



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS FOR LEADERS

Most of us tend to avoid difficult conversations, because: 1) we don't want to discourage those we lead, 2) we don't want to harm our relationship with those we lead, 3) we don't want those we lead to stop following us, and 4) we want to be liked.

However, if you are leading anyone, you are going to need to develop the skill of engaging in difficult conversations. Difficult conversations, if handled well, and in a timely manner, will enhance your relationship with those you lead, improve their effectiveness, develop their character, and prevent larger problems from arising in the future.

Following is a step-by-step guide for having difficult conversations.

1. Pray for them.

If you need to have a difficult conversation with someone, you've probably already developed some negative feelings about them. Take the time to pray for them to ensure that you are seeing them through God's eyes, not through the lens of the negative interaction you've had with them.

2. Pray for you.

Pray that your heart and motives would be pure. Pray for patience. Pray for wisdom to know what to say. Pray for the courage to say it. Pray that your identity would be grounded in God, and not in the affirmation of others.

3. Strategize with another leader.

Call a trusted leader to discuss the situation with them. Another leader can often help provide insight and perspective. Also, sometimes we gain insight simply by speaking our concerns out loud to another trusted person.

4. Outline your conversation.

Write down or memorize the key points you need to make in the conversation with them. This will provide you with a road map to follow when faced with the stress of the conversation itself. Anticipate their responses. Anticipate the possibility that the conversation may jeopardize or even terminate the relationship. Be prepared for, and willing to accept *any* outcome.

5. Set the Table.

Difficult conversations are easiest to have when all parties know that something important is about to be discussed. Call, text, or email the person and say: "Hey, I'd like to speak with you about something important. Let's talk at 1pm today."

In some cases, It may be helpful to provide additional detail. "Hey, I'd like to speak with you about the incident that happened yesterday. Let's talk at 1pm today."

6. Open with clarifying questions. Be genuinely curious.

Never assume you understand the motive, or intent of the person. Always seek to understand why they engaged in the action or behavior. Often times this will help to find the right solution.

7. Be personal, compassionate, and candid. Clarity is kind.

Do not hedge. Do not placate. Do not fudge. Do not soft pedal. People are highly perceptive. They know if you are trying to appease, mollify or pacify them, and *they will resent you for it*. When we try to appease someone, it's because we don't **trust** them. They may be hurt by the hard thing you need to say to them, but they will lose respect for you if you don't say it. It's easier for them to heal from an offense than it is for them to regain respect for a leader who won't speak truthfully to them.

8. Make it productive, not personal.

Always focus on *the missional reason* that the attitude, behavior or speech needs to change. Do not focus on how the attitude, behavior or speech affects you. Remember, it's not about you. It's about the mission.

9. Listen closely to their response.

Listen carefully and take note of the person's response. If the person raises points that you hadn't considered, be willing to listen to those points of view. If the person refuses to take responsibility, consider what next steps may be required. If the

person accepts responsibility, and commits to changing, be willing to give them the opportunity to do so.

10. Accept the outcome.

Be prepared to accept the consequences of the conversation. Often, difficult conversations will enhance your relationship with the person, enhance their effectiveness, and further develop their character. In some cases, difficult conversations will damage or even terminate your relationship with the person. Either way, show grace and kindness.