



# 6 Ways to Prepare for Difficult Conversations

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In any courageous conversation, there are three conversations playing out:

- **The what happened? conversation:** Most difficult conversations involve disagreement about what has happened or what should happen.
- **The feelings conversation:** Every difficult conversation also asks and answers questions about feelings.
- **The identity conversation:** This is the conversation we each have with ourselves about what this situation means to us.

Every difficult conversation involves grappling with these **three conversations**, so engaging successfully requires learning to operate effectively in each of the three realms.

## Getting yourself ready

In preparation for your conversation, consider: the environment – is it safe for both parties; humility – recognition that each party is as much a part of the challenge as they are a part of the solution; readiness – are you both ready for a courageous conversation?

## Remember: the body speaks first, never lies and always wins

Breathe deeply and slowly and sit in an open posture when you get to have the conversation, otherwise your body will think it's in a threat situation.

Sit with your feet on the ground, back and spine is upright – but with a relaxed spine. Your arms, hands, legs and ankles are open, uncrossed and unfolded, your gaze direct but with soft eyes.

Notice your mind-talk – is it fearful and negative? Practice saying 'I'm going to be brave, open, clear, kind and curious'.

## Starting the conversation

Your opening statement (this can only be a max of 2 minutes to avoid overwhelming your partner and causing them to become armoured up and defensive)

### Name the issue.

The problem named is the problem solved. Name the behaviour that is causing the problem and the area the behaviour is impacting.

### Select a specific example that illustrates the behaviour or situation you want to change.

Since you only have two minutes in which to make your entire opening statement, this example must be succinct.

### Describe your emotions about this issue.

Telling someone what emotion his or her behaviour evokes in you is intimate and disarming. You are letting the person know that you are affected, that you are vulnerable.

### Clarify what is at stake.

In other words, why is this important? What is at stake for **you**, for the **other person**, **others**, for the **customer**, for the **team**, for the **organisation**?

### Identify your part and contribution to this problem.

What is appropriate here is a brief acknowledgement that you recognise any role you may have played in creating the problem and that you intend to do something about it.

### Indicate your wish to resolve the issue.

Use the word resolve. It shows that there is not a firing squad waiting outside the door.

Invite the other(s) to respond. At the end, clarify what action or commitments will each of you take or not take

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