

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

TEAMSKILLS



Domino's

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Objectives

By completing this workbook you will be able to:

- ✦ Prepare for difficult conversations
- ✦ Conduct a difficult conversation with confidence
- ✦ Take steps to resolve issues you are faced with

INTRODUCTION

As a manager you will often find you need to have difficult conversations. Sometimes these can lead to us feeling:

- ✦ Nervous
- ✦ Anxious
- ✦ Unsure

The ability to be able to have a conversation about very sensitive and emotive issues is an integral part of effective management and critical to managing your team's performance.

Can you think of an example of a “Difficult Conversation” a manager may have?

Write examples below:



The key to mastering this type of situation at work is keeping calm and staying in control. This workbook will help you manage:

- 1** The situations; by creating clear boundaries
- 2** Your emotions; by giving you the confidence to face arising issues
- 3** The actions you plan to take

Many managers go into a difficult conversation with good intentions but often make the mistake of prolonging or intensifying the problem rather than resolving it.

IT'S DIFFICULT, BUT WHY?

Talking face to face with a team member about issues where there are strong feelings on both sides may require you to step out of your comfort zone. You may be worried the meeting will turn into a confrontation or that it will not go as planned.

Managers often feel anxious about these challenging situations. This may be due to not feeling in control of:

- ✦ The facts; what happened, when and why. It's not enough to breeze into a meeting without firm facts
- ✦ Your emotions
- ✦ The team member's emotions

Many managers feel the nature of a challenging conversation forces them to act out of character. Perhaps appearing stricter than in normal day to day interactions.



THE KEY IS TO PREPARE

DEALING WITH ISSUES

If you are dealing with a performance or conduct issue, you need to have the relevant facts at your fingertips.

What are the employee's performance targets and in what way have they failed to meet these targets?

Are there any mitigating circumstances – for example, if they have been absent due to sickness or training courses, do you need to adjust the targets?



Is there is an attendance issue? Make sure you have an accurate record of the employee's timekeeping. If you made a note of them coming in late on several occasions but didn't say anything, why not?

Ideally, if you have been giving regular feedback, there should not be any surprises in store for the employee at the meeting. Of course, there are exceptions. If you need to talk to an employee about a sensitive personal matter, they may be shocked.

You should consider what impact the issue is having on the team and be able to back up any statements you make with evidence rather than hearsay.

It may also be worth thinking about what you know about the individual. This will help you anticipate how they may react. A pre-prepared script can help you keep on track and in control of the meeting. It's a bit like planning a few moves ahead in a game of chess.

BE PREPARED

Preparation is key. It doesn't necessarily remove the sensitivity or tension from what you have to say but it does help you to give your message in a clear and constructive way.

Here are some useful questions to ask yourself when preparing to have a difficult conversation:

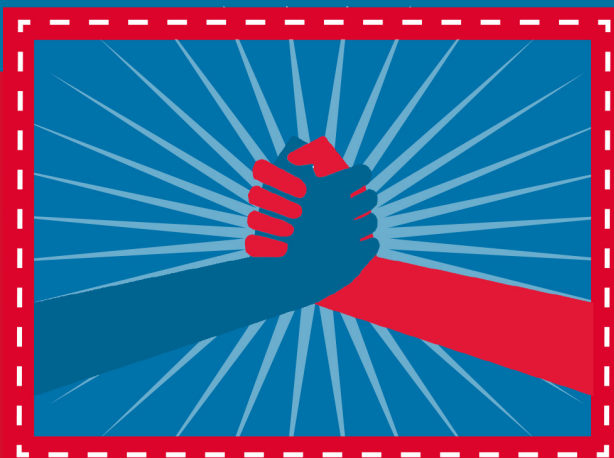
Clarifying the issue:

- What happened, or didn't happen?
- Where did you get your information?
- What is the impact of the issue on you or on other team members?
- What do you think the other person might have intended through their actions?
- Are you making assumptions about the other person's intentions?
- What has your contribution been to the situation?

Clarify your emotions then try and step back from them:

- What are you feeling about the issue/situation? Why?
- What are the consequences of the situation? For others?
- Are things in perspective or is the situation being blown up out of proportion?
- How do you think the other party feels?

- What is the purpose of the difficult conversation?
- What do you hope to achieve by having this conversation?
- Is this the best way to address the issue?
- Can you affect the issue by changing your point of view?
- If you don't address the issue, what will happen? Will you be able to let go?
- Do you just want your opinion to be heard and to say how you feel?
- Plan the conversation:
- What are your opening words? How are you going to introduce the conversation?
- What is the key point(s) you want to make?
- Have you got some examples to support your input?
- How will you describe what you feel about the issue and why it is important?
- How will you describe your desire to resolve the issue and invite the other person to work with you?
- How will you use your body language to help ensure a constructive meeting?



USING QUESTIONS

Using questioning effectively can help you manage a difficult conversation. By asking the correct questions you can gather relevant information to help you adequately understand the situation.

Development of this skill requires time and practice. It is worth being familiar with the following types of questions:

| Type of question | Example | Benefits | Drawbacks |
|------------------------|--|--|--|
| Open | Why did you leave? To what extent would you say..? How do you feel about..? Open questions usually start with: Who, what, where, when or how. | These encourage the other person to talk freely, as no restriction is placed on their answer. They enable people to 'open up' on any topic, opinions or feelings. | The team member may talk too much, drift away from the subject and start to control the conversation. To avoid this, try using a qualifier. For example, 'Very briefly, tell me how you..' or 'In a few words...' |
| Closed | What time did it happen? How long did it take? Did you speak first? | These questions can be effective in verifying specific information, refocusing on the subject in hand or emphasising a vital point. | They can be very unhelpful when dealing with feelings. For example, 'Did that make you feel bad?' may not illicit the depth of response you were hoping for. |
| Probing/ reflective | Why did you say that? What, in particular, made you feel like that? Are you telling me that..? | Useful in seeking depth and detail. | The team member may feel threatened. Attention must be given to anticipating and monitoring the feelings of the team member. |
| Leading | You're not suggesting that ? You must admit that ..? | These questions should be avoided | You run the risk of putting words in someone's mouth and leading them towards your own conclusions. |

When deciding which questioning technique to use

- ✦ At the start of the discussion it is usually best to ask open questions
- ✦ You might then follow up with probing questions, with information verified using closed questions where necessary

EFFORT DISTRESS INTERVENTION

Activity

Think about how you would prepare for these two situations/conversations and make notes below:

Kerry is telling everyone you didn't promote her because you don't like her.



Jim was quiet, and not his normal self.



STARTING A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

Remember; a constructive outcome is more likely if there is structure to a discussion

The opening

- ✦ Describe the issue, situation and/or behaviour as you see it
- ✦ Give specific examples to demonstrate what you mean
- ✦ Describe how it makes you feel
- ✦ Say why it is important to resolve the issue/situation
- ✦ Identify your contribution to the problem
- ✦ Indicate your desire to resolve the issue/situation

Sometimes it is hard to know how to begin what you think will be a difficult conversation; your opening words are critical in setting the tone.

Here are some simple top tips!

“I have something I’d like to discuss with you that I think will help us work together more effectively.”

“I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes to talk?”

“I need your help with something. Can we talk about it?”

“I’d like to talk to you about and get your point of view”

The middle

- ✦ Invite the other party to share their view, emotions and perceptions
- ✦ Listen carefully and check for full understanding – don’t be satisfied by superficial responses
- ✦ Ask questions and acknowledge feelings
- ✦ Keep the conversation on track



The resolution

- ⚡ Develop options that reflect both your most important concerns and interests
- ⚡ Identify what is needed for both of you to be satisfied
- ⚡ Check if there is anything left unsaid that needs saying
- ⚡ Summarise your understanding of the outcomes and ask the other party to do the same
- ⚡ Be clear about any future communication
- ⚡ Be clear about how you are going to move forward, given the outcomes you have chosen

Remember to note the facts of a conversation in a diary or note book in case you should need to refer to it again.

NOTES



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