



## COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

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*"Our work, our relationships and our lives succeed or fail, one conversation at a time."*

*--Susan Scott*

Effective leaders are able to have conversations that surface and deal with interpersonal tensions and conflict. This tool will help you engage with people in a respectful and mindful way. Applying it to difficult conversations will create the opportunity for both parties to describe their experience, understand the impact, explore what is possible, and develop mutual understanding that will strengthen the relationship.

### **PART ONE: SELF-PREPARATION (QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF)**

1. Describe the situation: What is the essence of the problem?
2. How are you feeling about the current situation?
3. What values are being violated or what buttons are being pushed for you?
4. What interpretations (stories) are you making up about what is going on?
  - *What meaning are you giving to what is going on?*
  - *What motives or assumptions are you ascribing to the other person?*
5. Describe what you hope to accomplish by having the conversation: What is your desired outcome? What is it you specifically want for yourself, for the other person, and for the relationship?
6. What is important to you about getting the above outcome(s)?
7. Step into the other person's shoes: What do you think is going on for the other person? What might s/he be feeling? Is s/he aware of the problem?
8. How have you contributed to the current situation?
9. What concerns do you have about having the conversation? What is the worst-case scenario? How likely is it that this would actually occur?
10. What are the implications if the situation is NOT resolved? What's possible if the situation IS resolved?

11. What could help the conversation go well?
  - *What could create a climate of safety and mutual respect?*
  - *What useful assumptions or perceptions could you hold about the other person that would shift the way you view this person? (i.e. What do you appreciate about the other person?)*
12. Given your initial thinking about this situation, what is next?
  - *Is this YOUR work? Is this something you need to manage within yourself instead of involving the other person?*
  - *Is a crucial conversation appropriate? If yes, are you willing to invest the time and energy to have the conversation? Is it worth the effort?*

## PART TWO: ENGAGING IN THE CONVERSATION

Each person tells his/her “story” so the other fully understands his/her experience, perceptions and interests. Be specific when you talk about the behavior or situation that isn’t working. Make sure you have a full understanding of each other’s experience before making agreements. Don’t rush to solve the problem.

### Specific information to share:

- Describe your experience: Tell your story of what is going on from your perspective.
- Describe your emotions about the issue.
- Describe the impact of what’s not working on you, others, and the organization.
- Acknowledge your contribution to the problem.
- Discuss what could support your relationship at its best.
- Be specific about what you appreciate about the other.
- Articulate what you want, need, or expect from the other and explain why this is important to you.

**Inviting the other person to engage in the conversation: Opening lines:**

1. I have something I'd like to discuss with you that I think will help us work together more effectively.
2. I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes now or can we schedule some time in the near future?
3. I'd like to talk about\_\_\_\_\_. I think we have different perceptions and I'd like to better understand your thinking on this.
4. I'd like to see if we might reach a better understanding about\_\_\_\_\_. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well.

**During the Interaction:**

Ask questions to fully understand what the other is saying. Inquire into the other person's views. Be curious. Make sure the other person knows that you fully understand. Repeat back what you heard. Acknowledge each other's positions and interests. Be aware of the impact of your non-verbal behavior.

**PART THREE: RESOLUTION (QUESTIONS TO MOVE TOWARD CLOSURE)**

1. Has anything been left unsaid?
2. Where are we now? What have we learned? What is needed for resolution?
3. What are the ways we can address the issues we have identified? How can we move forward from here given our new understanding?
4. What agreements will support positive interactions between us? How will we handle it if we don't honor the agreements we made? When will we check in with each other about how things are going between us?

**HARD WON WISDOM**

- Our perceptions of a situation are subjective. Unfortunately, this is easy to forget. Perceptions impact feelings, actions, and behaviors that ultimately affect other people and can lead to snap judgments or misguided assumptions. By becoming more aware of your feelings, and those of the people around you, this cycle can be broken.
- Remember that 93% of the message you are communicating is non-verbal. Your tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions have more impact than the words you are saying.