

Initiating a Difficult Conversation

“Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success in Work and Life, One Conversation at a Time”.
By Susan Scott

These seven components must be included in your opening statement.

Time spent preparing this statement will increase the likelihood of a high quality conversation.

Your opening statement

1. **Name the issue:** Name the behaviour that is causing the problem and the area the behaviour is impacting. e.g. “Carol I’d like to talk to you about your contribution to the monthly team meetings.”
2. **Select a specific example:** Describe a recent example that clearly illustrates the behaviour or situation you want to change. It is very important to be specific and concise at the same time. e.g. “I have noticed that you have not spoken at the last 3 meetings, and you did not have your report ready to discuss at the last meeting.”
3. **Describe your emotions about this issue:** You do this because you are letting someone know that you are affected, that you are vulnerable. Telling someone the emotion that their behaviour evokes in you is disarming and intimate – and leads to the possibility of more connection. Name the emotion that is true for you – sad, angry, fearful, worried, concerned – all emotions are experienced at home and work, and it is appropriate to admit them. e.g. “I am concerned that your performance effectiveness is slipping; in the past you have always been a keen contributor, and reliable for meeting deadlines. I am worried that there may be something going on that you are not talking about?”
4. **Clarify what is at stake:** Why is this important? What do you feel is at stake for the individual whose behaviour you are confronting? Describe what is at stake for you, others, customers, the team, the organisation. Use the words “at stake” – they have emotional impact. Talk calmly and in a non-threatening way. e.g. “What is at stake here is your performance rating, and your reputation as a solid contributor to the team. In addition the late production of your report meant that the team missed a vital deadline for the quarterly reporting of the division.”
5. **Identify your contribution to this problem:** Before we confront someone else’s behaviour it is important that we confront our own first! What is needed here is a brief acknowledgement that you recognise your own contribution to the situation you find yourselves in. e.g. “I realise I should have raised this with you at an earlier point when I first noticed the change in your behaviour”.
6. **Indicate your wish to resolve the issue:** Use the word “resolve” if you can. The word resolve communicates good intention on your behalf. It can help to re-state the core issue at this point again. e.g. “What I want to resolve with you Carol is getting your contribution back to where it was at team meetings and making sure you meet report deadlines in the future”.

7. **Invite the person to respond:** Having been clear about the situation and what you hope for it is important to ask the other person to tell you their perspective. e.g. “How do you respond to what I have said.....or what’s your perspective on what I have outlined?”

ALL OF THE ABOVE MUST BE COMPLETED WITHIN 60 SECONDS!!

The interactive phase:

- Listen carefully to what the person says in response
- Inquire with open questions to broaden and deepen your understanding
- Interrogate reality from both perspectives; provoke learning for you both; enrich your relationship.

Resolution phase:

- What have you learned? Be explicit, and include learning from both sides.
- Make agreements