

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS ACTION PLAN

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| Purpose | The purpose is to help preplan for meetings and coaching sessions. The various strategies listed below are helpful to use when navigating through difficult conversations in the workplace. The strategies will assist in planning for meetings with districts that involve giving difficult feedback, sharing challenging news around data, and/or sensitive topics such as diversity and inclusion. |
| <p>Things to Consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Set the talking points in advance: Giving the other person advance notice of what you would like to discuss allows him or her to prepare, too, and establishes clear expectations for both of you. II. Focus on facts, not feeling: Dig a bit into what you're feeling so you can understand and share your thoughts clearly. Try to separate what you know from what you think or feel. III. Create an environment of honesty: It is important to foster a sense of trust and mutual respect with members of the district that you support. Having regular feedback exchanges will help others to feel comfortable to be candid with you. When facing a tough conversation, ask questions to open up the conversation and show that you want to hear what the other person has to say. IV. Aim for understanding above consensus: Be empathetic and give the member(s) from your district(s) space to share their perspectives before you offer your own. V. Find a solution together: Every meeting should wrap up by setting clear action items. This is especially important when you are discussing topics such as data, equity plans, coaching, culturally responsive pedagogy, etc. <p>NOTE: A successful conversation means finding the most productive solution, not being right or proving a point.</p> | |
| Plan Out Your Approach | |
| State the reality of the situation. (Communicate clearly why you are meeting; there should be no surprises.) | |
| Why is it important for you to address this challenge? (Put another way, what important, shared value do you advance by having the conversation? For example, if opening a conversation with your team about inclusion, you might say, "It's important to me that we have an inclusive workplace and that we aim to be empathetic with each other.") | |
| What is your initial plan for the conversation? (Use data, equity plans, coaching, etc.) | |



| Find the Right Time for Conversation | |
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| Identify a date and time that works for all. (Make sure your calendar is clear, allow time needed for the meeting, avoid multitasking during meeting.) | |
| Be Aware of Identities You Bring to the Meeting | |
| What aspect of your identity influences you the most? (Gender, age, race, nationality, religious/spiritual affiliation, socioeconomic status—to name a few.) | |
| How does the awareness of your identities help you in not making assumptions and asking better questions during difficult conversations? (Awareness of our identities helps us to not make assumptions that those identities apply to others, which usually leads us to ask better questions and to listen to how people answer them.) | |
| Listen More Than You Talk | |
| What are some things that may distract you from giving your undivided attention during conversation? (Do everything you can to direct attention to the conversation itself.) | |
| How do you prevent misinterpretation of silence? (In conversations held over the phone or Zoom, your conversational partners can sometimes misinterpret silence as a sign of a dropped call or technical problems—or they may simply worry you are checking your email in another window.) | |
| What are some techniques that you can use to pay attention to what is being said and not what you want to say? (One way to do this is to strive to repeat the last sentence of what others say. That sustains your attention on what they say until they finish, instead of diverting your attention to how you will respond.) | |
| Own When You Get It Wrong | |
| When you get it wrong during a conversation, what steps do you take to make it right? (A key trait of inclusive leaders is not the absence of error but awareness and willingness to accept that you will get it wrong sometimes. When you get it wrong, do not minimize. Do not focus your apology on your good intent. Instead, focus your apology on empathizing with the hurt caused and learning how you can do better next time.) | |



| Follow Up (in the right way) When the Conversation Is Done | |
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| <p>After a conversation, how do you indicate appreciation of perspectives shared, moments where you learned, and when active listening was displayed?</p> <p>(Bear in mind that, while the conversation was difficult for you, it may have been even more difficult for the person you were speaking to! Take time to express your gratitude in writing, whether via email or a handwritten note, for their participation.)</p> | |
| <p>Indicate a specific action you will take in response to the conversation and commit to a date for that next step's completion.</p> <p>(Bear in mind that, while the conversation was difficult for you, it may have been even more difficult for the person you were speaking to! Take time to express your gratitude in writing, whether via email or a handwritten note, for their participation. In that note, try to indicate specific areas of appreciation, such as a perspective that was shared, moments where you learned, or places where active listening was displayed.)</p> | <p>"I will talk to ___ about __," or "I will exhibit greater consciousness and sensitivity about ____."</p> |

