

5 Tips for Managing Difficult Conversations

Regardless of their experience the majority of business leaders often avoid difficult conversations with employees.

Leaders who can learn to respond to difficult conversations in an effective manner and in the right way will discover that solving outstanding conflict results in improving organisational and employee performance. Following our 5 simple tips will ensure that you handle tough conversations more skilfully and reduce stress for all involved.

#1 – Address the situation as soon as possible

Difficult conversations which are left to fester do not get any easier to handle. In fact, you'll only waste time and energy deciding how you will handle the conversation. In many cases, employees become anxious if a difficult topic is not addressed which can lead to unnecessary negativity, resulting in under performance.

#2 – Turn a difficult conversation into a positive discussion

Difficult conversations can quite easily lead to conflict if they are not addressed carefully and sensitively. Instead of going in full guns blazing focusing on the areas of difference, start off by focusing on the successful aspects of your working relationship as this approach will create a positive atmosphere for your discussions.

#3 – Give the other person a chance to respond

It takes two people to have a conversation. Good leaders understand how important it is to listen to the other side. Allow the employee to process a response and try not to overtake their moment of silence by filling it with your own opinion.

#4 – Accept responsibility for your role

Part of being an exceptional leader is to accept responsibility for your side in things. Whether you have neglected to provide enough information or the employee needs more guidance, take personal responsibility for this and apologise to the employee if necessary – yes that's right – apologise.

Now is the time you will ask the employee what he or she needs to improve the current situation. This is when you offer feedback and support to the employee, to ensure to ensure they can learn from the situation and move forward. The key to effective leadership is empowering others to be their very best.

#5 – Set clear expectations

Establishing expectations about behaviour and performance within a reasonable timeline is critical to correct the issues. Depending on the person, job and deliverables, you may want to give a week or two or even a few months. Ensure that a record of all issues and interactions is kept to avoid any misunderstandings at a later date.

Rialto provide specialist coaching for assisting leaders in managing difficult conversations - Contact us for a complimentary consultation:

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