DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Maneuvering through the Maze

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It is fear that paralyzes us when faced with conflict and begs us to avoid difficult conversations.

~ Karen Adkins
“A discussion between two or more people where (1) stakes are high, (2) opinions vary, and (3) emotions run strong.”

~ Crucial Conversations, Tools for Talking when Stakes are High by Patterson, Greeny, McMillan, & Switzler
difficult conversations are almost never about getting the facts right. They are about conflicting perceptions, interpretations, and values.

~ Douglas Stone
>2,500 organizations in 90 countries

Message is clear:
- Companies are struggling to engage our modern, 21st century workforce

2/3 of today’s employees feel overwhelmed

Work-life balance has been lost
- Rapid increase in technology
- Breakdown in barriers between work and life

>80,000 adults, aged 18 and older

31.5% of U.S. employees are actively engaged at work

51% are not engaged

17.5% are so disengaged they are likely to spread negativity to others

Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends Study

Gallup Poll
Today’s Employees

- Owners
  - Time
  - Energy
  - Expertise

- Investors
  - Individuals
  - Ideals
  - Goals...in which they believe

- Give them something to believe in by making every conversation as real as possible
“We need to understand what the people involved are thinking and feeling but not saying to each other...this is usually where the real action is.”

~ Douglas Stone
STRUCTURE OF A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

1. The “What Happened?” Conversation
   - Disagreement
   - Perceived inequalities
   - Conflicting perceptions

2. The Feelings Conversation
   - Are my feelings valid?
   - Should I be hurt or angry?
   - Did I hurt or anger my colleague/boss?

3. The Identity Conversation
   - Internal debate with oneself
   - What does the situation mean to us?
“Often we go through an entire conversation - or indeed an entire relationship - without ever realizing that each of us is paying attention to different things, that our views are based on different information.”

~ Douglas Stone
Reframe Your Mindset

- Avoid labeling the conversation
- Remain calm
- Collect your thoughts
- Enter the conversation in a supportive “coaching” manner
Reframe Your Mindset

- Ask questions that foster open dialogue
- Be mindful of your tone
- Avoid reactionary behavior by planning
“reality has an irritating habit of shifting at work and at home, seriously complicating our favorite fantasies.”

~ Susan Scott
PLAN...DON’T SCRIPT

- Careful conversation is a failed conversation
  - Inhibited
  - Lacks Intimacy

- Flexible conversation with many possible responses

- Language:
  - Simple
  - Clear
  - Direct
  - Neutral
Planning prior to engaging in a difficult conversation will increase your chances of a successful outcome.
BE PREPARED!

- Plan prior to engaging
- Be clear and concise about the issue
- Find a neutral location
- Invite a HR representative or another manager to witness the conversation
“listen like every sentence matters, talk like every word counts, and act like every interaction is important.”

~ Geoffrey Tumlin
HAVING A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

- Find your focus
- Acknowledge others' perspective
- Give back
ARE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GETTING THE FACTS RIGHT?

“the quest to determine who is right and who is wrong is a dead end.”

~ Douglas Stone
KEEPING RELATIONSHIPS

- Be compassionate and show empathy
- Don’t play the victim
- Know that you have rights
- Reminders to keep relationships
- Complete the conversation
“at the very moment when most people become furious, we need to become curious.”

~ Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler
Emotional Intelligence

- Address unwanted behaviors
- Attempt to restore order
- Failure to maintain Emotional Intelligence
CONVERSATIONS GONE BAD

- Swearing and/or aggressive behaviors
- End the meeting
- Reflect and learn
Nothing is more dangerous than an idea, when it’s the only one you have.

~ Emile Chartier
Seeking Reality

- Identify the Issue
- Invite questions
- Check for agreement
- Avoid laying blame
“It's ok to have strong opinions. The problem comes when we try to express them.”

~ Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler
COMMON MISTAKES

- Avoiding the conversation
- Assigning negative labels
- Lack of preparation
- Failure to maintain Emotional Intelligence
COMMON MISTAKES

- Listening to reply
- Delivering message by email or social media
- Forgetting to use silence for heavy lifting
We don’t care where the ball lands, as long as it doesn’t land on us.”

~ Douglas Stone
IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- Observe others succeed
- Be empathetic
- Focus on success vs. failures
- Understand perception differences
Enhance your listening

Ask open ended questions

Train others to handle difficult conversations
“Identify the conversations out there with your name on them and resolve to have them with all the courage, grace, and vulnerability they require.”

~ Susan Scott
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RESOURCES

- How to Handle Difficult Conversations at Work, by Rebecca Knight
- We Have to Talk: A Step-By-Step Checklist for Difficult Conversations, by Judy Ringer
- Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most, by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, & Sheila Heen
- The Top 6 Mistakes Managers Make When Having Difficult Conversations, by Lisa Evans
- 12 Tips for Handling Difficult Conversations, by Bruna Martinuzzi
- 9 Crucial Rules to Remember When Having Difficult Conversations with Employees, by Colleen Giallorenzo
- Fierce Conversations, by Susan Scott
- Stop Talking, Start Communicating by Geoffrey Tumlin
- Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2014 by Jeff Schwartz, Josh Bersin & Bill Pelster
- Gallup Research: Majority of U.S. Employees Not Engaged Despite Gains in 2014 by Amy Adkins