



eBook

Confronting Challenging Conversations



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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Common Challenging Conversations.....	4
Managing Expectations & Assertiveness.....	5
How to Communicate More Clearly.....	7
5 Tips for Having Challenging Conversations.....	8
Conclusion.....	10

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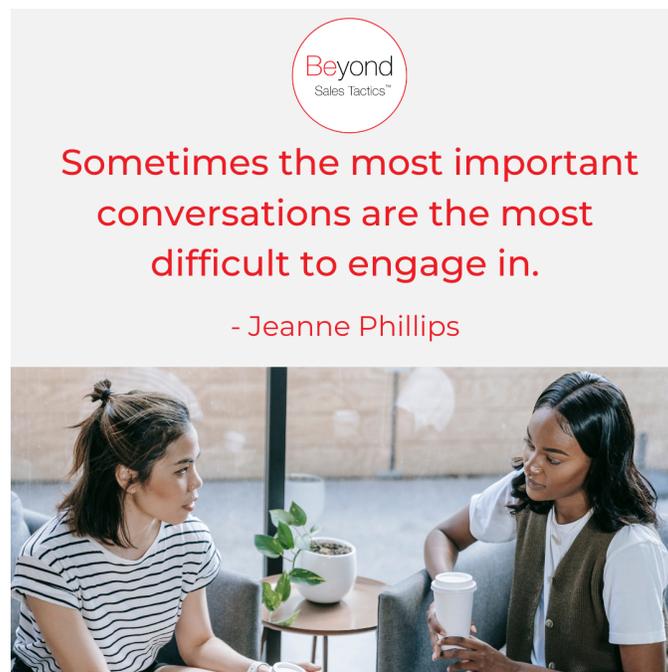
Introduction

Communication is the foundation of every aspect of life and every relationship you have...including the relationship you have with yourself. How well you get along with others personally, how successful you are in your professional life, it all hinges on how well you are able to communicate.

Conversations should have a purpose, even small talk which is useful for bonding or getting to know someone. When it comes to confronting a sticky or challenging conversation, proper, thoughtful communication is even more important.

In this eBook, we will discuss common challenging conversations and how to navigate them, expectations, and assertiveness tips (when appropriate), planning ahead for challenging conversations, and finally five tips to incorporate when having a prickly or challenging conversation.

As you read forward, let this quote inspire your perspective:



Common Challenging Conversations

Challenging conversations are common in professional environments, just ask any HR manager, boss, leader or supervisor. While these conversations can be wide ranging, there are topics that come up consistently that tend to have a little more tension surrounding them for the employee and/or the manager. Including:

- Employee performance improvement
- Promotion & compensation discussions
- Disciplinary conversations
- Communicating layoffs
- Giving negative feedback
- Admitting a big mistake
- Resolving conflict amongst co-workers– family and partners too

Do these sound familiar? Likely you have been involved in at least one of these types of discussions, perhaps on one or both sides.

Challenging conversations are a part of life, personally and professionally. Yes, they can be tough and easy to avoid, yet the better prepared you are to have these conversations the more successful they will likely be. If you are like many of my clients, workshop, and retreat participants, you tend to waste a lot of time and energy communicating when there is neither a clear purpose or outcome for the conversation nor plan to navigate it. Many of us begin with a high level idea and just start talking and hope for the best. Worse yet we speak with flaring emotions and speak in a way that we might later regret.

While it's helpful to have a plan of action no matter the type of conversation you are having, when the potential for strong emotions is elevated, having a clear, specific idea of what you would like to accomplish is crucial to the conversation's success.

Studying the art of challenging conversations will ensure that your discussions going forward, both positive and challenging, will go smoother and be more effective.

Managing Expectations & Assertiveness

Regardless which side of the table you are on during a prickly conversation, managing your expectations can be supportive. Not only does expectation management support you emotionally, it can also assist in resolving the matter quickly and effectively. Strive to go into any conversation with a neutral attitude of what the solution will be, yet have the preparedness to go in whatever direction is needed.

Assertiveness means that you are able to clearly express your thoughts and feelings without anger in an appropriate and honest way. Showing up prepared, clear, confident in your communication is key.

Here are some techniques that can help you both manage your expectations and ensure assertiveness when engaging in those challenging or potentially heated conversations.

Broken Record

This technique encourages you to persist in expressing what you want and how you feel without bringing anger and resentment into your tone of voice. The trick is to remain calm and express your wants clearly. Then, keep repeating your point without wavering unless you decide to agree to a compromise.

Fogging

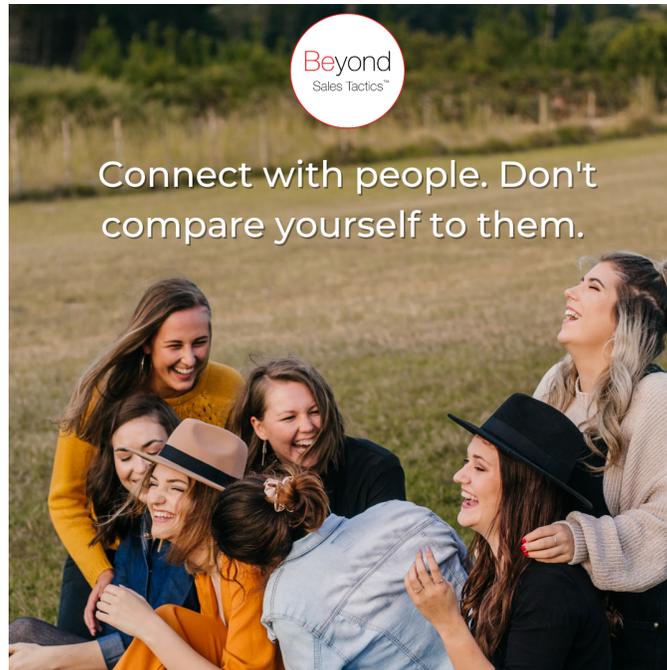
This is a technique which involves not responding in an anticipated manner. This method is one which gives a minimal response within a conversation, rather than being argumentative. When you're not expressing the desired effect with the person, he or she will tire of the conversation.

Handling Positive and Negative Comments

You may have trouble responding to compliments – or to respond to negative comments about you or something you've done. For positive comments, express your assertiveness by thanking the person and to negative criticism, express regret that the person feels that way and then ask what, in particular, do they have a problem with. Be curious to understand their point of view without necessarily agreeing with it.

As you continue to practice your assertiveness with others, you'll find that your communication skills will increase and you'll have less problems dealing with people. You may find methods of your own which work – such as not engaging a person in arguments or being able to walk away from a bullying situation calmly and without being upset.

Developing interpersonal skills is a self-confidence booster which can help you with day-to-day communication with those who are close to you and those you may need to deal with on a one-time basis.



How to Communicate More Clearly

Have you ever fallen out with someone over text message? Or watched a fight unfold in a Teams chat room because one person misread someone else's tone? Why does this happen? Well, the conversation was meant to happen in a different format.

In-Person Communication

If you're dealing with a highly emotional issue, then it should be addressed in person. If it's impossible to do so in-person, at least do so via video call. This goes for positive and negative emotions. If you're delivering great news then you want everyone to catch your positive energy.

As far as bad news or negative conversations go, it will be received better if you do the job in-person.

Email Facts

People often lose concentration when they are being given facts and figures verbally. If you're dealing with a finance issue, statistics, or otherwise, opt for emailing this information so the other person can easily look back on the numbers when necessary.

No Talking, Just Listen

This is applicable to in-person communication. Stop spending so much time doing all the talking and start listening. Unless you are the one who came to the table to start a conversation, give others the respect they're due when they are trying to communicate their ideas or feelings.

Simplicity

We live in a society of information overload so simplify your messages. You might use five sentences when you can probably say it with one. For those of us that can be described as verbose, simplicity is something to continue striving for.

5 Tips for Having Challenging Conversations

Tough conversations need to happen. While this is normal, how you handle these conversations will determine whether you come away from a particular discussion with a stronger working relationship. So it's important to confront rather than avoid conversations well.

How do you ensure you engage in the best conversation possible in these circumstances?

Start with Not Putting Off the Talk Longer than Necessary

Take time to count to ten or to take a few deep breaths before beginning. After all, starting with too much emotion will be more damaging than helpful. Once you're cooled down though, it's time to talk. Why is it better sooner rather than later? By putting things off, you tend to build up resentment and inflate the conflict. It's important to address situations before they get out of hand. A small problem today is much easier to solve than a giant one several weeks from now.

Drop the Good News / Bad News Approach

No one likes waiting for the other shoe to drop, so instead of giving the compliment with a 'but' lurking to negate everything you've just said, share the tough news first. If you're determined to add in the compliment, do so after the challenging part is out of the way, so you leave the person on a more positive note.

Plan Your Conversation

Rather than blindside your team member with an uncomfortable discussion, let them know you have something you want to talk about. Make it clear you're wanting to discuss something that affects your feelings, rather than starting out in attack mode. There's a vast difference between, "I'd like to talk to you sometime about your communication style" (which may evoke defensiveness) vs. "I'd like to talk to you about how your communication style makes me feel (which is taking ownership for how you feel)."

What Are Your Goals?

In any heavy conversation, strive to agree on common goals. Working toward the same end result will help you find your way through the conversation to that eventual space. And let's face it, there are times when the end result is agreeing to disagree.

Keep a Positive Spirit

Aim for optimism. Even if the conversation isn't going how you would like it to, finding something to hope for will soften the outcome regardless.

Challenging conversations are just that challenging. Having a plan in place will help you confront them with courage and grace. Use these steps to build the framework of your conversation, and even if the outcome is not desirable, getting there won't be as difficult as you think.



Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.



Conclusion

The best way to get more comfortable with challenging conversations is to have them. Sure, they can feel intimidating and uncomfortable, however with the guidance offered in this resource you are well on your way to successful conversations.

Beyond Sales Tactics



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- Speaking
- Coaching
- Consulting
- Training & Facilitation

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