10 HYPER-EFFECTIVE Templates for Difficult Conversations

Setting the stage, opening a conversation, building understanding, and adding value. These difficult conversation templates have you covered throughout the entire conversation process. Use these fill-in-the-blanks templates to master data backed conversation techniques AND conquer your most challenging conversations.

Use these master templates for use in one on one conversations. To apply these templates to small and large groups, use templates 9-10 for adaptations

Korero
Solutions

1. PREPARING FOR THE CONVERSATION

Use this template before the conversation to ensure you are adequately prepared

Follow these 4 steps In order to prepare

Ask yourself these reflective questions
- What is the message I would like to convey to the other person?
- What about this is this important to me?
- What personal story may I want to share regarding this topic?
- What past experience may be impacting or affecting this current situation?
- What am I curious about regarding the other person's action, behavior or words?
- What questions do I need to ask to gain an understanding of their perspective?
- What is my hope for this conversation?

Consider Location
As the saying goes, location, location, location…. this is about what your goal is for the conversation, and what location would best serve the end result. For a challenging conversation, aim for a neutral setting. A location can be as casual as a coffee shop to someplace more formal, like a boardroom. Depending on the topic of conversation, you may need to consider the amount of privacy that is necessary.

Items to bring
Ensure that you have the things you need to have a productive conversation.
- Reflective notes (from reflective questions)
- A notebook with a couple of pens
- A way to keep time - remember to place electronics away or leave on silent face down
- *An open mind*

WHY IT WORKS

Follow these 4 steps

Taking time to prepare
- Clarifies perspective
- Gives time for personal reflection
- Ability to "cool down" emotionally

Asking questions
- Prevents circular conversation
- Deepens understanding
- Encourages mutual understanding
- Shows you care

Location,
- Manage perceived power dynamic
- Ensures confidentiality
- Sets tone for the conversation (us vs problem instead of me vs you)

Coming Prepared
- Keeps you on track
- Ensures you don't forget important points
- Helps when you are stuck

How people most often dealt with their *recent workplace conflicts*:*
89%: Let conflicts escalate
67%: Took extra measures to avoid a colleague with whom they had disagreed
29%: Took several days to resolve the conflict
24%: Avoided social events with colleagues
16%: Had still not resolved a conflict, which may have gotten worse over time
12%: Quit their job
10%: Avoided going to meetings
9%: Avoided coming to work for multiple days

*CPP Global

2. EFFECTIVE INVITATIONS

Use this template to invite the other party to engage in a conversation

Call or e-mail script
We recommend calling to personally invite the individual to the conversation whenever possible. Adjust email script if calling.

Subject: **Schedule a time to speak in person**

> Hi *[First Name]*,
>
> I am reaching out to request a time for us to discuss *[insert issue]**.
>
> I would like to resolve this together and have an opportunity to speak in person to gain an understanding of your perspective.
>
> Let me know if there is a day or time that works best for you to sit down for *[insert required time needed]*. I can book a location for us to meet uninterrupted.
>
> I look forward to speaking soon.
>
> *[Your name]*

*This should be the issue at a high level. DO NOT get into the details, specifics or share your perspective during this step.

WHY IT WORKS

Keep it simple
If you are going to email the invitation, this is not the time to get into the details of the issue. This email will set the tone of the meeting, keep it polite and future focused.

Be Clear
Ensure they know what you are wanting to discuss without being positional. Let them know how much time you will are looking to book them for and respectful this timeframe.

Give them options
Each person requires a different amount of time to process and prepare for a difficult conversation. By allowing them the opportunity to let you know the day and time that work best for them, you show that you are respectful of their schedule and personal conflict style.
Respects each persons schedule

3. SETTING UP THE CONVERSATION

Use this template to start the conversation

Thank them for joining you

Reiterate the time you have allocated to discuss - Confirm it still works for them

Frame the issue
- Ensure you are both on the same page as to what you are there to discuss

Set your intention
- Restate that together, you are confident a solution can be found

WHY IT WORKS

Sets the tone for the conversation
By coming in with an open mind and a goal of understanding their perspectives, you both show respect and demonstrate how you wish to be treated during the conversation.

Frames the issue as neutral
By framing the issue in a way that shows it is both of you vs the problem instead of each of you vs each other, it immediately places you both on the same team, working together to achieve both your personal goals.

Balances Power Dynamic
Allowing the other person to speak first demonstrates your respect for what they have to say. Seek to understand them before being understood by them.

4. ENSURING YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Use this template to begin digging into your difficult conversation

Here is where your questions come in

Tools
Reflect
Summarize
Empathize

Ask questions
- Gain an understanding of their perspective
- Write down any areas where they have a common view as yours
- Note any statement you would like clarity on
- Track the area you would like to explore at a deeper level.
- Listen until they are done speaking
- Do not interrupt

WHY IT WORKS

Reveals new information
When thinking about the other persons perspective, what we believe is mostly based upon assumptions. By asking questions, you clarify this understanding, often learning new information in the process.

Allows them to feel heard
Taking time to ask questions based upon what they are telling you is a great way to demonstrate to the other person you are listening.

Gets to what is underneath the issue
Asking questions is a great way to remove the layers that may be covering the root cause of an issue.

Builds understanding of issue complexities
Hearing the other persons perspective, while asking questions to clarify your assumptions will give you a broader picture of the issue. It is often more complex than you first see from your perspective.

Reveals other issue
You may uncover that there are addition entangled issues that could inhibit solutions/decisions you originally thought would address the issue.

5. SHARING YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Use this template to help in sharing your perspective in a way it will be heard

Share your perspective by engaging in a discussion.

Some ways to phrase your story during this section;

> During that event, what was happening for me was...

> I didn't know...

> It's important for both of us....

> Something important to me about this...

> This impact this had on me...

Points to remember

Reflect on areas of common views and interests, then share the variances.

Allow them to ask you for clarity or questions to expand their understanding.

Keep an open mind, as this discussion process may bring what was an unconscious action or reaction to the conscious level.

This is a great opportunity to help build understanding as to why you reacted or made the decision you did.

## WHY IT WORKS

You have made them feel understood
Feeling understood increases the chances for the other person to listen to and relate with you. This often leads to an increased level of openness and willingness to collaborate.

Link common interests
Now that you have a deeper understanding of their perspective you are able to link your experience back to theirs, increasing the impact of your perspective.

Continue having an open conversation
Conversation are a two way street. By using this opportunity to continue to ask questions you will both continue gaining clarity.
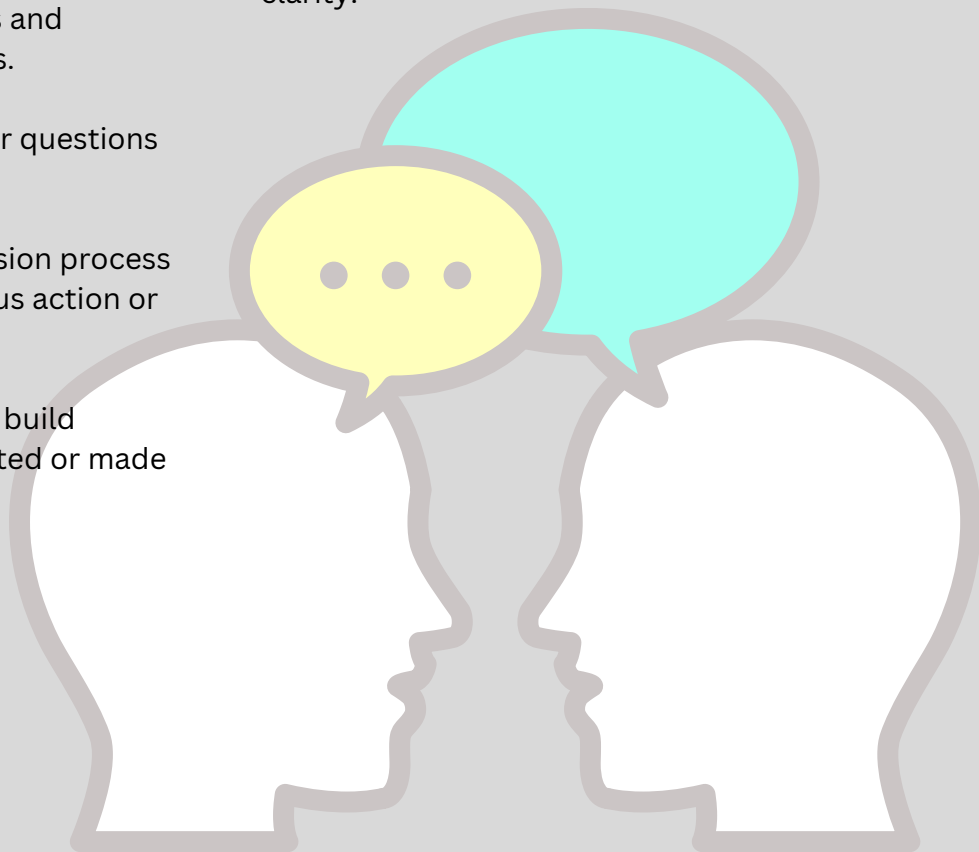
6. CREATING VALUE ADD SOLUTIONS

Use this template to assist in collaborating on solutions

Step-by-Step Approach

1.
Identify what is most important
Discuss what needs to be kept at the forefront as most important when looking for solutions. What criteria must be met for a successful solution?

2.
Brainstorming ideas.
No judgement
Do not evaluate until you have multiple ideas. Write everything down to validate all the solutions given out

3.
Evaluate which ideas
Benchmark each solution against the criteria you have set out in *Step 1*.

4.
Write out the agreement
Ensure this is read and provided to both you and the other person.

5.
Schedule a follow-up meeting
Discuss when/how you will determine if the solution was successful. When and how will you follow up?

WHY IT WORKS

Respects the difference
Identifying what is most important ensures that both individuals needs will be met within the final solution to the greatest possible extent.

Allows for creative solutions
Often the first ideas within a brainstorm are not the ones chosen. By putting down as many ideas as you can, building off of one another's thoughts.

Everything is created by the two of you!
The best way to create a solution with the greatest chance of success, is to create a solution tailored to your needs and goals.

Creates opportunity to come back and evaluate
This removes the pressure that you need to get the solution perfect the first time. If it is not working, you have a list of other solutions you can come back and review.

Consider
Are there people that need to know about what you discussed or the solutions you created. Who and how will this be communicated?

7. POST CONVERSATION FOLLOW-UP

Use this template to keep positive momentum from your conversation

Subject: **[issue] conversation Follow-up**

Hi *[First Name]*,

Thank you for the constructive conversation [yesterday]. I am looking forward to working with you to improve our working relationship.

As discussed within the conversation, we had agreed that you would [*actions]* by *[date]* and I would *actions]* by *[date]*.

We will meet again on *[date]* to follow up. *[I/you]* will book this in both our calendars.

Please confirm that this is what you left the conversation understanding.

I look forward to speaking again soon.

[Your name]

WHY IT WORKS

Maintains a positive tone
Reflects on the fact that you were able to cone together for a conversation together and achieve a positive outcome.

Captures any actionable items
Creates an actionable list of expectations from both sides that you can both go back to.

Confirms commitment to follow up
Sets a time so each person knows that if things are not working as anticipated, there is an opportunity to address concerns.

Even the best solutions may have unforeseen consequences when they are implemented. Saying that they can reach out prior to the meeting allows the opportunity to get ahead of any issues that arise prior to them becoming fires to put out later.

8. FOSTERING YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Use this template to build your working relationship

There are many factors that contribute to the dynamics of a working relationship. No matter the seniority level, position or responsibility, there are always things you can do to build your relationship with people in your organization.

Team Building Exercises
Create the opportunity for people to get to know one another as individuals, not just job positions.

Personality Quizzes
Be it Personality types, Communication styles, Conflict styles, Colors etc, personality quizzes give a glimpse into the uniqueness of each member of your team.

Remember that tests are a snapshot of who the person is, a single aspect of who they are in that moment. DO NOT use these to label, form biases or make assumptions about their abilities.

Appreciation
Each person wants to be appreciated for the contribution they make and they impact they have. This very important aspect of building relationships needs to go in all directions, not just top-down.

Respect
This word means different things to each individual. Find out what to means to those on your team. Gain an understanding of what each person values.

WHY IT WORKS

Establishes a relationship before there are issues
Building relationships helps us remove the negative assumptions we may make about their behavior when they are not congruent with how we know the person to typically be.

Getting to know people
Building meaningful relationships isn't just good for our career, it is also good for our mental health.

Mutual Respect
By fostering relationships with others, mutually beneficial relationships are formed. These give each person a sense of dignity, appreciation, contribution and value.

Mitigate biases
The more time we take to get to know someone, the more we see them as an individual. This removes them from the group that we hold biases, conscious and unconscienced, towards.

Create a network of mutual support
Through actively engaging in appreciation and respectful behaviors, you show the individual that you care about them as a person and value being on the same team as them.

9. ADAPTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP CONVERSATIONS

Use these adaptions to modify templates for small groups (3-20 people)

1 Invite everyone to a meeting, utilizing the template from *2. Effective Invitations.*

2 Once everyone is together, begin by stating that your hope is everyone will have the opportunity to provide their input, that you value each and every person's unique contribution.

3 Ensure everyone is comfortable and understands what you are there to discuss.

4 Make a list of participants in attendance so whether you go from left to right or random, you will ensure everyone has been given the opportunity to speak uninterrupted.
    Allow time for other participants to ask for clarity or a deeper understanding of the opinions shared.

5 Ensure there is no finger-pointing or blaming. This can be achieved by asking each participant to use "I" statements when sharing.

6 Allow time for free flowing conversation. Encourage dialogue as long as it remains respectful, beneficial and future focused.

7 Thank everyone for their input and keep the opportunity for input open for 24 hours.

8 Reiterate that together, forging this path forward by respecting each perspective will increase the probability of success whatever they do.

WHY IT WORKS

Ensure each person received the same information
Ensure that each person has time to prepare for the meeting and knows what they are coming in to discuss and solve. By ensuring this is an action and solution oriented meeting, people will be more willing to participate.

Honor both introverts and extroverts
Making note to ensure everyone had an opportunity to speak, be heard. Having a timeframe afterwards, leaving time for reflection, will ensure each team member can bring their best ideas to the solution.

Leaves time for different information processing
Each person will input and process the information that is being shared differently. By ensuring there is time for further input prior to decisions being made, you will capture feedback that would otherwise be missed.

10. ADAPTIONS FOR LARGE GROUP CONVERSATIONS

Use these adaptions to modify templates for small groups (20-100+ people)

1A **Medium - Large groups**
Follow the same process as small groups yet adjust your time for responses. If you have set an hour you may only be able to give 2 min for each of the 30 team members.

1B **For Extra Large groups**
Break people into groups of 10 -15 participants to discuss the assigned topics. Try to mix up the participants as nature usually has same people grouping together.

Allow a representative to speak on the groups behalf to share highlights of the conversation.

2 **Go Slow to Go Fast**
Don't rush the meeting, if it seems more time is required, communicate that you will book another meeting to allow for these valuable conversations to take place.

Check in with the team to see if people need a break. Ensure breaks are no longer then 15 min, as you may lose the positive momentum.

3 **Closing the meeting**
Thank everyone for their open and honest conversations.

Wrap up with a list of the positives you have noted throughout this conversation.

4 **Give Time for Processing**
Identify key members who will continue to take input and feedback for the next 24-48 hours.

WHY IT WORKS

Utilize your time effectively
Managing your time effectively is essential to ensuring each team member has their perspective heard.

You will have to monitor and ensure each individual has their chance to speak with minimal interruptions.

Giving space for the process
Consider the importance of a positive outcome and how essential teamwork will be to see a solution through. By spending time laying a strong foundation, your future work will be far easier as your team has developed a strong rapport and the skills to work together executing the plan.

End on a high note
The tone you set at the end of the meeting is the feeling that will stick with your team as they go back to their jobs putting ideas into action. By highlighting the great work and positives they have already achieved, you will tie these emotions into your next stage.

Leaves time for different types of information processing
Refer to 9. Adaptions for Small Group Conversations