

Xcellence Program Session 10

Managing Difficult Conversations.



Learning Outcomes



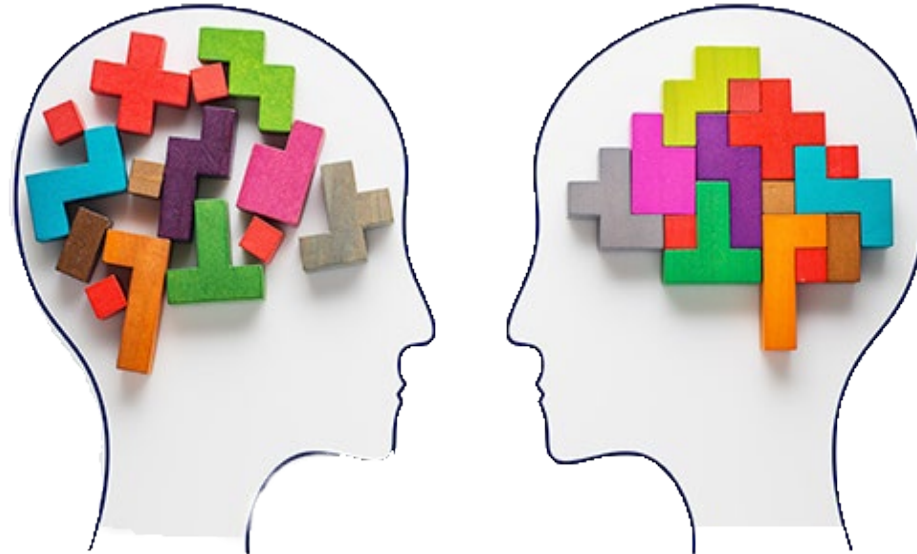
- Approach difficult conversations with more confidence
- Demonstrate empathy through active listening and effective questioning skills
- Confront difficult issues directly while maintaining relationships
- Identify personal signs of stress and use techniques to maintain calm during difficult conversations
- Demonstrate focus on a 'win-win' attitude when dealing with sensitive issues

How would you define/describe a difficult conversation?



What is a Difficult Conversation?

High Risk



Strong Emotions



Variable or Opposing Opinions



Difficult Conversation Continuum

Difficult



Crucial

Skills Practice - Difficult Conversations

The Scenario has a Deliverer, Receiver & Observer



The Deliverer

- Select one of the scenarios sent via email. There are six all up. Enough to go around! Alternatively, select one from your experience.

The Receiver

- You are the person receiving this feedback.
- You can get into 'character' and be accepting, resisting or adversarial or something else.

The Observer

- Using the Difficult Conversation Checklist, see if you can capture the actions / behaviours of both the Deliverer and the Receiver.
- Please be willing to share your observation with both individuals.



Skills Practice (60 min)

Guestimate Timing
4 mins - Think time
8 mins - Discussion
8 mins - Feedback
Switch
Suggestion Appoint a
Timekeeper

Instructions

- 2 people role play – Deliverer and Receiver
 - The Deliverer is the person conducting and leads the difficult conversation.
- 1 person will be the Observer
 - At the end of the discussion, using the check list to help provide feedback, the observer will provide feedback to both the Deliverer and Receiver

OR

- If there are 4 of you in a group, the observers role can be split (one person observing the Deliverer & one person observing the Receiver)

Please note: Although I have sent you some scenarios you may select a scenario that is from your experience!

Difficult Conversation Check List

1. Attitude (Sincere / Enthusiastic)
2. Voice (pace, tone, pitch, pauses)
3. Paying attention (actively listening, how were the non-verbals?)
4. Withhold judgement (open to ideas and not be fixed in approach?)
5. Reflect (engage comment and paraphrase)
6. Clarify (willing to clarify and paraphrase any issue that's ambiguous or unclear?)
7. Summarize (playback - confirm your understanding)
8. Share (did the conversation reach a point where thoughts & feelings were shared, and it became about solutions?)
9. Feedback on the overall conversation?



Skills Practice Discussion



Seven Principles of Difficult Conversations



1. Question the reality of the situation
2. Have a conversation based on evidence
3. Be present and focused.
4. Deal with the toughest challenge today or asap.
5. Listen to your instincts and seek to validate
6. Take responsibility for your emotional wake
7. Use the power of silence.

Break





What factors would you consider when creating an environment for a difficult conversation?

Environment for Difficult Conversations

Timing

- Choose a time when the receiver will be most receptive
- Choose a time when you are at your best, not rushed, and feeling confident
- Ensure plenty of time for discussion so that your session isn't rushed or interrupted



Environment for Difficult Conversations

Preparedness

- Set the appropriate frame of reference
- Be focused and well prepared
- If necessary, ask permission to give hard feedback Control your own emotions
- Be specific - behavioural observations
 - not *personal* judgements
- Come straight to the point – don't waffle
 - Slight digressions may occur
- Give positive information first
- Offer support and encouragement



Environment for Difficult Conversations



Location

- Choose a public or private setting – you can use this to control the other's response
- Your space / their space / neutral space
- Control seating arrangements.
 - Choose to sit opposite, side by side, or in a corner position. Each position has advantages and disadvantages

Online

- Cameras ON
- Private i.e. not an open office

Environment for Difficult Conversations

Set the Agenda

- Be clear about the issues

Prepare! Prepare! Prepare!

- Have all the facts at your disposal
- Match the process to suit the recipient
 - E.g. Extrovert vs Introvert
- Be specific, with a behavioural focus
- Explain the purpose and come to the point – don't waffle or go off track from the agenda you've set
- Describe consequences (+ive & -ive)



Your Mindset for Difficult Conversations

A Positive or Growth Mindset may appear as:

- Relaxed
- Open
- Flexible
- Friendly
- Asking
- Listening
- Collaborative
- Questioning



A Negative or Fixed Mindset may appear as:

- Tense
- Closed
- Rigid
- Aggressive
- Telling
- Ignoring
- Coercive
- Dictating



Managing Your Self Talk

By taking more control of our self-talk we naturally become more aware of what to avoid.

5 Self-Talk Derailers

- The inner critic
- Analysis paralysis & procrastination
- Labelling yourself and others – suspend any judgement to focus on the facts.
- Lack of confidence
- Catastrophising



3 Step Approach – the rule of 3



1st Approach
Collaborative

When would you use this approach?

The first time you address the issue.

What does this sound like?

"Tell me more about that..."
"That has potential to..."
"How do you think it would impact ...?"
"Help me understand...?"
– *Playback Understanding*



2nd Approach
Revisiting

When more information is required, or you observe no, or little change from the 1st Collaborative Conversation

"I want to touch base with you about xxx, I may not have communicated clearly about the expectations of the project...."
"I think we need to revisit our previous conversation about...."
"As I mentioned before..."
– *Playback Understanding*



3rd Approach
Directive

When there is no change in behaviour to the 1st and 2nd conversation has been ignored and a more direct approach is required.

"I have been reflecting on our previous conversations about this it seems as if.... "
"Unfortunately, I have not seen any change about XXXX, can you help me understand why that is so?"
"Moving forward I expect the reports be completed on time."
– *Playback Understanding*



Some Reactions - 4D's

- **Denial:** The other person rejects the information you're putting forward, claims it is untrue, or completely shuts down.
- **Deflection:** The other person changes the subject. "I can't believe you're telling me this. I can name three other people who are doing far worse things. And we have crummy computers. And no one every told me this before."
- **Disruption:** The other person shouts, swears, sobs, storms out — or all the above.
- **Dumping on the boss:** The other person declares it is your fault and tries to steer the conversation into criticism of you or the organization





Difficult Conversations: When do you Challenge?

When to Challenge?

When an individual is not taking any responsibility for a problem.

Suggested Questions

- “What is your role in the process?” OR “What role do you think you *played* in the process”
- “What did you do to influence the situation?”
OR “How might you have influenced the situation?”



When nothing is changing

Suggested approach

- “I think we covered this before. Do you agree with that?” So where do you think should we go from here?
- “Nothing has changed since we last spoke. Help me to understand what you think has changed?”

When a situation is being distorted.

Continuation

- “I appreciate that you see things this way, and many see it as”



When a person needs to consider the consequences of their behaviour.

Suggested Questions

- “What do you think will be the outcome if this situation continues?”
 - This encourages the person to see “no change/action” is a choice.

Continuation

- “If you don’t do anything about this, it may well be that...”



The Rule Of Open Questions

To gather more information

- “How did you feel about that?”
- “What if you tried”
- “I’m curious about...”

To allow the deliverer to decide on conversation direction.

- “What do you think is the best way to move forward?”
- “Where do you think we should go from here?” to be non-threatening.



The Rule Of Closed Questions

To close a conversation

- “Are you clear about what needs to happen?”
- “Can you play back to me your understanding of what needs to happen?”
 - The What x When

To pin a person down

- “Did you know that work was due on Monday?”

To direct a conversation

- “Will you have time to complete this on time?”



Reviewing a Difficult Conversation...

- How have you been going since last we met?
- What would you do, if it were possible, to change the situation?
- What topic are you hoping I won't bring up?
- What do you wish you had more time to do?
- Don't forget to acknowledge any improvements however, if behaviour is still not where it needs to be, stay on point!



Overcoming Conversation Power Plays

Repeat

- Repeat yourself.
 - Yes, the first step is to repeat the words that were ignored before.

And I just said...

- Answer whatever they have said, briefly. Then immediately say,
 - "And I just said..." and repeat yourself again.

Feedback

- Feedback what they have just said using these words,
 - "I understand that you (want, believe, intend) to (repeat his point). What I don't understand is how that relates to" Now repeat your original point again.

words
have
power



Overcoming Conversation Power Plays

Up the pressure

- Up the pressure again by commenting on the conversation,
 - "We have had this conversation 3 times, yet you are acting as if you have not heard me at all."

Choose according to objective

- **Get cooperation** - "I need your view (or response to what I told you) in order to help you accomplish (a mutual objective)."
- **Defuse the situation** - de-escalate the power struggle, you can assume the blame for the uncomfortable conversation.
 - "I'm sorry, I must not have communicated clearly about...however" Repeat your expectations & What X When

words
have
power



References and Recommended Reading

Books

- Difficult Conversations - *Bruce Patton, Douglas Stone, and Sheila Heen*
- Crucial Conversations - Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High – *Kerry Patterson, Al Switzler, Joseph Grenny, and Ron McMillan*
- Fierce Conversations – *Susan Scott*
- Coach Yourself: *Anthony Grant and Jane Greene*
- Solutions Focused Coaching: *Anthony Grant*

Wrap for Session 10

Next, Session 10 – Managing Performance

