

AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS



When a topic is a hard one to discuss, this can be perceived as an awkward conversation. You may be embarrassed to raise an issue or worried about the reaction you will get, but it is important not to ignore the issue.

Topics may include delivering bad news, giving critical feedback, talking about misconduct, discussing problems between colleagues or the topic that may cause the most embarrassment, personal hygiene.

What you need to know...

Do we have to address it?

It is important to address issues raised, even if they are uncomfortable to talk about.

Remember:

- Issues will not resolve themselves
- Relatively small problems escalate when they are ignored
- There can be a negative effect on morale if issues are not addressed
- The impact of these issues can affect client relations and therefore revenue



What are the risks of getting it wrong?

- Failing to take into account protected characteristics which may be at the root of any issues you are tackling, can result in discrimination claims at Tribunal.
- If the conversation is not handled well, the employee may leave.
- They might stay, but their performance may suffer due to low morale – which could also adversely affect the morale of the rest of the team.
- These things have a way of getting out – which can lead to reputational damage for the company and the person who had the conversation with the employee.

What you need to do...

BEFORE THE MEETING

CONSIDER any potential circumstances

- Could the issue be the result of a protected characteristic? This may inform how you approach the conversation.
- Has something happened either at work or in their home life that may have led to the issue arising? Context can help you to decide how to proceed (e.g. is it a conduct issue or do they need support).

PLAN

- Where will you hold the meeting?
- It needs to be somewhere private where you are not going to be seen or overheard.
- When?
- Consider the best time – avoid just before team meetings and Fridays if possible. Can it wait for an already scheduled meeting? However, if the issue is serious, do not delay – address it as soon as possible. Make sure that there is time for them to respond and potentially take some time afterwards to compose themselves.
- What will you say?
- Practice what you will say and body language in front of a mirror or an appropriate trusted colleague.

During the meeting

- Be sensitive and empathetic
- Be honest and direct
- Give specific examples / evidence
- Avoid belittling the issue
- Do not blame others!
- Give them an opportunity to talk and ask open questions
- Listen!
- Make sure they understand the impact / any consequences
- Offer help / support
- End on a positive note (if possible!)

Meeting Structure

- 1. Present:** Present the facts with neutrality
 - “When we were working on x, your contribution was late/not delivered on time” rather than “You always miss deadlines”
- 2. Ask:** How do they see it – establish their point of view
 - “What were the obstacles?” “Why do you think it turned out this way?”
- 3. Describe:** Describe your own view and keep it neutral
 - “I noticed...” “I saw...” rather than “I suspect what you thought was...”, “As usual you...”
- 4. Highlight:** Highlight the impact, focusing on the issue or behaviour
 - “Your reluctance to share knowledge resulted in errors being made, this reflected badly on the team”
 - Rather than “You’re always the negative one in the team and that’s why things go wrong.”
- 5. Summarise and generate:** Summarise and generate options to move forward
 - “So, what we’ve discussed is...” “You have agreed to...” “The next steps are...”
- 6. Express:** Express your appreciation if appropriate
 - “I really appreciate your openness.”

What's next?

- Monitor the situation
- Keep an open door
- Check in with them
- Step in if you need to follow-up
- If appropriate, acknowledge improvement



Seek Advice

Awkward conversations can be difficult to navigate, so if you are not sure, it is always best to speak to an experienced colleague or external advisor.

They can:

- Help to analyse risk
- Talk you through the conversation / draft a plan
- Provide a script
- Offer HR presence if the situation feels contentious
- Provide support and guidance in the aftermath

if you'd like to know more call 747559 and let's chat!

