

CLEAR THE AIR:

8 TIPS FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

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Difficult conversations are, well, difficult. We don't like to have them with others. We don't like others to have them with us. Consequently, we aren't very good at them, because we avoid having them as much as possible.

However, many situations only get worse without having a conversation. **A lot of challenges can be avoided by sitting down and having a difficult conversation.** Take a deep breath and do it.

Try these tips to clear the air with a simple conversation:

1. Consider the other person's point of view. Before going to war with someone, take the time to see things from their perspective. They might have a valid issue that you haven't considered. It's not easy to do this, but those that deal with people effectively are good at it.

- **Consider what the other person knows and wants.** Sometimes, others don't have all the information that you do.

2. Identify the issue. What exactly is the problem? You might think your employee runs for the parking lot each night because they don't care. The real situation might be that they have to pick their children up from daycare by a certain time or pay a big fine.

- Be certain you know what the actual issue is before having a difficult conversation.

3. Identify the desired outcome. What is the goal of the conversation? Is it to end a relationship? Find middle ground? It's hard to achieve success if you don't even know what success looks like. Determine what you're trying to accomplish before you have the conversation.

4. Right place, right time. Most difficult conversations need to be done in private, and at a time when everyone involved has enough time to participate and process their thoughts.

5. Identify behavior but leave the person alone. Suppose you don't like the fact that your husband leaves his wet bath towel on the hardwood floor of the master bedroom.

- It would be appropriate to say, "Leaving your wet towel on the floor is causing damage and creating a tripping hazard. I would appreciate it if you would cease and desist."
- It wouldn't be appropriate to say, "Why are you such a lazy person? What's wrong with you?" This approach might feel good in the moment, but it always backfires.
- When you attack others, their natural instinct is to attack back. That's probably not your desired outcome.

6. Allow the other person to speak. Conversations require at least two people. You can't just drop a bomb and then head for your poker game. It's important that everyone has a chance to say what's on their mind.

7. Forgive. Difficult conversations often result in hurt feelings. **Forgiveness is part of the process of finding a pleasant place to land.** Holding a grudge only

creates additional pain. Forgiving another person can be incredibly challenging, but you'll feel a lot better.

8. Do something positive afterwards. Avoid just going back to your neutral corners afterwards. It creates an awkward situation. Go for a walk or go to a movie. Have some ice cream. Something to take the edge off.

Whom do you need to speak to? What would be solved by having that conversation? Difficult conversations are called difficult for a reason. They're not easy conversations to have. They make both parties feel uncomfortable.

However, the ability to communicate clearly and precisely is one of the advantages of being human. We have an obligation to use that ability. You can do it.