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## **How to Deal with Difficult Conversations**

*By Brooke Loening*

Did you ever have a situation where you really needed to communicate something to another person, but were too intimidated or too fearful to do it? Like many of us, you probably have numerous examples where this has happened and you never said a word.

Usually, the reason we don't have these important conversations is our fear of what might happen. What will the other person do? Will they get angry, will they stop talking to me, with their feelings be hurt? We would rather live with the less than desirable state that we are currently in than experience the potential consequences.

We all need to make a choice as to what interactions could be beneficial to both parties, but the number one issue I see as being a problem in relationships of all kinds is *poor communication*. Better and more honest communication *does* result in better friendships, relationships, and partnerships.

Next time the fear has you frozen, try using some of the following tips and practice your communication skills in those intimidating situations:

Get a little space- if needed, allow some time to pass so that you can have a better perspective, more clarity, and less emotional charge. This will provide the framework for you to create a healthier communication.

Think about what your goal is- what is the end result that you want to achieve from this conversation? How do you want things to be for both of you when you are done? This vision will influence your entire presentation. You may even want to share this at the beginning of your communication.

Organize what you want to say- what is your agenda? Sometimes when we are nervous or wound up, we forget some of the key points we want to cover.

Visualize their point of view- Put yourself in their shoes and acknowledge that in the conversation. This action will help them to feel like they are not being judged or attacked.

Build them up- if appropriate, start by telling them all the positive points you see about them and or the situation. This strategy can be critical to setting a tone of success for the entire communication. Starting with something negative often leads to a communication breakdown right from the start.

Talk to them about how you feel- just talk about *your* feelings, not about how they are doing something to you, which may result in feelings of anger. “ When this happens, I feel angry, scared etc.” This will help prevent them from feeling accused by you.

Listen to feedback- Just like you would like to be heard, so will they. It is a conversation, not a lecture.

Be prepared to be accepting of how they respond- Remember that if they throw a fit, get mad, or raise their voice, that may be the only way they know how to respond at the time. They may need to do that. *That is not your problem* even though it may feel like it at the time. Just maintain your own ground, don't respond in kind, and continue the conversation in a non-aggressive way.

Get a mediator- If you are finding that a conversation with this person is impossible, consider finding a third party therapist or mediator to be present. People tend to be on better behavior with a third person present, and that person can direct the dialogue to keep it on track.

Write a letter- Writing to someone is another option. Sometimes a letter is perfect because you can say exactly what you want to say. You might have someone else review the letter to make sure it is not attacking or negative in any way. It may also be the case that the other person does not want to talk, will become too emotional, or will not agree to a third party.

The vast majority of the time it will be better for both parties to have the conversation. Get your feet wet, and give it a try using some of the above advice. Every time you do it, you will get better at it, and it will be easier the next time. Remember, very few people ever look back and regret good communication about sensitive issues, in fact many times the dreaded talk turns out to be a breakthrough and positive experience for everyone involved.

*Brooke Loening is a life coach in Sharon who works with individuals, and runs weekly coaching groups on achieving growth in career, health and relationships. For more information and previous columns visit [theloeningplan.com](http://theloeningplan.com). Columns can also be found at [tcextra.com](http://tcextra.com)*