decreased work productivity and workplace morale.

If managers are trained to handle conflict effectively in the workplace, this could lead to higher workplace productivity as well as lower the cost associated with missed work time.

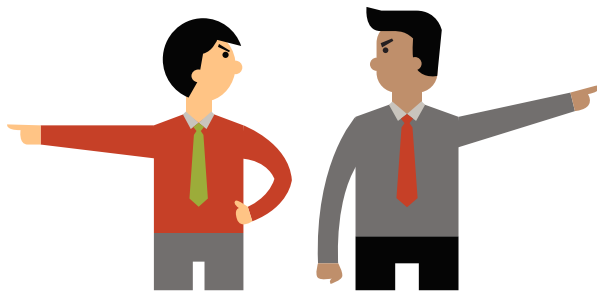
The average manager spends

25-40%

of their work time resolving workplace conflict.³



This translates to as much as two days per workweek lost as a result of having to meet with employees or mentor coworkers through disagreements.



Whether you are tasked with addressing an employee's performance issue or delivering difficult news to your project team, there are key strategies you can use to prepare for difficult conversations in the workplace.

At Speakeasy, Inc., our business communication consultants recommend following these key strategies to prepare for and navigate difficult conversations in the workplace. Using these tools can ensure that your next conversation is handled with tact and professionalism.

1 MAINTAIN A POSITIVE MINDSET



If you label the conversation, in your mind, as being “difficult” this can influence how you approach the other person and your overall feelings about meeting. Instead, focus on the conversation as being a way to resolve an issue and share ideas to improve performance or enhance a business relationship. Handling a difficult conversation works best when you frame the conversation in a positive or neutral light. This includes how you invite the other person to speak with you. For example, instead of outlining the meeting topic as “performance review”, consider referring to it as “brainstorming session for professional development”. This way everyone involved will be entering the conversation with a mindset of collaboration and idea sharing.

2 DON'T FORGET TO BREATHE AND RELEASE BODY TENSION



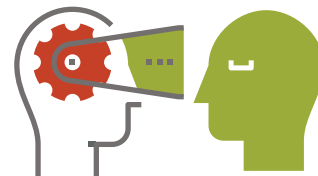
When delivering difficult news, your tone and body language are essential. If you are very stern in your approach or take on a closed body posture, this can be interpreted as you being upset and may result in the other person becoming uncomfortable or defensive. Before starting the talk, take a few minutes to calm your body and release any thoughts of anxiety from your mind. During this time, be sure to also visualize how you will position your body, how you will use your hands and facial gestures, and even how you will maintain eye contact. Remember, the more calm and centered your body and thoughts are, the better prepared you will be to approach the conversation.

3 LOOSELY PLAN YOUR TALK, BUT ALLOW FOR AUTHENTICITY



During any conversation, it is easy to get sidetracked and forget to mention key points. For challenging conversations, pre-planning your talking points can be a great way to structure the conversation and determine the best sequence of topics to discuss. The key with this strategy is to not script the conversation, but instead use this planning time to sort through the key information you want to share and discuss with the other party. If needed, you can also use this time to gather evidence to support the topics of the conversation so you are more likely to feel prepared to address difficult issues. Keep in mind that being authentic in your communication is important in how your audience will perceive your motives and receive your message.

4 RECOGNIZE THE OTHER PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE



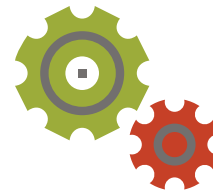
Avoid using the “my way or the highway” approach and instead acknowledge the other person’s view and how they may be feeling. Communication consultants recommend starting the conversation with an open-ended question related to the issue at hand. For example, instead of opening the talk with “I’ve noticed your work productivity has been low”, try saying, “How do you feel your recent productivity levels have been?” This way the other person can share their thoughts which may shed more light on the true issue. You may find the employee is aware of their drop in performance and allowing them to share their thoughts generates an environment of collaboration versus accusation.

5 MAKE IT A CONVERSATION AND NOT A LECTURE



Remember to talk with the person and not at the person. This is a conversation and should feel like such. Spending too much time talking and not enough time listening can give the other person the impression that you do not value their opinions. If needed, slow down the pace of the conversation to ensure you are taking the time you need to process what is being said. Throughout the conversation, be sure to pause and summarize what has been discussed. Encouraging the other person to share their thoughts increases the likelihood that a resolution can be agreed upon and implemented. If you are entering into a conversation that will put the other person in a difficult position or will take something away from them, consider if there is anything that you can give back. For example, if you have to lay an employee off, you may be able to offer to give them a recommendation or provide them with a list of companies hiring employees with their skillset. The more invested the other person feels you are in preserving their best interest, the more likely the conversation will be productive and less hostile.

6 REFLECT AND CONSIDER WAYS TO IMPROVE



After each conversation, it is worthwhile to spend time reflecting on your performance. Take this time to review how you approached the conversation, how you handled objections or questions, and how you closed the conversation. Practicing delivering difficult news whether in front of a mirror or with a friend, can go a long way in increasing your confidence with handling challenging conversations.

CONCLUSION



Using these Speakeasy conversation preparation strategies are the first steps to overcoming anxiety related to handling difficult conversations. Over time with more practice and guidance, you will be able to become an effective communicator, in all circumstances. To approach a difficult conversation with success, it is key to calm your body, establish a positive mindset, encourage information sharing, and emphasize listening over speaking. At some point in your professional career having to deliver difficult news will be inevitable. How you handle this can be a defining moment in maintaining your business relationships. The business communication consultants at Speakeasy are here to help you throughout your communication journey, from impromptu presentations to handling challenging situations. Our expert faculty specialize in empowering business professionals with the communication skills they need to strengthen business relationships and enhance interpersonal communication. With dynamic business communication skills training programs, participants receive real-world opportunities to put proven communication strategies into practice to ensure their future communications are successful. Contact Speakeasy today to register for one of our communication programs, before spaces fill up. We are excited to partner with you on your communication journey and make your next difficult conversation as seamless and as productive as possible.

To learn more about our dynamic communication classes visit our website at <http://www.speakeasyinc.com/>, or call one of our communication advisors at **1-888-375-1801**.

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¹ <http://tacklingdifficultconversations.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Difficult-Conversations-Survey-Report2.pdf>

² <https://hbr.org/2015/01/how-to-handle-difficult-conversations-at-work>

³ <http://conflictinworkplace.com/2011/07/31/work-place-statistics-the-cost-of-turnover-loss-of-productivity-and-absenteeism/>