

DIFFICULT CONVERSATION SIMULATION: 5-STEP FRAMEWORK

Leaders often have to engage in difficult conversations. While the specific topic of a difficult conversation may be a very challenging problem, your objective as a leader is to help the other person emerge from the conversation (or conversations) able to perform at a sustained higher level. There are five core practices in this model:

AFFIRM THE PERSON

- The foundation for receptivity to feedback, learning, and development is affirmation.
- Affirmation has been shown to generate high levels of energy, engagement and commitment.
- Examples of affirmations include specific observation and personal reactions. Individuals are more likely to believe the veracity of what they are hearing if they are faced with specific instances of where they have exhibited behavior.

CONFRONT THE FACTS

- Productive and authentic conversations can only happen when rooted in the realities of the day, no matter how harsh, and when the truth is sought out, no matter how difficult to hear.
- Besides confronting the person with helpful feedback, also seek to confront the other person with their own values, aspirations and potential.
- Good confrontations are given as gifts with good intentions.

EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES

- Help the other person find options. There is power in options. If they believe they have only one path forward, they often have a sense of powerlessness. Power comes from having options.
- Provide the other person with fresh eyes to see things they would not otherwise see.

ENCOURAGE THE CHANGE

- Remind the person that they are the architect of their own career and life, and have the capacity to learn and change.
- Offer support while insisting that the other person remain accountable for their own choices and future.

ADVANCE THE ACTION

- Without action or change of some sort, it has just been a nice conversation. Encourage the other person to take accountability for a change—an attitude, approach, behavior or habit.
- Often, we can be most effective when we help the other person identify and commit to the most potent first step towards their objective.
- Clear accountability to others and oneself fuels the effort required to create sustained change.

Instructions:

Using the above framework, ready yourself for an upcoming difficult conversation by jotting down specific answers to the following questions. After completing the exercise, you will be better prepared to engage in a difficult conversation.

1. AFFIRM the person

HOW WILL YOU: Treat the other person with dignity and respect? Show them that you care about them? Remind the other person of their unique strengths? See the best in them?

2. CONFRONT the facts

HOW WILL YOU: Make sure you provide the feedback that is necessary? Ask questions for clarification? Seek feedback from the other person?

3. EXPLORE the possibilities

HOW WILL YOU: Make sure you understand their point of view? Help the other person gain a fresh perspective? Seek to partner on possible solutions?

4. ENCOURAGE the change

HOW WILL YOU: Express confidence in the other person? Stay positive about the future? Help the other person excel? Promote ongoing improvement or development?

5. ADVANCE the action

HOW WILL YOU: Challenge the other person to take responsibility for their development and improvement? Hold them accountable? Facilitate action planning?