Growth Performance

MANAGER PREPARATION TOOL

Difficult Conversations Planner

Use this planner before any conversation that matters but feels uncomfortable: performance, conduct, redundancy, interpersonal conflict, or any situation where honest words are needed. The quality of your preparation determines the quality of the conversation.

Before you start: The goal of a difficult conversation is not to "win." It's to be heard, to understand the other person's perspective, and to reach a clear and honest outcome. Preparation is how you stay grounded when it gets hard.

THE CONVERSATION

DATE & TIME

PERSON

THEIR ROLE / RELATIONSHIP

TYPE OF CONVERSATION

☐ Performance ☐ Conduct ☐ Redundancy ☐ Interpersonal conflict ☐ Relationship breakdown ☐ Other:

MY OUTCOME

Be specific about what you want to have achieved by the end of this conversation, not in terms of what you'll say, but what you want to be true afterwards.

WHAT IS THE OUTCOME I WANT FROM THIS CONVERSATION?

WHAT DOES "GOOD" LOOK LIKE AT THE END?

WHAT AM I WILLING TO BE FLEXIBLE ON?

THEIR PERSPECTIVE

Conversations go wrong most often when we treat our interpretation as fact. Taking time to genuinely consider their view changes how you enter the room.

WHAT DO THEY LIKELY FEEL OR BELIEVE ABOUT THIS SITUATION?

WHAT DO THEY NEED FROM THIS CONVERSATION?

WHAT MIGHT THEY BE WORRIED ABOUT?

WHAT ASSUMPTIONS AM I MAKING THAT I SHOULD CHECK?

THE FACTS

Ground the conversation in observable facts, not interpretations. What did you see or hear? What was the impact? Keep this section factual.

THE SPECIFIC BEHAVIOUR, EVENT, OR SITUATION I OBSERVED:

THE IMPACT IT HAD (ON THE TEAM, THE WORK, ME, THE ORGANISATION):

MY OPENING

Write out your actual opening sentence. Research by Stone, Patton, and Heen shows that the first 30 seconds determine whether the other person can hear what follows. Practise saying it aloud before the conversation.

MY OPENING SENTENCE (WRITE THE EXACT WORDS):

MANAGING DIFFICULTY

IF THEY GET DEFENSIVE, I WILL:

IF THEY GET UPSET OR EMOTIONAL, I WILL:

IF THEY DENY OR DEFLECT, I WILL:

IF THE CONVERSATION NEEDS TO PAUSE OR STOP, I WILL:

CLOSING WITH CLARITY

A conversation without a clear close creates ambiguity. Know in advance how you intend to close.

WHAT I WILL CONFIRM AT THE END OF THE CONVERSATION (DECISIONS, ACTIONS, NEXT STEPS):

ACTION / NEXT STEP	OWNER	BY WHEN

WHEN WILL WE NEXT CONNECT TO REVIEW?

AFTER THE CONVERSATION

WHAT WENT WELL?

WHAT WOULD I DO DIFFERENTLY?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT THE OTHER PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE?

Want help putting this into practice?

Growth Performance builds the human advantage in an AI-driven world, with people, teams and leaders.

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