

# 5 WAYS TO HANDLE TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

MADE FOR  
INTROVERTED ENGINEERING MANAGERS  
WHO LEAD IN THEIR OWN WAY



by Samuel Au



# Introduction

If you've ever walked away from a conversation thinking,  
"I should've said that differently...",  
or,  
"I wish I spoke up, but I didn't know how..."  
—you're not alone.

As introverted engineering managers, we care deeply about getting things right—especially when it comes to people. But difficult conversations can feel overwhelming. We don't want to come off as harsh. And we definitely don't want to create more tension than there already is.

I used to dread difficult conversations. I'd rehearse them in my head, delay them for days, and sometimes avoid them altogether.



# Continued

Part of me worried I'd say the wrong thing. But deep down, I just didn't believe I could handle it well—as someone who's naturally quiet and thoughtful.

What made the real difference wasn't becoming louder or tougher. It was learning a few simple ways to ground myself—so I could speak with clarity, even when it was hard.

Those same strategies are what I now share with other introverted engineering managers—because they work, and **they don't ask you to change who you are.**

This guide offers 5 quiet, practical ways to approach tough conversations—without the emotional drain. Not scripts. Not tricks. Just tools to help you lead with more clarity and confidence.

Let's begin.







# 01

## WRITE IT FIRST— THEN SAY IT SIMPLY

### What it means:

You don't have to figure it out on the spot. Writing helps you process what you want to say and how you want to say it. Drafting your thoughts beforehand gives you a sense of calm clarity going in.

### Why it works for introverts:

You naturally think things through. Writing is how you organize, reflect, and refine—so use it as a quiet strength in your leadership toolkit.

### Try This:

Write out what you'd want to say as if it were an email. Then highlight 1–2 sentences that get to the heart of it. That's your anchor when you speak.



## — USE “I NOTICED...” TO OPEN THE DOOR —

### **What it means:**

Start with what you’ve observed—not what you assume or heard secondhand. Using “I noticed...” creates space for honest conversation without making the other person feel attacked.

### **Why it works for introverts:**

You pay close attention to detail. Framing feedback around your own observations gives you a neutral, non-judgmental way to begin.

### **Try This:**

“I noticed you seemed disengaged during yesterday’s team meeting. Can we talk about what might be going on?”





# 03

## SHARE THE IMPACT, NOT JUST THE PROBLEM

### What it means:

Instead of focusing on what went wrong, focus on why it matters. Framing the impact helps the other person connect behavior with outcomes—and it makes your message feel more meaningful.

### Why it works for introverts:

You see the big picture. Sharing the ripple effect of an action helps you stay constructive, not critical.

### Try This:

“When this wasn’t delivered on time, it delayed our end-to-end testing schedule with more real data, and added pressure on dependent teams that were waiting on us.”

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# 04

## DON'T FIX, REFLECT

### What it means:

You don't always need to have a solution. Reflecting what you're hearing shows empathy and helps the other person feel seen—without you needing to jump into fix-it mode.

### Why it works for introverts:

You're naturally a good listener. This approach lets you lead with presence, not pressure.

### Try This:

"It sounds like this has been really frustrating. I want to make sure I understand before we talk the next steps."





# 05

## PUT THE BALL IN THEIR COURT— GENTLY

### What it means:

You don't need to carry the whole conversation or come up with every solution. Invite the other person to reflect or suggest next steps. This builds trust and shared ownership.

### Why it works for introverts:

You value collaboration and thoughtful pacing. This lets you lead the process without dominating it.

### Try This:

"What feels like a good next step?"

or,

"Is there something that would help right now?"

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# A Quiet Step Forward

Difficult conversations won't always be easy — but they don't have to drain you.

You don't need scripts. You don't need to become someone louder or tougher.

You just need a few reliable ways to ground yourself, speak clearly, and lead in your own way.

These five strategies are just a starting point.

And like any skill, they get easier with practice.

I know hitting reply isn't everyone's thing — especially after a long day. But if you're up for it, I'd love to hear:

Which strategy felt most helpful — or most different from what you've tried before?

You can reach me at:  
[samuel@swiftfocuscoaching.com](mailto:samuel@swiftfocuscoaching.com)

Or just take a quiet moment to reflect:

Which one could shift your next tough conversation?

However you move forward — in action or quiet thought — I'm really glad you're here.



# ABOUT ME



Hi, I'm Samuel Au — an engineering leader with 20 years of experience and an introvert who's been where you are.

I know the quiet pressure of tough conversations and how hard it can be to speak up without draining your energy.

I've helped many introverted engineering managers lead with clarity, confidence, and calm — without changing who they are.

My mission is to help leaders like you grow by using your strengths and leading in a way that feels true to you.

[www.swiftfocuscoaching.com](http://www.swiftfocuscoaching.com)