

# Leader Toolkit

## Difficult conversation planner



We are leaders who are **RESPONSIBLE** and **DEDICATED TO QUALITY**.

We don't avoid or put off having the conversations that matter most.

### Why use this tool

Every leader will have to have difficult conversations at some time. By thinking ahead and planning, you can make sure that every part of the conversation is constructive and directed at a positive result.

### When to use this tool

When you know you need to have a conversation with a team member or colleague and know that the topic, the situation or the person's state of mind **could make the discussion difficult**.

### How to use this tool

1. Be clear about the objectives you have for the conversation and about what **each of you** will want to achieve.
2. Write down your outcomes in the planner, then use the planner to **plan**.
  - how you will start the conversation.
  - what messages you want to get across and the examples or evidence you will use to back up those messages.
  - how they will **react** to your messages and how you will **respond** to their reactions, including how you will respond to what they say and the emotions that the conversation could stir up.
  - Refer to [Ways of dealing with different responses](#) to help you think constructively about how you may need to respond.
  - what emotions the conversation could stir up and the emotions you may need to show.
3. Finally, think carefully about how you will close the conversation.

### Tips

- Choose the **time and place** for the conversation carefully.
- **Practice** the conversation - at least in your head - and picture a successful result.
- Be **clear about your purpose**, know and return to your purpose at difficult moments.
- Keep in mind that **how** you say what you are going to say is just **as important as what** you say.
- Be aware of **emotional energy** - yours and theirs - and direct it towards a useful purpose. Don't ignore it.

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**Objectives – be clear about the outcomes each of you would like to achieve**

Your outcomes	Their outcomes
What do you need to achieve from this meeting? How would you like the other person to go away feeling?	What might the other person be expecting from this meeting?

**Plan your conversation**

Conversation plan – way in
How will you start the conversation?

Communicating effectively	
What messages do you need to get across?	What evidence/examples do you have that will help you get the message across?



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## Anticipating reactions and responses

For help, refer to *Ways of dealing with different responses*

### Their REACTIONS

What could their objectives be?  
What counter-arguments will they have?

### Your RESPONSES

What counter arguments/ reactions do you have to their objections?  
How will you respond to their counter-arguments/reactions?

## Closing the conversation

How will you close the conversation?

## Next Steps

What are the next steps?



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## Ways of dealing with different responses

Consider different ways for dealing with the emotions and behaviours that difficult conversations can cause.

Behaviour	Strategies
<b>Person passively agrees to everything you say or decide</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Allow some time to develop a relaxed atmosphere.</li><li>▪ Make sure they do some of their own thinking. Question them on their thoughts, reasoning or feelings.</li><li>▪ Ask them for their own assumptions.</li><li>▪ Don't be afraid of silence, give time to think.</li><li>▪ State your reasoning clearly and check their understanding.</li><li>▪ Keep to the facts.</li><li>▪ Actively ask for and constructively include their comments.</li></ul>
<b>Person will not agree to evidence/ examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Ask for their reasons.</li><li>▪ Listen with an open mind.</li><li>▪ Recognise their right to a viewpoint.</li><li>▪ Be determined about your facts.</li><li>▪ Restate your decision.</li><li>▪ Consider possibilities and potential.</li></ul>
<b>Person defends, blames or attacks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Listen.</li><li>▪ Identify the source of frustration.</li><li>▪ Don't defend, blame or attack in return.</li><li>▪ Restate the objective of the conversation.</li><li>▪ Don't reject complaints but agree to discuss their implications at another time and close the meeting.</li></ul>
<b>Person is impatient or tries to side-track the meeting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Clarify the agenda for the meeting.</li><li>▪ Listen and note particular points to address later.</li><li>▪ Don't get side-tracked yourself.</li><li>▪ Restate choices or options.</li><li>▪ Make a firm commitment to discuss the priority issue for the individual at a later date.</li></ul>
<b>Person talks too much</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Allow enough time.</li><li>▪ Don't respond too quickly – allow them time to talk.</li><li>▪ Restate the purpose of the meeting and the agenda.</li><li>▪ Keep them to the agenda by referring to what they have said and asking relevant questions.</li><li>▪ Narrow down choices and focus them.</li></ul>

