



Synchrony Connect



CHANGING WHAT'S POSSIBLE™

HOW TO HAVE



DIFFICULT EMPLOYEE CONVERSATIONS

Being a manager or business owner means sometimes having difficult conversations with your employees. Whether you need to address an associate's poor work performance, let people know they won't be getting a raise, or even fire someone, difficult conversations are a part of business life. Here are some strategies to make them easier and more effective.

Don't put it off.

Difficult conversations can be hard, but they are often necessary. Sweeping a problem under the rug will only make things worse. It's better to be proactive, address the situation and move forward than it is to let a bad situation escalate.

Have the conversation someplace private.

This may seem obvious, but it's important to acknowledge anyway. Talking about sensitive issues should always happen away from the rest of the team—someplace private where you won't be interrupted. This reduces the potential for embarrassment and gossip. It also helps create a more comfortable environment for honest, open discussion.

Here are some tips from Synchrony:

Plan what to say in advance.

Think about what you want to say before the meeting. This can help you clarify your message, anticipate the other person's reactions, and go into the conversation with more confidence. It can also help keep the conversation short and to the point, which further reduces the potential for discomfort.

Approach it with a positive mindset.

Instead of seeing a difficult conversation as "difficult," try to focus on the benefits of it. By reframing it as helpful and constructive, you can approach it with more a more positive, relaxed attitude that may help things go more smoothly. While it's important to address the problem, focus more on finding solutions, moving forward and making positive changes.

Be direct.

Don't drag it out. Get to the point quickly and don't sugarcoat things too much. While the direct approach may seem harsh on the surface, it's actually better for everyone. Instead of dancing around the issue, pull the Band-Aid off quick. It's easier for the other person to hear what you have to say when you say it as straightforward and honestly as possible.

Clarity is key.

Laying out the problem clearly and concisely makes it easier for the employee to acknowledge and understand. It also helps avoid confusion. If possible, offer concrete examples. Improvements and behavior changes can be made only if the other person knows exactly what they did wrong. Providing specific examples can make it easier for the other person to see what happened—and lead to solutions for improving the situation.

A little empathy goes a long way.

Keep in mind that bad news or criticism is usually hard to hear, even if it is well deserved. Underneath, we are all just human beings with feelings. So, put yourself in your employee's shoes. Show compassion by being sensitive to how he or she may be feeling. Deliver the news in

an honest, fair and genuine way. But, while it's good to show your sensitive side, don't ask for sympathy by acknowledging that the conversation is hard for you, too. It's important to keep the focus on your employee.

Be a good listener.

Difficult conversations can feel less like an attack when both parties have a chance to speak their minds. Even if you have figured out how to resolve the issue, try to be open to what the other person has to say. When you listen, acknowledge and validate their feelings and opinions, they feel more valued. This helps pave the way for positive change.

Manage your emotions.

Sometimes, difficult conversations lead to difficult emotions. If the other person doesn't react well to what you have to say, it's important to control the situation. Show compassion and empathy, but at the same time, try to reduce the tension. When emotions flare up, it can be hard to stay calm and courteous. Don't overreact or let things get too personal. Stay positive and keep the conversation professional.

Offer a solution.

It's not enough to focus on the problem. Think about what you want to accomplish moving forward. Go into the conversation ready to suggest some practical, productive action steps that can fix, or at least improve, the situation. At the end of your discussion, it should be clear what happens next and what everyone needs to do. At the same time, remain open to other options. It's possible that your conversation could reveal a better solution than what you originally had in mind.

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