Critical tips for critical conversations



The fear of an angry or emotional reaction is why so many managers avoid having difficult conversations with employees. Instead, they hope matters will just resolve themselves. However, they usually don't. In fact, they're likely to get worse. So the sooner productivity or behavioural issues are confronted, the sooner they can be resolved.

Here are some tips to help you address a difficult or sensitive issue with a member of your team:

Be prepared. Begin by gathering all the pertinent information and facts. Consult with HR to ensure you fully understand company policies and procedures, your rights and the employee's rights. Your internal policies and procedures should give you a framework for any action you intend to take.

2. **Practice active listening**. This includes:
    - Maintaining eye contact
    - Smiling and nodding when appropriate
    - Keeping an attentive posture
    - Paraphrasing and asking relevant questions to help clarify what the other person has said
    - Acknowledging your counterpart's perspective
    - Not interrupting
3. **Remain calm, respectful and focused on the issue**. If the conversation starts to veer off-track or the other person becomes angry, upset or hostile, agree to meet again and/or seek support from HR.
4. **Use "I" not "you" language.** Starting your sentences with "I" avoids judgment and blame and diffuses defensiveness. For example, instead of "You never have your sales report ready" say, "I cannot meet our departmental targets without timely sales reports."
5. **Together, agree to a plan for going forward and schedule a follow up meeting**.
6. **Thank the other person for listening and/or understanding**. This ends the conversation on a respectful, positive note.

For more information and support on how to approach a difficult situation, **contact us**.