

How to Say Hard Things

STEP 1: Prepare for the conversation

Gain clarity and manage emotions

- Separate what happened (the facts) from how you **feel** about the situation and the **assumptions** you are making about **why** it happened.
- Clarify your motives for this conversation. What do you want to change or improve as a result?
- Develop questions you want to ask and additional information you need to gather during the conversation.
- Think about the impact this issue is having on the work, other people, the culture, the customers, the bottom line, etc.
- What expectations do you have going forward? What might happen if those expectations aren't met?
- Create your talking points based on this information.



STEP 2: Set the stage for the conversation

Keep an open mind and open dialogue

- Thank the person for joining you in this conversation.
- State the reason for the discussion and share the facts as you know them. **Pause** and see if the other person will take accountability on their own without having to go any further.
 - If they do not, continue with why this set of circumstances is concerning/frustrating (insert emotion word here) for you. In other words, your motive for wanting to have this conversation.
- **Pause** and see if the other person wants to respond or offer up additional information or share their own perspective.
 - If they do not, invite them into the conversation using questions like:
 - ✓ Can you help me understand what is going on? Why is this happening?
 - ✓ What am I missing?
 - ✓ Were you aware of this?

STEP 3: Engage with candor and compassion

Maintain focus and set expectations

- Allow time for processing and initial discomfort on the part of the other person. Don't rush things.
- If the person fails to see that the issue you are discussing is a problem, or they believe it to be someone else's problem, use these questions to gain accountability:
 - What do you gain from this behavior? What benefit do you receive from doing/saying _____?
 - What is the decision costing you? What do you lose when you _____?
 - What can you do to resolve this issue? How can you prevent this from happening again?
- **Pause** and let them respond to each question you ask. Don't be afraid to repeat or rephrase the questions to get a response.
 - If they share information that is impacting their behavior, consider opportunities for support or flexibility.
 - If needed, share the answers to these questions from your perspective.

STEP 4: Wrap it up

Bring the conversation to a close

- Reiterate any agreed upon understandings.
- State your expectations for what you would like to see in the future.
- Share potential consequences if a situation like this happens again.
- Schedule a follow-up meeting at an appropriate time.
- Thank the person for having this conversation with you.
- Document the conversation if appropriate.

Adapted from Source: HRM Services. (n.d.). *How To Say Hard Things*. Retrieved June 5, 2024, from www.workwithhrm.com.