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Difficult Conversations

**Robin Paggi, Training & Development Specialist
MA, SPHR-CA, CPLP, CPC, SHRM-SCP**

Difficult Conversations



Because of their position, supervisors are required to have difficult conversations with others:

- Disciplining, terminating employment
- Talking to an employee about a personal issue (body odor, improper attire, etc.)
- Dealing with an angry/potentially violent employee

Today's Objective



**Identify how to prepare for
and handle the
conversations so they will
be easier for the sender and
the receiver.**

Difficult Conversations



**What makes
conversations
difficult?**

Why do we communicate?



- **To gain a desired response from our audience.**
- **When you have to initiate a difficult conversation, focus on the response you want from the other person. Then create your message to get that response.**

First, think about how you communicate



- Are you direct and brutally honest?
- Are you personable and like to keep it light?
- Are you tactful and sometimes indirect?
- Do you just stick to the facts?

You need to be a little of all four:
direct, personable, tactful, and factual.

Fight or Flee



- When initiating a difficult conversation, you are probably going to experience the fight or flight syndrome.
- Prepare, breathe, stay calm, don't attack or defend.
- The listener is probably going to experience it, too.

You can help the listener by:



- Carefully choosing where the conversation will be held (neutral, away from traffic) and seating arrangements
- Using a soft entry – let the listener get prepared
- Being direct, personable, tactful, and factual
- Allowing the listener to talk
- Determining how the listener can be successful

Coaching to improve performance



“Robin, as your supervisor it is my responsibility to help you be as effective as possible. Therefore, I need to tell you the following (lets the listener get prepared). Your directness sounds harsh at times, which hurts the feelings of some of your co-workers (direct, personable, tactful, factual). I think you will be much more effective if you are more sensitive in your approach (tells how to be successful). What do you think?” (lets listener talk).

Talking about a personal issue



“Robin, I need to talk to you about a sensitive issue (lets listener get prepared). There are times that you have an odor, which detracts from your professionalism (direct, personable, tactful, factual). Is there a reason for the odor that I should know about? (lets listener talk). I know this is embarrassing, but I want you to be successful and eliminating the odor will help with that (tells how to be successful).”

Failure to meet expectations



“Robin, we need to talk about yesterday’s workshop (lets listener get prepared). The workshop ended 20 minutes late, which cut into the participants’ schedules (direct, personable, tactful, factual). Did something happen to prevent you from ending on time? (lets listener talk). Be sure to end your workshops on time in the future” (tells how to be successful).

Policy violation with disciplinary action



“Robin, I need to talk to you about yesterday afternoon. You indicated in an email that you had a couple of glasses of wine at lunch. Am I correct that you had been drinking? Drinking during working hours is a violation of company policy; therefore, I am giving you a written warning. Please refrain from drinking during working hours in the future.”

Second policy violation resulting in termination



“This is going to be a difficult conversation. You were intoxicated at work again yesterday, which is the second violation of the company’s policy against the use of alcohol during working hours. Unfortunately, I am terminating your employment. Do you have any questions or concerns? I wish you the best of luck in the future.”

Typical two-way communication



- What the speaker thinks he said
- What he actually said
- What the listener thinks he said.

- What the listener thinks she said
- What she actually said
- What the speaker thinks she said.

Moral: write it down.



Difficult conversations are less so when you:

- **Think of the desired response that you want, then deliver your message to get that response.**
- **Try to lessen the threat of the situation by:**
 - **choosing the environment carefully**
 - **using a soft entry**
 - **being direct, personable, tactful, and factual**
 - **letting the listener talk**
 - **telling the listener how to be successful**

Difficult Conversations



**A difficult conversation
can make the difference between
success and failure
for a valued employee.**

**Care enough to hold
the difficult conversation.**

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Specialist

MA, SPHR-CA, CPLP, CPC, SHRM-SCP

rpaggi@worklogichr.com

661.695.5168