

# TIPS FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

There are many reasons why we get angry or upset with other people. However, an inappropriate reaction can result in long-term consequences to a working relationship or to your reputation. Once careless words are released, they cannot be retracted.

Have you ever wished we could go back in time and redo at least one conversation? Fortunately, time and wisdom have taught me some valuable lessons about how to engage with others more peacefully. From my human resources and coaching research, I have found the following four steps will improve a person's ability to communicate with integrity - even with difficult people.

## Stay Calm

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If you anticipate a difficult meeting, take a few minutes to calm yourself in advance. This technique is called centering and it does exactly what it says—it helps you find your center and focus, so that you can be in a resourceful frame of mind.

One of the simplest ways to stay calm is to practice abdominal breathing; it is as simple as spending a few minutes paying attention to your breath. I recommend abdominal breathing because it helps you get more oxygen into your body, gives you something to focus on and slows your heart and breathing rates. This in turn helps you to be calmer and more focused during your meeting. Although it takes a bit of practice in the beginning, it will soon feel natural and effortless.

### Abdominal Breathing

- Sit up tall with one hand on your navel, the other on your knee
- Relax your belly and close your eyes
- Inhale deeply through your nose and exhale out through your mouth
- Relax your belly even more
- Breathe deeply without forcing the breath
- Continue for a few minutes

When you get good at abdominal breathing, you can use the technique at any time to calm yourself down and improve your focus. If this technique does not work you may need to try another activity. Perhaps a short walk around the building or outside, even running up and down a flight of stairs can help release emotions. Another option is to talk with a coach or a person trained to help you get clear on what you need to say, and how to say it, in the most productive manner.

## Slow the Conversation Down

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After being caught off-guard, we notice that we are speaking without considering the consequences. Usually you may find yourself talking too fast, not thinking clearly and losing focus. If you find yourself in this situation, start to slow things down as soon as possible. Name what has just happened and take a moment to breathe and re-center.

### You could say:

“You have caught me by surprise. Can we take a moment to calm down and start from a fresh perspective?”

**OR**

“Let's keep the language professional. Maybe we should take a short break and calm down before we proceed.”

**OR**

When you need more than a moment. “Can we stop the discussion now and meet again later today or tomorrow after I have thought about what you said?”

## Consider the Other Person's Perspective

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When taking another person's perspective, you imagine what life is like from the other person's point of view. Pretend you are standing in their shoes, looking back at yourself. It helps you gain valuable insights into how the other person sees their world.

Taking the other person's perspective is especially useful in situations in which you feel frustrated or have run out of options. It can help you understand the underlying issues better and be more compassionate in your approach.

Before responding, take a moment to visualise yourself and the situation, through the eyes of the other person. **Then ask yourself:**

- How does the other person perceive me or the situation?
- What is important to the other person?
- What does this person need specifically?
- What is driving this person to behave in this manner?

## Consider the Long-Term Outcome

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Every discussion you have with the other person sets the stage for any type of relationship. Be sure to engage in a manner that builds the relationship rather than trying to be right, disrespectful or competitive. When considering the working relationship, focus on achieving a mutually agreeable outcome. This could mean having another conversation with a third-party, writing out some notes and considering their point of view in an unbiased manner.

Finally, always remember that relationships are built one conversation at a time. Make choices that build the kind of relationship and long-term outcome you want in the future.

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