



**YOUR ULTIMATE
GUIDE TO
NAVIGATING
DIFFICULT
CONVERSATIONS**



APPROACH CONFLICT WITH CONFIDENCE



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CREATING INTERPERSONAL EFFICIENCY

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Conflict. The dreaded, unaddressed tension with a colleague or between team members that is likely impacting the morale of the entire team.

Conflict is a part of life. We all have different perceptions of the world. Conflict can occur when there is a clash of those perceptions combined with the lack of perceived skill or motivation by both parties to talk about the clash in a productive way.

When not addressed effectively, this clash of perception leads us to jump to conclusions about a situation or another person and, let's face it, those conclusions are usually not very flattering for anyone involved. Slowly, teams or even entire cultures become full of tension, stress and frustration.

The good news is that there is an easy solution to help us adjust our approach to conflict so that we can turn tension and frustration into trust and collaboration.

This guide is based on the following principles I call the Conflict Compact. This compact is one you will make with yourself to ensure you effectively lead a difficult conversation

THE CONFLICT COMPACT

1. I will not rush into a potentially difficult or charged conversation if I am emotional and unprepared. Take a moment to prepare and clear the emotions (you can use this guide to do just that).
2. I will stop procrastinating and commit to take action to build my competence, which in turn will build my confidence in addressing conflict.
3. I commit to approach the conversation with an intention of learning and connecting instead of telling and controlling.



READY TO GET STARTED?

The following is a 5-Step worksheet guide to help you navigate conflict with more confidence and less dread. Answer the questions prompted in Steps 1-4 to prepare for the conversation and then use the suggested conversation template outlined in Step 5 to take meaningful action in addressing difficult situations.



STEP 1: INCREASE YOUR SELF-AWARENESS BY ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR INTERNAL DIALOGUE AND EXTERNAL ACTIONS

What is the difficult conversation that you need to have?

What is your version of the situation, what you think led to the need for this difficult conversation?
(Your judgments, assumptions, theories)

How is this situation making you feel?

(If we don't acknowledge our feelings, the feelings will drive the conversation and have the potential to take over).

What do you fear this conversation (or the need to have this conversation) might say about you?
In other words, what meaning might you be applying to this situation?

(For example, "I am not an effective leader if I can't handle difficult personalities", "If I screw this up, I won't be respected".)

Describe your actions or behaviors that might have contributed to this situation.

(We all contribute to scenarios in which we are involved. In fact, we can make the assumption that each one of us has a "joint contribution" to conflict. It may simply be that we avoided a conversation for too long or it may be a bigger behavioral contribution).



STEP 2: IMAGINE A WALK IN THEIR SHOES

It's helpful to take an empathetic approach in our preparation by not only acknowledging our contribution but also by taking a guess at the other party's perspective. Imagine you have stepped into the perspective of the other person and answer the following:

What is their version of the situation? (*their judgments, assumptions, theories, what they might think led to the need for this difficult conversation*)

How might they be feeling about this situation? About you?

What meaning might they place on this situation? What might they fear it says about them?

Describe their actions or behaviors that led to this situation? (*their "joint contribution"*)

From their viewpoint, what might a mutual win look like in this scenario?



STEP 3: SHIFT YOUR MINDSET TO ENSURE LEARNING AND CONNECTION

How might you get into a state of curiosity instead of judgment? What questions could you ask that could move the conversation forward in a productive and positive way?

(For example, "Help me understand OR I observed XYZ, can you help me understand what was going on for you?)

Describe your intention and purpose for the discussion. Are these things within your control? If not, keep searching for a higher intention/purpose. *(Note: when we are focused on right/wrong (vs. serving the higher purpose), it is nearly impossible to lead with curiosity!)*

Define a positive frame with which you could begin your discussion. *(For example, what's most important to you to maintain in this discussion, what might you respect about the other person, what is the silver lining, etc?)*



STEP 4: BEFORE YOU ENGAGE IN THE CONVERSATION, MAKE SURE YOU CAN ANSWER YES TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS

- I have completed Step 1 to assess my contribution and feelings about the situation.
- I am open to solutions and perspectives outside of my own in this scenario.
- I don't expect to control the outcome or the other person's behavior. *(ex. Tell them bad news and expect them not to be mad, upset with me, emotional, etc) We can cannot control someone else's reaction, we can only control our purpose, intention and approach.*
- I see how I have personally contributed to the conflict and have first changed what I contributed. *(either my actions or behaviors)*
- I understand that this is NOT about proving I am right and the other person is wrong.
- I want to learn from this conversation and use it as a platform for greater connection.



STEP 5: TAKE ACTION AND BEGIN THE CONVERSATION

The following is a suggested step-by-step approach for your reference.

1. Frame the positive.
2. Share your joint contribution and your intention.
3. Describe the facts *(from the perspective of a neutral 3rd party)*.
4. Describe the feelings associate with the facts *(and take a guess at theirs)*.
5. Invite them to share their version of the story.
6. Listen/clarify/reframe or restate to ensure understanding.
7. Ask permission to share your perspective and then share.
8. Problem solve: define areas of connection and areas of disconnect.
9. Agree to next steps.
10. Leave the scene better than you found it.

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