

CONFLICT CONVERSATIONS

The 7 Step Plan

Whatever the reason - we've all experienced a time when the destructive behaviour of a colleague has left us reeling. Modern workplaces can be fraught, so it's perhaps not surprising that it doesn't always bring out the best in people. Before you get into any more shouting matches or arguments - let's take a look at the seven step plan for dealing with conflict conversations. The plan is built on the foundations of bestselling author, Stephen Covey's, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.

HABIT 1 – BE PROACTIVE

Covey said that proactive people take initiative. This means working on the things they can do something about.

In conflict, too many people mistakenly assume that that they have no real hope of changing the relationship they have with the other person, whether that's a grumpy boss, whiny colleague or an impossible customer.

If you act proactively, you step up to the challenge rather than avoiding it. Remember - proactive people engage the important conversations in their lives.



HABIT 2 – BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND



In difficult conversations you want to have a "big picture" image of success before you start the conversation.

Be careful what you visualise - your end goal doesn't necessarily result in the other person "seeing the light" and doing things your way.

Successful ends include preserving the relationship, minimising future conflict and encouraging workplace dialogue.

HABIT 3 – FIRST THINGS FIRST

You should attend to your priorities before you attend to lesser matters.

In difficult conversations, you want to focus on the most important topics and avoid getting side-tracked by less important matters.

Get clear on the heart of the matter for you both and keep that front and centre in your conversation.



HABIT 4 – THINK WIN/WIN



If you enter your most important conversations with the intent to win at the other person's expense, then you risk prolonged and entrenched conflict and greater harm to the relationship.

The win/win approach invites you to consider the conversation as a joint exploration into what could work for both of you.

While this type of conversation takes longer to accomplish, you'll save time and energy in the long run.

HABIT 5 – SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD

In a conflict situation, it's really easy to spend your energy telling.

Telling the other person what they did wrong, what the impact was on you, how you'd like them to do it differently. Don't fall into the "Telling Trap".

The resulting "telling tug of war" will make the conversation messier than it need be.

Instead, try entering your difficult conversation with genuine curiosity.

Make it your first priority to understand the other person's perspective, even if you don't agree to it.

Why? Because real attention to understanding is likely to yield new information that can help you resolve the problem.



HABIT 6 – SYNERGISE

Truly effective conflict management is all about synergy.

Different values, opinions and perspectives, when viewed as opportunity instead of a problem, allow organisations to build on their joint strengths and minimise the individual weaknesses.

In difficult conversations, valuing synergy means that you no longer ask, "how can I make that person different or better", and instead ask, "how can the two of us bring our best to this problem?"



HABIT 7 – SHARPEN THE SAW

For Covey, this habit makes all the other habits possible.

Sharpening the saw is the act of self-renewal, learning, and personal growth.

In dialogue terms, sharpening the saw means practising your habits in low-stakes situations so that they're more accessible to you when you need them most.

It means learning to manage yourself well in difficult moments, whether you learn this by attending training, working with a coach or mentor, or self-directed learning.

When you stretch yourself and practise when the stakes are low, you help your mind respond better in those trying moments.



TAKEAWAY

When you are next faced with a difficult conversation, spend some time going through the seven steps to remind yourself of the basic principles and how you should go about it. "The quality of our lives depends not on whether or not we have conflicts, but on how we respond to them"