

Difficult conversations

Overview

The overall aim of this workshop is to build knowledge, skills and confidence in having difficult conversations at work. It helps managers conduct effective conversations in challenging areas such as giving feedback, conducting return to work interviews and in relation to a range of concerns including conduct, capability, performance and other sensitive issues. It focuses on planning a structured conversation, communicating assertively and handling difficult responses effectively. It gives participants an opportunity to reflect on the situations they personally find most challenging to address and it provides valuable practice in conducting such difficult conversations in a safe and supportive environment.

Learning objectives

This programme will help line managers:

- Plan and prepare to conduct effective conversations in a range of 'difficult' situations
- Understand the barriers to conducting such conversations and develop practical strategies to overcome them
- Recognise the importance of communicating effectively and enhance existing communication skills, eg, questioning and listening skills
- Communicate difficult messages assertively and respond appropriately to challenging behaviours
- Provide effective feedback using a range of feedback tools
- Build knowledge, skills and confidence in this area

Audience

This programme has been designed specifically for line managers. (A different version can be run specifically for HR professionals.)

Format

This one-day programme is highly participative and uses group exercises, case studies and practical exercises to illustrate problems and develop a best practice approach in dealing with them. Group discussions and feedback are used to develop learning points and to enable participants to relate examples to their own situations. Participants are sent a welcome pack in advance of the session which includes some pre-course work as well as asking them to reflect upon their own experiences and challenges in this area.

Special feature

If an organisation can provide real-life case studies, then the workshop exercises can be tailored accordingly, making the skills practice sessions even more relevant and useful.

Expert trainer

This programme is delivered by **Rachel Hicks**, our lead trainer in this area. See her profile [here](#).

Workshop outline

1 Introduction

- Workshop objectives and benefits from attending
- Participants' experience and confidence in this area
- Personal objectives

2 Difficult conversations

- Exploring the range of conversations that participants find difficult and why
- Understanding what makes these conversations effective – the do's and don'ts

3 Planning and preparation

- The importance of planning and preparation
- A planning template
- Understanding performance gaps. Setting clear standards and evidencing performance.
- Establishing clear outcomes
- Anticipating difficult responses
- Exploring our own beliefs and the self-fulfilling prophecy
- Overcoming other barriers to holding these conversations

4 Structuring the conversation

- A four-stage approach to structuring the conversation:
 - Getting off to an effective start
 - Understanding the situation and exploring issues and reasons
 - Exploring options and agreeing a way forward
 - An effective ending
- Collective v individual
- Other structures, eg, WARM approach to return to work interviews

5 Key skills

- A checklist of skills
- Participants' strengths and development areas
- Skill-building activities in communication, highlighting the importance of clear and congruent communication and the danger of assumptions. Practical tips and techniques for enhancing communication, including questioning and listening skills.
- Understanding different behaviour types and the benefits of acting assertively. Assertive communication in practice

6 Practical skill building activities

- *Exercise: Participants plan for and conduct a 'difficult' conversation, eg, a return to work interview*
- *Exercise: Dealing with sensitive issues, eg, addressing personal hygiene issues*
- Practical tips and techniques

7 Feedback

- Feedback on challenging issues, eg, capability, conduct, performance etc.
- The importance of managing proactively and giving effective feedback
- Understanding what makes feedback useful. Principles to follow.
- Feedback approach and style: push v pull
- Feedback models
- *Exercise: Planning to give feedback in a range of scenarios and / or real issues*
- Using a coaching approach

8 Managing challenging situations

- Managing challenging behaviour, eg, anger, frustration, tears, etc
- Retaining control of the conversation
- Managing your own emotional response
- Minimising conflict
- When a planned approach isn't possible. Responding appropriately when 'put on the spot'.
- Boundaries and sources of support

9 And finally...

- Open forum – remaining challenges and 'what if' scenarios
- Action planning – identifying how participants will transfer this learning into the workplace and what else they may need which will help them to do this effectively
- Review and close

For a no-obligation discussion about running this programme for your organisation on an in-house basis, just give us a call on **01582 463462**.