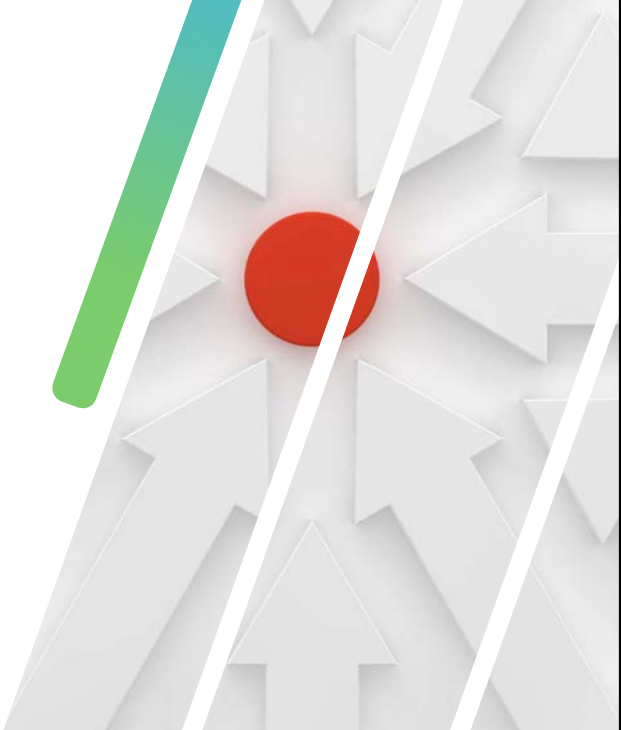




MCIT: Employee Performance Management: Tips for Effective Difficult Conversations with Employees

Objectives

- Employee Management
 - Importance of Difficult Conversations
 - Prepare for the Conversation
 - Create a Supportive Environment
 - Communicate Effectively
 - Manage Emotions
 - Provide Constructive Feedback
 - Collaborative Problem-Solving
 - Follow-Up and Support
 - Legal and Ethical Considerations
 - Resources
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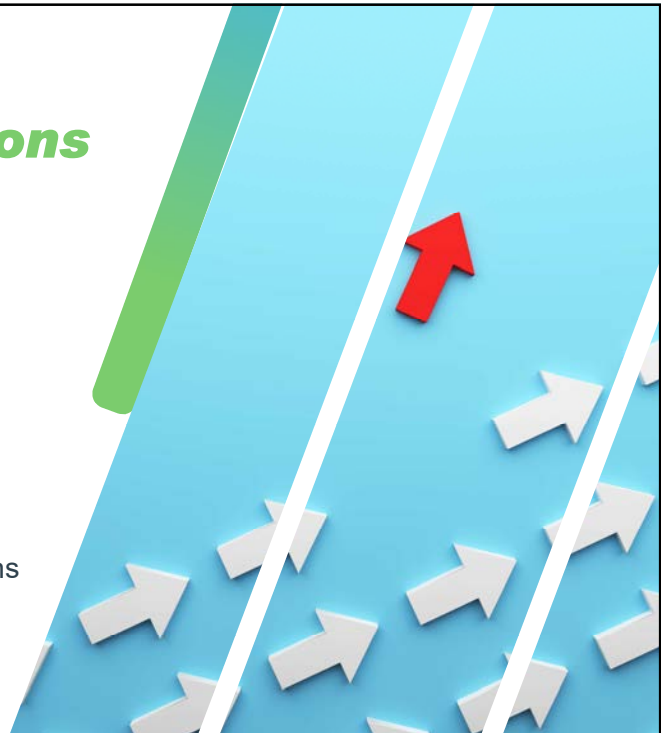
Difficult Conversations

- Recognize the impact of avoiding difficult conversations on team dynamics and performance.
- Identify the benefits of addressing issues promptly and constructively.



Reasons to have Difficult Conversations

- Performance
- Behavior/Conduct
- Policy Violations
- Attitude and Motivation
- Feedback and Development
- Personal Issues Impacting Work
- Communication Issues
- Conflict Resolution
- Changes in Job Role or Expectations
- Disciplinary Action or Termination



Stress Factors

Emotional Factors

High Stakes

Personal Issues

Defensiveness

Fear or Guilt

Communication Barriers

Lack of Clarity

Poor Listening

Assumptions and Bias

Interpersonal Dynamics

Power Imbalance

Lack of Trust

Conflict Avoidance

Cultural and Organizational Factors

Company Culture

Policy Constraints

AVOIDANCE

- If you're avoiding a hard conversation at work, you're not alone. A study by coaching and training firm Bravely shows that 70 percent of employees avoid difficult conversations.
- Most hope the issue will resolve itself, but that's rarely the case. The longer the conversation festers, the more resentment tends to build, and the harder the discussion becomes once you've worked up the courage to start it.
- Fifty-three percent of employees handle "toxic" situations by ignoring them. That avoidance impacts your team.





Hard conversations are an inevitable part of leadership and development. Maybe you need to deliver tough client or employee feedback reset a stakeholder's expectations or give a poor performance review. Whatever the situation, there are tactics you can leverage to navigate difficult conversations with employees effectively and formulate an action plan for how to move forward.

Below are tips to help you get started:

1. Prioritize Building Trust
2. Consider the Conversations Layers
3. Active Listening
4. Speak in Specifics

Prioritize Building Trust

- Building trust and cultivating positive rapport.
 - Be consistent – across the board.
 - Be approachable
- When a tough conversation arises, it will be easier because your colleagues will be less likely to assume negative intent.
- This combination signals that you have good intentions and the skills to act on them, which can help you navigate challenging conversations with your team.



Prepare for the Conversation

- Gather information and facts before the meeting.
- Develop a clear objective for the conversation and plan key points to discuss.



Pre-Intervention Strategies

❖ *Before meeting with the employee:*

- Gather documentation of performance or conduct problems. FACTS.
- As needed:
 - Review the workplace policy
 - Consult HR
 - Consult an EAP Counselor
 - Have resources available for employee (EAP/FMLA etc.)

Consider the Conversation's Layers

"We can divide any difficult conversation into three layers," says Harvard Business School Professor Julie Battilana.

Those layers include:

1. What happened
2. How we feel about what happened
3. How the incident intersects with or threatens each person's identity



Considerations:

➤ What Happened

Amid a hard conversation, it's tempting to describe your perception of the situation as absolute truth and place blame on the other party. In doing so, you assume their intentions, which you can't predict. Instead, speak from your perspective, acknowledge your role, and describe how the incident affected you. This creates a safe space for the other person to share how they perceived the situation and its impact on them.

➤ How We Feel About What Happened

Difficult conversations tend to conjure strong emotions. It's tempting to vent your frustrations or take your feelings out on others. While some may say to remove emotion from the conversation entirely, it's better to address how both parties feel without judgment. You can then understand where the other person is coming from and reach a resolution.

Considerations:

➤ **How the Incident Intersects with or Threatens Each Person's Identity**

Everyone has a self-image they're trying to protect, and that often feels threatened during a difficult conversation. Perhaps you feel like someone is questioning your expertise or work ethic. It's understandable that you might get defensive.

➤ Before the initial conversation, it's important to remember you're not the only one in it; the other person is coming to it with their own identity issues. Consider whether the situation threatens both parties' self-image. Once you understand what's on the line for each of you, it's easier to relate and find common ground.

➤ By recognizing these three layers and shifting the discussion, you can have a more productive, honest conversation.

Create a Supportive Environment

- The importance of choosing an appropriate time and place for the conversation.
- Create a non-threatening and respectful atmosphere.



Communicate Effectively

- Develop active listening skills to understand the employee's perspective.
- Practice clear and concise communication, avoiding ambiguous language.



Actively Listen

- 1. Pay Attention**
Focus Completely, Show That You're Listening
- 2. Demonstrate Understanding**
Use Body Language, Encourage the Speaker
- 3. Provide Feedback**
Reflect on What's Being Said, Ask Questions
- 4. Defer Judgment**
Avoid Interrupting, Keep an Open Mind
- 5. Respond Appropriately**
Be Honest and Respectful, Relate Appropriately
- 6. Remember What Was Said**
Summarize and Paraphrase, Follow Up
- 7. Be Mindful of Nonverbal Cues**
Observe Body Language, Be Aware Nonverbal Signals

Speak in Specifics

- During difficult conversations, the more specific you can be, the better.
- Focus on facts and examples instead of your employee's personality or unique traits.
 - Practicing this will help ensure your personal biases don't creep into the conversation. When choosing examples, use more recent ones. Rather, if you're delivering an annual performance review, don't rehash issues from the year before. Present a specific situation from within the review window, detail its aftereffects, and share how you'd advise your employee to approach the situation moving forward.

Communication Scripting



Utilize a “scripting” approach or “statement starter”

- Statement starters encourage restating the problems as an initiation for feedback, collaborative problem solving and/or productive exploration.
- State the issue in the form of a short phrase or introductory statement

Consider a statement starter to the beginning of each phrase

I have noticed that _____

I am concerned about _____

I want to check in with you about _____

***Solution Focused Starters**

How might you _____?

In what ways might you _____?

How are you going to _____?

COMMON TACTFUL PHRASES & CUSHION STATEMENTS



- *Thank you for...*
- *I appreciate your opinion and...*
- *I see it differently.*
- *It seems to me that the problem is...*
- *My concern is that...*
- *Could you please explain this to me...*
- *Would it be possible for you to recheck...*
- *I can see why you may feel that way...*
- *I don't feel totally comfortable with...*
- *I'm sure you don't realize it, but...*
- *Maybe I didn't state that clearly...*
- *Perhaps I misunderstood. Are you saying that...*

Manage Emotions

- Learn strategies for managing your own emotions and staying calm.
- Understand how to handle emotional reactions from employees constructively.
- Provide Constructive Feedback:
- Understand the principles of giving constructive feedback that focuses on behavior and outcomes, not personal attributes.
- Practice using specific examples to illustrate points.



Feedback

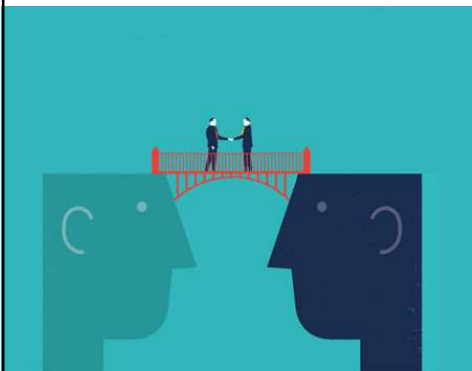
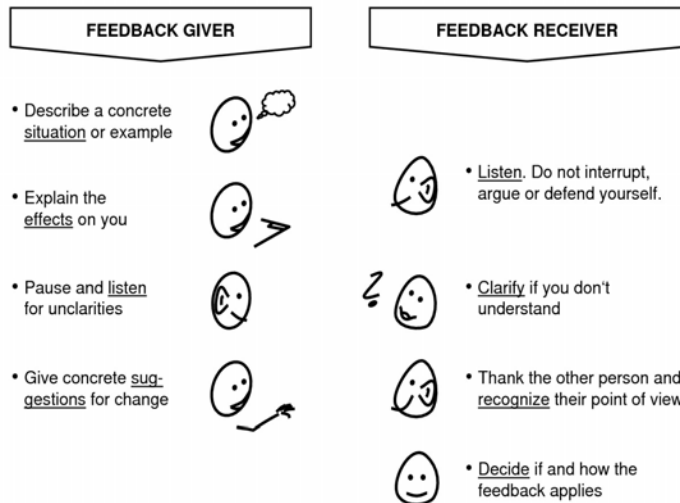
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Communication and Feedback

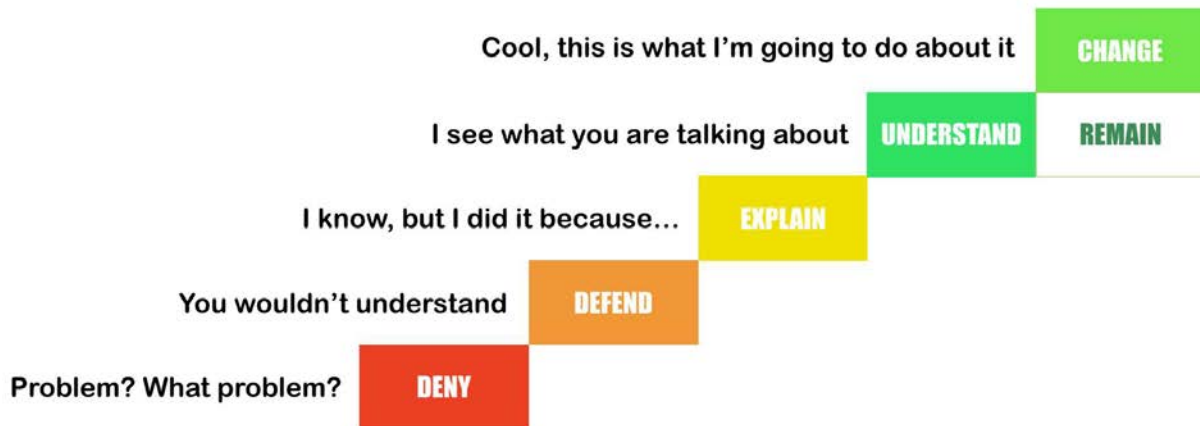
4-Step Feedback Model

VERSION 18.1.2007



Wolfgang Gatterbauer
 Online available at: www.dbai.tuwien.ac.at/staff/gatter/work/050323_Feedback_Model.pdf
 Inspiration: Diverse web documents on the EEC (Example, Effect, Change) and LCD (Listen, Clarify, Decide) feedback models

Feedback Staircase



Collaborative Problem-Solving

- Learn techniques for involving the employee in developing solutions and action plans.
- Encourage mutual agreement on steps to improve performance or behavior.



Brainstorm Solutions Together

- You may come to the conversation with an end goal in mind. Yet, to make the most of the discussion, brainstorm a plan for how to move forward together. The process might surface stronger solutions to the problem or help you reach a better understanding.
- By making the difficult conversation a collaborative one, you can both leave knowing you did your best to reach a resolution.



Follow-Up and Support

- **For Employee:** the importance of follow-up meetings to monitor progress and provide ongoing support.
 - Document the conversation and follow-up actions effectively.
- **For yourself:** Engage in role-playing exercises to practice handling various difficult scenarios.
 - Request feedback and tips for improvement from trainers and peers.



Legal and Ethical Considerations

- Be consistent.
 - Emphasize the importance of confidentiality and employees' rights.
 - Know company policies related to performance/conduct etc.
 - Know where your support is as a Manager.
 - HR/Legal Counsel
 - EAP
- ❖ **Consult your HR department or legal counsel regarding legal implications in this area.**



When We UNDERSTAND Conflict

We are able to...

- Preserve and strengthen our relationships
- Improve our productivity by reducing time spent on handling conflict
- Reduce our stress
- Get better results when a conflict does occur

Strategies for Supervisors to Practice Self-Care

- ✓ Set Boundaries
- ✓ Time Management
- ✓ Practice Stress Management Techniques
- ✓ Physical Health
- ✓ Mental and Emotional Health
- ✓ Professional Development
- ✓ Positive Work Environment
- ✓ Realistic Expectations
- ✓ Recreation/Hobbies and Social Connection
- ✓ Mindful Technology Use



Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

- Counseling Sessions (6)
- Life Coaching
- In-the-moment support
- Supervisor Support/Consultation
- Parent Coaching and Referrals
- Elder and Child-Care Referrals
- Financial Counseling
- Legal Consultations
- Critical Incident Response
- Crisis Debriefings



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