

Keys to Challenging Conversations

Navigating Difficult Dialogue with Clarity and Care

The Cost of Avoidance

"

Think of a conversation you've been
avoiding.

"

What is the cost of *not* having it?

The Foundational Mindset



Be Real

Build trust by being authentic and transparent in your communication.



Be Present

Give your full attention to the person and the conversation at hand.



Be Uncomfortable

Be willing to lean into the discomfort.
This is where growth happens.

Prepare: What's Your Goal?

What is it you want from the conversation?

- 🎯 **Clarity**
To ensure everyone is on the same page.
- 🎯 **Behavior Change**
To address a specific action or pattern.
- 🎯 **Mutual Understanding**
To see each other's perspectives, even if you don't agree.
- 🎯 **Accountability**
To establish ownership of actions and outcomes.

Prepare: Self-Awareness

Separate Facts from Opinions

Fact: "You arrived 10 minutes late to the last 3 meetings."

Opinion: "You are disrespectful and don't care about this team."

Stick to observable facts to avoid defensiveness.

Check Your Emotions

How are you feeling about this? Frustrated? Anxious?
Disappointed?

Acknowledge your emotions so you can manage them,
rather than letting them manage you.

Practical Prep Checklist



What is the specific issue?

Get crystal clear on the "what."



How does it impact me/the team?

This is the "so what."



What's my contribution to the problem?

A key step for humility and self-awareness.



What is the ideal outcome?

What would a successful resolution look like?

Conversation Roadmap (Steps 1-3)

- ✓ **1. Name/State the Issue Clearly**
Be specific and direct. "I'd like to talk about..."
- ✓ **2. Provide a concrete example**
"I noticed in the team meeting when..." not "You always..."
- ✓ **3. Describe your emotions**
Use "I" statements. "I feel concerned when..."

Conversation Roadmap (Steps 4-7)

- ✓ **4. Clarify what's at stake**
"This is important because it impacts our team's trust..."
- ✓ **5. Identify your contribution**
"I recognize I may have contributed by..."
- ✓ **6. Indicate your wish to resolve it**
"I really want to find a solution that works for both of us."
- ✓ **7. Invite their perspective**
"What is your perspective on this?" (Then, listen.)

Tips *During* the Conversation

Be Fully Present

Put your phone away. Make eye contact. Listen to understand, not just to reply.

Model Curiosity, Not Judgment

Ask genuine questions. "Can you tell me more about that?"
"What led to that decision?"

Stay Fierce But Kind

Hold the standard. Be clear about your boundaries and expectations, but do so with respect and empathy.

Move Toward Resolution

Don't get stuck in the problem. Shift the focus to solutions.
"How can we move forward?"

Ending the Conversation

Summarize & Define Next Steps

Recap what was agreed upon. "So, to confirm, we've decided that..."

Who will do what, by when? Make it clear and actionable.

Express Appreciation

"Thank you for your openness."

"I appreciate you having this conversation with me."

Acknowledge their willingness to engage, even if it was difficult.

The Follow-Up

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Relationships are built through ongoing,
honest conversation. (Susan Scott)

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A single conversation rarely solves everything. Check in later and continue to build the relationship.

Questions?