Difficult Conversations in the Workplace: How to Effectively Prepare for a Successful Conversation

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Learning Objectives

- Describe and discuss difficult workplace conversations
- Learn and apply techniques to **prepare** for the conversation
- Learn and apply techniques to **have** the conversation

Conversation examples

- Day to day conversations that affect our work lives
  - I want a promotion, but I was overlooked
  - I have to discuss lack of personal hygiene with a trainee
  - The nurse manager of my clinic is often late
  - I suspect substance abuse in my trainee
  - I feel that a colleague of mine is shirking their duties and putting extra work on me
Why are these conversations difficult?

- Potentially embarrassing topics
- Disbelief or denial from the receiver
- High stakes, if discussing remediation or promotion
- May be a hierarchy involved
- Relationship may be at risk
- Emotions from both sides

Why are these similar/different from parent/patient conversations?

**Similar**
- High stakes
- Emotions can be very high
- Want to maintain relationship
- No one is at their best
- May be uncertainty

**Different**
- Person may or may not be aware of the issue
- You engage on a different level
- Power base is different
- You will likely have a continued relationship with this person
Today's Skills

- Start with Heart
- ASK-TELL-ASK
- Combine skills in faculty-led demonstrations
Start with Heart....

- Prior to the conversation
  - Manage your emotions and get to cognitive frame of mind
- Begin a high risk conversation with the right motives
  - What do you want for yourself, the other person, and the relationship?

Preparing – Reflect on..

**The Situation:** Describe in neutral terms
  - What is the problem as you see/experience it?
  - Where is common ground?

Preparing – Reflect on..

**Self:**
- My stress reaction?
- My goal?
- How I do want to be in the conversation?

Preparing – Reflect on..

**The Other:**
- Assume is unaware or well-intentioned
- Recognize you do not know what’s going on for them
- Anticipate stress response
Small Group Discussion

Large Group Discussion - Questions on Self-Reflection Exercise?
**ASK-TELL-ASK**

- **ASK**
  - Invitation to discuss the issue
  - Use "I" statements

- **TELL**
  - Identify the problem
  - State the problem using facts and not emotion

- **ASK**
  - What is their perspective?
  - How do they see this issue?

**End Well and Make a Plan**

- **End well**
  - Conclude the conversation
  - Be prepared that it may not actually end with goals accomplished
  - Keep emotions in control

- **Make a Plan**
  - Next steps?
  - Provide support for future
  - Work on solutions
  - Maintain relationship
ASK-TELL-ASK Example

- **ASK**
  - Dan, I wanted to talk with you about something that has come to my attention. Do you have a minute?

- **TELL**
  - Two of the female fellows feel uncomfortable that you often put your arm around them while on clinical service.

- **ASK**
  - I would like to hear your perspective on these concerns.

End well and Make a Plan- Example

- **End Well**
  - Dan, I appreciate you taking these concerns seriously and for being open with me. Thank you for changing these behaviors.

- **Make a Plan**
  - I'm happy to meet again in a few weeks. You are a great clinician and I value your contribution to the fellowship.
Key Phrases-Initial Ask

- I’d like to discuss something with you that I think will help us work together more effectively.
- I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes? I’d like to talk about _____ with you and get your point of view.
- I’d like to talk about ____. I think we may have different ideas on how to ________.
- I’d like to see if we might reach a better understanding about ____. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well.
- I wanted to talk with you about __________ because_______ (why is it important; common ground)
- “I saw, noticed, I heard_______” (objectively describe, observed, changeable behavior)
- “I am __confused, surprised, uncertain, frustrated__” (name own state of mind, emotion)

Faculty Demonstration

- Roles
  - Conversation initiator
  - Conversation partner
- Activity
  - Faculty demonstration of cases
  - Large group discussion
Tips and Reminders....

- A successful outcome will depend on two things: how you present yourself and what you say.
- Acknowledge the emotion, both yours and theirs...Know and return to your purpose at difficult moments.
- Use "I" statements
- Don’t assume your conversation partner can see things from your point of view and think about their point of view
- Practice the conversation with a friend before holding the real one

Adapted from Judy Singer We Have to Talk: A Step-By-Step Checklist for Difficult Conversations, Judy Ringer, https://www.judyringer.com/.

Resources and Thank You

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OFD Session Evaluation
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