

HAVING THE ESSENTIAL CONVERSATION

This model allows us to confront tough issues with courage, compassion, and skill. We learn while enriching the relationship.

Before diving in here, you will have prepared for this conversation by drafting your opening statement (page 2 of this toolkit) and practicing it. You will have also thought through ideal resolutions.

Now it's time to STEP UP and have a heartfelt, genuine Essential Conversation with the goal of strengthening the relationship with this person, while also solving the issue.

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”

- STEPHEN R. COVEY

OPENING STATEMENT

Use the Preparation Checklist (on the next page) to prepare your opening statement. Practice saying it out loud, in 60 to 90 seconds. Remember, your opening statement should:

1. Name the issue.
2. Briefly state the specific example that illustrates the behaviour or situation you want to change.
3. Describe the effects of this issue.
4. Clarify what is at stake.
5. Identify your contribution to this problem.
6. Indicate your wish to resolve the issue and describe your ideal outcome.
7. Invite your partner to respond.

INTERACTION

When it comes time to have the conversation - inquire into your partner's views. Listen, to understand.

Use paraphrasing and a perception check. Be mindful to really listen

Dig for full understanding; don't be satisfied with the surface. They may need help to figure out what they think about this, and to be able to articulate it. Remember, you've had time to reflect and prepare your thoughts.

Make sure your partner knows that you fully understand and acknowledge his or her position and interests.

RESOLUTION

What have we learned from this Essential Conversation? Where are we now? Has anything been left unsaid that needs saying? What is needed for resolution? How can we move forward from here, given our new understanding?

Make a new agreement and determine how you will hold each other responsible for keeping it.

Based on: *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work & in Life, One Conversation at a Time*, by Susan Scott.

PREPARING YOUR OPENING STATEMENT

01 NAME THE ISSUE

- What is going on?
- How long has this been going on?
- The single issue that I most need to resolve is: _____

02 GIVE A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE

- Use just one example.
- Try your best not to show emotions here; you'll describe your emotions in the next step.

03 DESCRIBE THE EFFECTS OF THIS ISSUE

- How bad are things?
- How is this issue currently affecting me?
- What results are currently being produced for me by this situation?
- How is this issue currently affecting others?
- What results are currently being produced for them by this situation?
- When I consider the impact on myself and others, what are my emotions?

04 CLARIFY WHAT IS AT STAKE

- If nothing changes, what's likely to happen?
- What's at stake for me relative to this issue?
- What's at stake for others?
- When I consider these possible outcomes, what are my emotions?

05 EXAMINE YOUR CONTRIBUTION

- What is my contribution to this issue? (How might I have contributed to the problem?)
- What should I have done sooner?
- What could I have said sooner?
- How have my assumptions played into this?

06 DESCRIBE THE IDEAL OUTCOME

- When this issue is resolved, what difference will that make?
- What results will I enjoy?
- How might resolution benefit the other person? How will they look at this?
- When this issue is resolved, what results will others enjoy? Will this be appealing to them?
- When I imagine this resolution, what are my emotions?

07 INVITE YOUR PARTNER TO RESPOND

- Remember to listen to understand.
- Use empathy to understand their perspective.

MAKE A CONTRACT WITH YOURSELF

- What is the most useful step I could take to move this issue toward resolution?
- What are the possible roadblocks? How will I get past them?
- When will I take this step?

As I prepare for this conversation I've identified an important step to begin to resolve this issue. I have chosen the date by which I will take this step. There will be other steps, perhaps many of them. This is the first step and I commit to taking it.

What else do I commit to?

ACTION:	I COMMIT TO DOING THIS BY:

NOW TAKE A BREAK, WALK AROUND AND BREATHE. BREATHING IS GOOD.

ESSENTIAL CONVERSATION COMMON ERRORS

A few things we've seen time and again as clients practice this model. Read through them before your conversation to help you avoid these common errors.

WRITING THE SCRIPT

We imagine the entire conversation in our heads and then we talk ourselves out of it because we know "exactly" how it's going to go. We literally put words in their mouth as we create a scenario in our head. This is also a version of Story Telling - we create a story based on our reality, not facts.

THE SOFT START

"Hey, how's it going?" It's disrespectful and dishonest and most people can smell the hidden agenda from a mile away. If their response is, "Great!" it makes it really hard to re-route the conversation where you originally intended it to go.

TOO MANY PILLOWS

This is when we soften the message and the delivery to avoid hurt feelings. We provide them with "pillows" to land on. "So things didn't go so great with that report. I mean, it wasn't all bad but it could have been smoother in some areas. I'm sure you know what I mean and you're smart, so next time will be better." They're wondering, "Was that praise, or criticism?"

THE OREO COOKIE

Slipping in the real message amongst other messages. We should be praising more than we should be reprimanding but keep those conversations separate. The reason? You risk losing the critical component of the conversation and you send mixed messages. Saying, "You did a good job, but..." translates to, "you did a lousy job." When you offer a compliment down the road, people will be waiting for the other shoe to drop.

MACHINE GUN NELLY

This is typically, the bully. They hate confrontation, they avoid it, let things build, work themselves up until... BAM...they spew the message out with fury and storm out of the room.

TOO MUCH TALKING

After your opening, you invite them to respond ... please let them! Put your version of reality at the door and hear them out. When you are talking, you are not learning. Do your best not to interrupt. Try to listen with the intention of understanding.

COPPING OUT

Don't cancel and don't allow interruptions - the other person may think that the conversation isn't that important after all; and you risk losing some of the momentum and meaning. You want to leave time to create clarity about the next step, even if it is simply another conversation.