

The Art of Difficult Conversations

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I can almost guarantee that everybody here has been in a position where they have to have a difficult conversation and dreading it. Difficult conversations can consist of terminating an employee, death notification, or even ending a relationship. It is important to remember that this is not the end of the world, even though it may seem like it right now. If you use the inquiry, acknowledgement, advocacy, problem solving method you will have a successful outcome (Ringer, 2006).

The first step to a successful outcome is inquiry. Pretend that you don't know anything about the situation, and learn as much as possible before going in. Let the person talk until they are finished, and don't interrupt them except to acknowledge. Do not take what the person says personally, and don't rush into taking your turn to speak, because your turn will come (Ringer, 2006).

Now that it is your turn to speak, acknowledge the person to show that you have heard what they have said and advocate for yourself. Explain back to the person what they have said so they can hear it themselves. Acknowledgment is not associated with agreement, they are separate. Even acknowledge your own defensiveness. Next clarify your position on the matter without minimizing theirs (Ringer 2006).

Now that both sides of the conversation have been heard, it is time to problem solve.

Brainstorming and continuing inquiry are useful here. Ask the person what they think might

work, and build upon it. If the conversation reverts backwards, inquire about a solution (Ringer, 2006).

These difficult conversations can come up quickly and suddenly, even if we think we are prepared it is still nerve racking. Go into the conversation as if you don't know anything to gather more information. Then acknowledge the other persons point of view, and advocate for yourself. Next, problem solve a solution to the issue together (Ringer, 2006). Using this simple approach to difficult conversations can make them go smoothly.

References

Ringer, Judy. "We Have to Talk: A Step-By-Step Checklist for Difficult Conversations." *Judy Ringer*, 2006, www.judyringer.com.