



## How to Have Tough Conversations At Work

### Thought Starters Before We Begin

*While you're meeting others and getting settled, consider asking your colleagues these questions:*

- Why did you decide to attend this event today?
- What's the toughest conversation you've ever had to have at work?
- What's the tough conversation that's ahead of you now?
- What's at stake to get it right?

### Three Myths About How to Have Tough Conversations

Myth: Just stick to the **facts**.

Truth: Decisions are always made by **emotion**.

Myth: Keep it **brief**.

Truth: People need **time**.

Myth: I can't bring it up if I don't bring a **solution**.

Truth: If I don't bring it up, we won't find a **solution**.

***What's the tough conversation you've had to have at work?  
Or what's the one that's looming ahead for you?***



## Five Steps for Tough Conversations that Work at Work

### Step 1: **Schedule** It

To make better **decisions**, the brain needs **time**.

Consider:

- *Time of day*
- *Day of week*
- *What's happening before/after*
- *Environment/surroundings: should you stay in the office or go elsewhere?*
- *Ideal amount of time you need & minimal amount of time you need*
- *What's unique to YOUR situation?*

Suggested script:

*Hey—would you be open to [having lunch/coffee/sitting down with me] for [x] minutes in the next week or so? I'd like to get your input on [an idea/a decision/a concern] I need to address, and I'd value having a little focused time with you to talk. [Day of the week and time] or [Alternative day of the week and time] look good for me—what works best for you?*

[If they express concern and want to talk about it immediately:]

*I appreciate that, but I'd really rather you and I schedule a time to talk in more depth. Again, [day of the week and time] or [Alternative day of the week and time] look good for me—what works best for you?*

*or*

*It's important enough that I'd prefer we plan it on our calendars. That way I can make sure I'm prepared and we won't be distracted. So, does Tuesday at noon work for you?*



## Step 2: Plan It

Our brain craves clarity.

Consider:

- *What's the outcome you want?*
- *What's the outcome that would surpass your wildest dreams?*
- *What's the worst possible outcome? If you get it, how will you respond?*
- *What's the thing you need to say that you're afraid to say?*
- *What's the thing you're afraid to hear? If you hear it, how will you respond?*
- *What's YOUR unique issue you need to plan for?*

## Step 3: Show Up

Consider:

- *Arrive early and breathe.*
- *Assume positive intent—we're all doing the best we can with what we know now.*
- *Bring notes if you like (if you feel the need to explain them, say "This issue is pretty important to me, and I wanted to make sure to make good use of our time, so I jotted down some notes I didn't want to forget to share.")*
- *Bring a drink with you. It gives you an excuse to sip and take a quiet second during the conversation if you need it.*
- *Drop the corporate speak—speak from the heart.*

Suggested scripts:

These script fragments may help you convey emotion and paint pictures. They're not intended to be used all at once—choose the ones that resonate with you and your conversation, or use them for inspiration to insert more emotion and create clarity in your conversations.

- *We both get that this is a hard topic to talk about . . .*
- *Honestly, I may not get this conversation right, but I felt I owed it to you to talk about it . . .*
- *If the answers were easy, we probably wouldn't be talking about it now, right? Since it's not, I appreciate you diving in deeper with me . . .*
- *I'm raising the red flag on this issue . . .*
- *If [issue at hand] were a boat, I'd be calling the Coast Guard. . .*
- *Let's hit the pause button on X so we can focus on Y right now, okay?*
- *In my role as X, I'd be irresponsible if I don't speak up when the train is off the tracks . . .*
- *From where I sit, if X doesn't change, Y will happen. (Call out specific consequences that cause pain).*



#### Step 4: **Shut Up**

**Silence** is uncomfortable, but **discomfort** is where the growth comes from.

Try these techniques:

- Take a sip of water.
- Breathe slowly through your nose.
- Press your lips together.
- Count silently to ten.

#### Step 5: **Follow Up**

It's your conversation, and so it's your **responsibility** to **follow** up.

Consider:

- *Have you completed any actions that came out of the initial conversation? If not, why not?*
- *Do you need permission or just awareness?*
- *What needs to be said again, or more clearly? What's the picture you can paint?*
- *What will happen if the conversation fails? What will you do then?*

Suggested scripts:

*I just wanted to followup on the conversation we had on [DATE] about [TOPIC]. I'd like to take the next steps on the [idea/decision/concern] I shared. Do you have additional thoughts to share now, or should I schedule a few minutes for us to talk later in the week?*

*As a reminder, this is important because [your reasons you shared in the initial conversation] and that hasn't gone away. When can we decide on a resolution?*

*What do you need from me to close the loop on [the issue we discussed] by [DATE]?*



## Taking Action

What's one action you'll take now to put these ideas to work for you?

What's the support you need to make it happen?

## Additional Resources

*Check out these tools share them with your colleagues and friends. Or go to [RedCapeRevolution.com/free-tools](https://RedCapeRevolution.com/free-tools) for more!*

- **3 Secret Ways to Switch Gears in Your Career (A Guide to Get Unstuck Now and Move Forward Fast)**  
[RedCapeRevolution.com/switch-gears-in-career](https://RedCapeRevolution.com/switch-gears-in-career)
- **Your Ultimate Checklist to Better Decisions at Work**  
[RedCapeRevolution.com/decisions-checklist/](https://RedCapeRevolution.com/decisions-checklist/)
- **What to Say to Build Confidence at Work**  
[TinyURL.com/RCRConfidence](https://TinyURL.com/RCRConfidence)
- **Planning Guide: How to Network While You Work**  
[TinyURL.com/NetworkwithDarcy](https://TinyURL.com/NetworkwithDarcy)

### On-Demand Video Courses

- **Should You Stay or Go? Make Your Best Career Decision** (on demand video course)  
[RedCapeRevolution.com/should-i-stay-or-go-course-all/](https://RedCapeRevolution.com/should-i-stay-or-go-course-all/)
- **Create Career Clarity (on-demand video course)**  
[RedCapeRevolution.com/create-career-clarity-now/](https://RedCapeRevolution.com/create-career-clarity-now/)
- **How to Make a Bigger Impact (on-demand video mini-course)**  
[TinyURL.com/MakeImpactwithDarcy](https://TinyURL.com/MakeImpactwithDarcy)

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Thanks for being here today!*