

Having difficult
conversations

Difficult Conversations

Difficult conversations make most of us anxious and uncomfortable.

Irritation, distress, or even rage for another can often be pervasive. Sometimes, it is accompanied by a lot of self-doubt; something like... "am I not just being overly sensitive?" or "if others can put up with it, shouldn't I do too?"

Others handle tricky conversations instantly, almost impulsively, being straight-forward, and possibly even brutal – and afterwards, they wish they did not say or do the things they did.

Whatever your style may be – difficult conversations are stressful because it contains so much emotion. Therefore, most of us try to avoid such conversations.

When a difficult conversation is necessary, try to remember the following principles:

- Make sure you are emotionally calm before and during the conversation. When we are emotionally charged, we may easily say unnecessary things... and of course it is contagious, the other person retaliates.
- Be prepared about what you want to say: be honest, factual, logical, focused, and calm. Stick to the point. Pay attention to your body language. Do not blame, be oversensitive, try to read between the lines, elicit feelings of guilt, or use any form of emotional manipulation.
- It sometimes helps to start such a conversation with a statement like: "Will you please allow me to discuss a difficult matter with you?" or "Will you please listen to me without judging or interrupting me?" or "Come and sit here with me. I have something difficult to discuss with you".
- Throughout, try to also hear and understand the other person's view without judging and with respect.
- Acknowledge your own contribution to the problem.
- Look for points or principles that you both agree on, or how you can help/support the person, and then focus on the road ahead.

Do not waste your time on difficult conversations. Keep your life light and comfortable around these conversations.

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Arguments and conflict often continue for months on end. Each party feels strongly about their own viewpoints. We are not always good at listening; or talking and listening. We often talk about how we were affronted by others. We speak louder and angrier, become sarcastic, shout or dominate, ignore each other, and so on. One or both parties feel lost and mistreated. Stop controlling the conversation with "you said – I said" and trying to be right.

Difficult conversations are never easy. Whether we bottle it up for a long time, or deal with it impulsively and aggressively, both chafe away at our emotional reserves. Work on a solution, sort it out. It is essential for your own resilience and the resilience of your team.

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