



Can We Talk?

Discussing Equity with Senior
Workplace Leaders



Starting an Awkward Conversation

“Thank you so much for creating such a safe space that I could even bring up this topic.”

Why?

- Lower defenses.
- Protect the other person's ego.
- Express appreciation.
- Set the expectation for continued safety.

Explicitly Ask Them to Listen

“I go through this every day. Please concentrate on what I am saying. We should and will analyze the issues together. But not for the next five minutes.”

“It took me a lot of courage to plan this conversation. I’m scared. I know you will have reactions, and those feelings are 100% valid. But please hear me out first without interrupting.”

Why?

- Pre-empt the human instinct to defend and react.
- Make them see your terror and vulnerability (i.e., humanity).
- De-intellectualize the issue.
- Do not assume others will listen--make them listen.

We Are All on the Same Side

“In our society, inequities of all kinds can be taboo. I want to change that, and I know you want to change that, too.”

“I know that equality is important to you. That’s why I see you as an ally in this fight. Thank you for supporting the cause.”

Why?

- Demand responsibility and accountability.
- Call them an ally--maybe they will start to believe it, too!
- Separate the people from the problem.

Separating Intent from Impact

“I know you did not mean it that way because I know your character. But this is how it impacted me.”

“I respect you so much. That’s why I felt moved to tell you how that action came across, despite your best intentions.”

Why?

- Underscore that good people can say and do harmful things.
- Emphasize that good intentions are not...good enough.
- Show respect through confrontation.

It's Not Personal--It's Systemic

“This problem is bigger than all of us.”

“There are historical, legal, societal, and even linguistic roots for the problems we are seeing.”

Why?

- You are not attacking this individual.
- You are not accusing anyone of anything.

Saying Thank You

“I can see that was difficult for you, too. Thank you for listening.”

“I am impressed by how we handled that together. Thank you for taking my experience seriously. I respect you even more now.”

“Future conversations will feel uncomfortable, but I know our relationship is resilient enough to turn those conversations into positive change.”

Why?

- Expect strength rather than fragility.
- Acknowledge their experience.
- Set the expectation for continued respect and continuous conversation.

Challenges to Remember and Recognize

- Folks with power and privilege may be scared of “saying the wrong thing.”
- Folks with less power and less privilege have been historically labeled as ungrateful complainers.
- Conversations about systemic inequity challenge deeply held American beliefs about meritocracy and the power of hard work and a positive attitude.
- People want to believe they’re good or they’re different from those “other” oppressors. But we **all** play a part in oppressive systems.
- It is **not your job** to educate those in power about inequality. And if you do have power, then go out and get educated!



What Are Your Strategies?