



Difficult Conversations: 10 Mistakes to Avoid

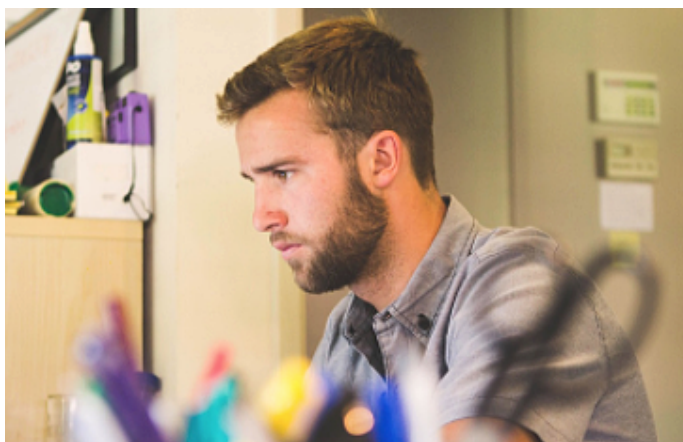


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HELPING SHAPE THE FUTURE THROUGH HR SOLUTIONS

What comes to mind when you hear the phrase 'difficult conversation'?

Something just popped into your head, whether it be a tough talk with an employee, an awkward encounter with a colleague or an intimidating chat with your boss. Difficult conversations come in all shapes and sizes, but that feeling of anticipation, anxiety or intimidation beforehand is common for a lot of people.



This fear or anxiety, derived from thoughts like, 'this won't change anything', 'what will they think of me?' or 'I don't want to hurt their feelings' although perfectly normal, can cause people to take a hurtful or unproductive approach to difficult conversations. This in turn leads to conflict, tension or even confusion when a resolution or understanding isn't met.

Heading into a difficult conversation with a clear head, an understanding of the key points you want to discuss and some basic tough talk tactics can make all the difference. In this ebook we're going to outline the 10 common mistakes people make during difficult conversations so you can avoid them in the future!

These tips can help you communicate better as a leader and become a more confident employee, but they can also improve your relationships outside of the workplace.



MISTAKE #1: Letting it Fester

There are many things that can make a conversation difficult:

- Topics you don't want to talk about
- Situations where you're not sure what to say
- Conflicting opinions
- Circumstances where the outcome is uncertain
- Discussions which make you feel uncomfortable

Some people tend to avoid difficult conversations because they're uncomfortable or afraid of them. The short term gain of 'keeping the peace' by avoiding these issues brings with it long term negative effects such as stress, anxiety and distractions that can cost a business thousands of dollars every year.

We all know the best way to handle an issue is to deal with it before it festers. Honest and upfront conversations are especially critical for managers, and if approached correctly they can resolve workplace conflict quickly and effectively, lift employee performance and improve relationships within your team.



MISTAKE #2: Difficult Conversation Smorgasbords

Due to the reptilian parts of the human brain, the very mention of the word FEEDBACK creates a threat response and according to Gallop, 32% of employees have to wait at least 3 months before receiving any!

Leaving too much time in between difficult conversations allows for fear and anxiety to build up and out of control. Take a 'tapas' view of difficult conversations, meaning turn them into smaller, bite sized morsels that are easier to digest rather than saving them up for a heart attack inducing smorgasbord!

The more sensitive the conversation the more likely it is that you need multiple conversations. This approach is well worth the results, as letting your people know that they matter enough to receive regular feedback about their performance and behaviour also builds confidence, trust and speeds up improvement.



MISTAKE #3: Expecting Perfection

Leaders make the mistake of thinking that they have to execute difficult conversations perfectly. This leads to many important messages left unsaid, poor behaviour, underperformance accepted and resentment growing within a team.

Remember, when you have an imperfect conversation you learn something. When you avoid it you learn nothing. Preparation is the cornerstone of approaching difficult conversations with confidence which is where Shape HR can help. We have over a decades experience executing life changing conversations in the workplace.

MISTAKE #4: Lack of Accountability

Accountability is especially important for the leaders within a workplace. Leaders who blame others when things go wrong, and take credit for things that succeed which others work hard for will not produce sustainable results and will set you up for poor conversations from the outset.



People simply won't connect with a leader who doesn't risk vulnerability. It's on you to take the brave step of expressing when you don't know the answer, when you are struggling with the workload or when someone has a better idea than you.

Being transparent about your fears, hopes and ambitions will strengthen your relationships with your employees and co-workers and will make those difficult conversations more approachable.



MISTAKE #5: Lack of Integrity

Much like accountability, integrity is a key value leaders need to demonstrate to connect well with their team. Employees look up to their leaders, so if that leader displays unethical behaviour, it won't take long before those working under them lose respect.

Many mistakes made in difficult conversation originate from not doing the groundwork and building respectful connections with coworkers and employees in the first place. Humility and respect are at the core of handling difficult conversations well, so ask yourself are you showing integrity within your workplace?

MISTAKE #6: Forgetting the Difference Between 'Nice' and 'Kind'

Did you know that being nice and being kind are two different things? Being nice is the things you say and do to be liked by others. Being kind is doing and saying things that speak your truth to make situations and people ultimately better. Ask yourself which one you are being right now!

Showing kindness will help you form a strong foundation for your working relationships, which means you'll have a greater degree of honesty and trust. This will help others be more receptive to tough conversations, bounce back from disagreement and be more likely to speak up when there's an issue.

MISTAKE #7: The Feedback Sandwich



Contrary to popular myth, the old feedback sandwich is not the way to deliver meaningful and effective feedback. If you're unfamiliar with this concept, the feedback sandwich is when one says something positive (top bun), includes something negative or constructive (the patty) and then closes with something positive (bottom bun).

The feedback sandwich has gone 'off'! People will know what you are up to and anxiously wait for the constructive part, or the patty, of the conversation. Instead of using trickery, start with the truth and use empathy to try and anticipate reactions.

MISTAKE #8: Letting Your Emotions Rule

Don't overestimate your communication skills! No matter how prepared you think you are for a conversation, without professional training and experience it is quite difficult to keep your emotions under control during tough conversations.




Sometimes people become emotionally charged and say things they don't mean to say, especially when they are feeling anxious, scared or when their feelings are hurt. When this happens it's essential to take an intentional pause, recognise that their reaction is 'in the moment' and think about what you want to say before responding.

MISTAKE #10: Diving in Without a Plan

When it comes to difficult conversations, 'winging it' is definitely not an appropriate tactic. Having a consistent model for how feedback is delivered that you can share with staff makes it predictable and safe.

Preparation is key to handling difficult situations, and thinking through the situation from both perspectives can lead to more positive, productive conversations and better outcomes.



A blurred background image showing several people in an office environment. In the foreground, a person with dark hair is looking down. To the right, a person with long brown hair is visible. The background is out of focus, showing other office workers and equipment.

Up to 70% of employees are avoiding difficult conversations at work, causing anxiety, stress and ultimately staff turnover.

Stop losing your top performers and relieve the stress associated with difficult conversations with help from Shape HR experts. When you know how to prepare and handle difficult conversations, you can expect better outcomes and even better relationships with those you're talking to. With practise, advice and solid framework, difficult conversations can happen naturally!

Learn more about how Shape HR can help shape difficult conversations (and your business!) for success by calling 0449 777 817 or by visiting our website:
<https://shapehr.com.au/>