Spark!™

An Interactive Team Discussion Program

How to Have Difficult Conversations

Part 2 of 2

Our Statement of Principles expresses the beliefs and philosophy held by our founders, forming the basis of our operating principles and Our Company's Mission. It states that we all should conduct ourselves so that we achieve specific objectives, including:

• Opportunities are provided for employees to progress toward personal goals.

• Employment in the company enhances, rather than jeopardizes, the proper functioning of the family, which we believe to be the foundation of society.

Our employee engagement surveys have indicated that employees find two-way communication between their supervisors/managers and themselves to be very important. Also, we want every employee to have the skills necessary to participate as an engaged and effective team member.

As a leader, your success is measured in large part by the accomplishments of your team. When your team doesn't feel like they can share feedback with you or a coworker, your team performance will diminish. As stated above, one of our collective goals as a company is to provide opportunities for employees to progress toward personal goals. Providing a work environment where they feel free to speak up in a constructive way is an important part of that goal. Similarly, being able to successfully conduct difficult conversations at work is likely to positively spillover into employees' families and home life.

This pair of Spark! Discussion Starters is designed to provide you with facilitating opportunities to foster a more welcoming environment for employees—an environment in which they feel able to participate in difficult conversations.

Facilitator Notes

This is the second discussion starter, and focuses on the process by which to successfully conduct difficult conversations. The other discussion starter confirms with employees that when difficult conversations are to be had, we welcome them and have an agreed upon set of rules by which to conduct those conversations.

Each discussion starter is designed to help you facilitate a discussion among your team members. **You are not to teach or tell them what to do; your role is to use these materials to facilitate discussion.**

Your Role:
• Let people talk and answer the questions for themselves.
• Ask encouraging follow-up questions where appropriate and as time permits.
• Take notes when participants ask you for follow-up information.

Expected time: this module should take approximately **30 minutes** to complete with up to 8 participants.
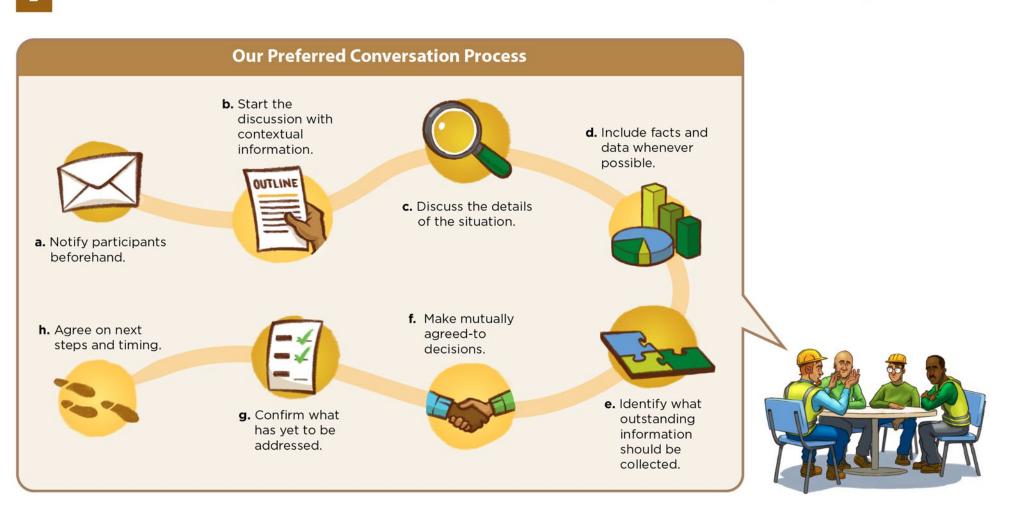
Facilitator Notes

Desired Outcomes for This Module:
• Participants will understand a preferred process for having difficult conversations.

Facilitator: please proceed to read the information on pages 4 - 8 to the group, starting with number 1 and pausing for discussion when indicated.

1 "Our Company's Statement of Principles leads us to create a workplace where everyone is able to speak more freely about difficult topics. In today's session, we're going to explore a preferred process for having difficult conversations." *(Continue reading.)*

2 "Let's begin by having someone read the conversation process below." *(Stop and do.)*

Our Preferred Conversation Process

a. Notify participants beforehand.

b. Start the discussion with contextual information.

c. Discuss the details of the situation.

d. Include facts and data whenever possible.

e. Identify what outstanding information should be collected.

f. Make mutually agreed-to decisions.

g. Confirm what has yet to be addressed.

h. Agree on next steps and timing.

3 "The process starts by **letting people know beforehand** that they will be asked to talk about a specific topic." *(Continue reading.)*

4 "If a coworker came to you to tell you that later in the day, they wanted to involve you in a conversation about a certain topic, would you appreciate that heads up? Why would that be good for you to know? " *(Stop and discuss.)*

5 "The next step in the process is to start the conversation by **setting the context of the conversation**. Review some examples of contextual information below. In your opinion, is one more important than the others? If so, which one and why?" *(Stop and discuss.)*

Setting the Context of the Conversation

🔍 What topic are we talking about?

👥 Why was each of us selected to participate in this conversation?

❗ What's the main issue or concern?

💬 Why aren't we just talking about it as we would any other topic?

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6 "The next step in the process is to discuss the details of the issue. It's common to use the following framework to uncover the details. Have someone read the information below." *(Stop and do.)*

Setting the Context of the Conversation

Where
Where does this issue most commonly occur?

When
When does this issue most commonly occur?

How
How is this issue affecting customers and employees?

What
What are the factors that need to be considered?

Who
Who's involved in the issue?

Why
Why is it important that we address the issue?

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7 "Can you think of some other situational details that you might want to know before trying to resolve a concern?" *(Stop and discuss.)*

8 "An important step in this process is to **include relevant facts and data** whenever possible. It can take time to gather relevant facts, but facts can shift how people think about a topic. In your opinion, why can facts be important to a discussion?" *(Stop and discuss.)*

9 "The next step in the process is to identify what **other data and information** that can be practically obtained, that should be considered. Not having this information in the moment shouldn't necessarily stop the conversation, but it's important to agree on what additional information should be considered before making a final decision. " *(Continue reading.)*

10 "In your opinion, what are some possible problems with waiting to get more and more information before making a decision about a difficult topic?" *(Stop and discuss.)*

11 "With that in mind, this conversation process doesn't stop and wait for all data to arrive. As a group, you may need to make conclusions while keeping an open-mind for future information." *(Continue reading.)*

12 "As part of this process, an important step is to make agreed-upon conclusions and decisions. When discussing a difficult topic, everyone needs to be driving towards conclusions and decisions." *(Continue reading.)*

13 "In your opinion, when is it good to discuss a difficult topic and not achieve conclusions? And when is it good to drive towards conclusions and make decisions?" *(Stop and discuss.)*

14 "Once you've agreed on some conclusions and decisions, there may be some items that haven't been fully addressed. Therefore, it's important to agree on **what related topics will be addressed** in the near future." *(Continue reading.)*

15 "Consider a time when you've had to discuss a difficult topic at work or in your personal life. What happens if the people involved don't agree to address unresolved topics and issues?" *(Stop and discuss.)*

16 "Does this make you feel more committed or less committed to the group?" *(Stop and discuss.)*

17 "The last step in this process is to **agree on next steps and the timing** of those steps. If you've followed the process and made progress on the topic, you should have made decisions that will affect work activities and/or behaviors. Don't let the fruits of this conversation go to waste. Write down what you've agreed to, what should change and when. And be sure to write down the data and related topics that the people will act on in the future." *(Stop and discuss.)*

18 "Let's take a big picture view of the process again by reviewing the steps below." *(Stop and discuss.)*

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h. Agree on next steps and timing

19 "What do you think about this process and what will it take to make it useful where you work?" *(Stop and discuss.)*

20 "Thank you for participating in this session today. We encourage you to experiment with using this process to improve how your team works within itself, and with other team members." *(Stop and discuss.)*

This concludes this module.

Congratulations on facilitating your team through this module!

On this page are suggested steps you should take to continue your facilitating efforts with your team and to act on the information shared by your team.

- Prioritize and select discussed items that you can work on and/or delegate; then share progress with the group as available.

- When you have an opportunity to talk with each person individually, be sure to discuss some ideas that he/she raised and encourage him/her to take more ownership of the positive impact that they can have on the vision.

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