

CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS

TIPS FOR STRESSFUL CONVERSATIONS

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Terry College of Business
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CONFLICT CONVERSATIONS

Tip #1

Stay focused on preserving the relationship

It's important to convey the difficult message while still treating the person with respect and empathy. If you damage the relationship, you shut down future opportunities for collaboration and growth. In fact, tell the person up front that the relationship is important to you.



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Tip #2

Consider that you might be wrong.

Go in with an open mind. You may not know all the variables causing the work or behavior problem. You may hear something that totally shifts your perspective—or you may be completely wrong. Knowing this will help you be a better listener.



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Tip #3

Schedule the meeting—don't pop in.

Ambushing people creates anxiety and breaks down trust. Better example: “Chris, I’d like to chat with you about what happened with the Jones account. Can we meet at 2:30?” This gives the person a chance to gather their thoughts and prepare.



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Tip #4

Meet on neutral ground.

It's usually best not to call the person into your office. This shifts the balance of power to your side and puts the other person on the defensive. A neutral space—say a conference room—sends the signal that this is a solutions-centered discussion, not a dressing down.



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Tip #5

Be clear and specific with your explanation.

Express upfront what the problem is, how it's affecting others and what must change. Be prepared with hard data: "You have been absent for 2 of our client prep meetings in the past 3 weeks."

Productive conversations are grounded in facts, not observations.



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Tip #6

When you ask questions, give the person time to gather their thoughts.

Don't just talk to assert your point of view or fill the silence. That's especially important when you're dealing with an introvert who needs time to think before they speak.



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Tip #7

Listen actively.

Stay focused on understanding what the person is saying, both verbally and nonverbally. Summarize what they say and confirm it with them. Trying to understand where someone is coming from will show your empathy. It helps the other person accept what you have to say, even if it isn't what they wanted to hear.



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Tip #8

Keep things civil.

Never yell, insult, threaten, or bully the person. If things start to escalate, end the meeting and reschedule when you're both calmer. A single episode of bad behavior can tear down a relationship that took years to build.



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Tip #9

End with an action item.

Ideally, the employee will leave the meeting with specific steps to improve on the topic discussed. Schedule a follow-up conversation to see if things have changed for the better.



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Role Play #1

A team member has not completed their tasks, delaying the team progress.



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Role Play #2

**One of your team members dominated the last client meeting.
S/he made promises that other team members are not ready to
support.**



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Role Play #3

You have been doing great work on a tough project and you want to bring this hard work to the attention of your manager.



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