

BRAVE CONVERSATIONS

A Simple Guide for
Leaders to Navigate Hard
Conversations with
Confidence and Care



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QUICK SELF-CHECK



Before diving in, take a moment to check in with yourself. If any of these sound familiar, this guide is for you:

- ☐ You avoid giving hard feedback because you don't want to hurt someone's feelings.
- ☐ You often think, "It's easier if I just deal with it myself."
- ☐ You've left a conversation wishing you had been more direct.
- ☐ You care deeply about your team and don't want to come across as harsh.
- ☐ You believe in honesty but struggle with how to deliver it.

If you're nodding yes to even one of these, you're not alone. And you're in the right place.



WHY THIS MATTERS

Hard conversations are where trust is built. They're uncomfortable, but necessary — not because something is broken, but because growth is happening. As a leader, you're not avoiding discomfort; you're choosing clarity, courage, and care.

Too many leaders mistake silence for kindness. They think they're protecting their team's feelings by keeping things to themselves. But withholding the truth is not compassion, it's avoidance. Telling the truth, kindly and clearly, is one of the greatest forms of care. It gives your team the chance to grow, to succeed, and to show up differently.

Honesty is not harshness, it's hope. It says, "I believe you can handle this, and I want to see you thrive."

Goal of this Guide: In 15 minutes, you'll walk away with a simple, repeatable approach to hard conversations that builds trust, preserves dignity, and gets to the heart of the issue.



GROUND YOURSELF FIRST

Before you speak, pause. Reflect. Regulate. Get clear on what really needs to be addressed.

Ask yourself:

- What is the real issue here?
- What outcome am I hoping for?
- What might this person be experiencing?

Mini-Prep Checklist:

- ☐ My message is clear.
- ☐ I've looked at this from their point of view.
- ☐ I'm calm and open to listening.

Pro Tip: Breathe deeply before you speak. Nervous system first, leadership second.

What Not to Do:

- Jump into the conversation while you're still upset or unclear.
- Assume your perspective is the only one that matters.
- Plan the “perfect script” but forget to consider how they might feel.

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SET THE TONE EARLY

Lead with honesty and kindness. You're not dropping a bomb. You're opening a door.

Sample openers:

- "Can we talk about something that might be a little uncomfortable? I respect you, and I think it matters."
- "I want to share something that might be hard to hear, and I'm bringing it up because I believe in your growth and value transparency."

Make it mutual: Use "we" language: "We've been having some tension on deadlines. Let's talk about what's behind it and how we solve it."

Pro Tip: Direct isn't rude. It's respectful when done with care.

What Not to Do:

- Dance around the issue for several minutes with small talk or nervous filler.
- Say things like, "I don't even know how to say this..." or "This is going to be really awkward..."
- Ambush the person without setting context or giving them a chance to engage.

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SAY IT CLEARLY, STAY CURIOUS

Say what you need to say — simply. Then pause and invite their perspective.

Say:

- “Here’s what I’m seeing...”
- “Can you share how you’re experiencing this?”
- “What do you think is contributing to this?”

Avoid:

- Blame-y "you" statements (e.g., "You always..." or "You never...")
- Over-explaining or softening so much that your message gets lost

Pro Tip: Let silence do some of the work. People need a moment to respond honestly.

What Not to Do:

- Lecture or dominate the conversation.
- Assume you already know all the reasons why it’s happening.
- Turn it into a monologue. This is a dialogue.

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COLLABORATE ON THE WAY FORWARD

This isn't about being right. It's about moving forward together.

Try this:

- “What would progress look like for both of us?”
- “How can we check in and make sure this improves?”

Agree on one small step. Then follow through.

Pro Tip: Leaders aren't fixers — they're facilitators of ownership and change.

What Not to Do:

- End the conversation without any clear next steps.
- Take full ownership for fixing the issue on your own.
- Make vague promises like “We'll see how it goes.”

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REFLECT AND REPAIR (IF NEEDED)

After the conversation, reflect.

- What went well?
- What was hard?
- What would I do differently next time?

And if you fumbled? Own it. Circle back.

Say:

- “I’ve been thinking about our conversation. I could’ve said that more clearly. Thanks for sticking with it.”

Pro Tip: Repair builds more trust than perfection ever could.

What Not to Do:

- Pretend it never happened if something felt off.
- Beat yourself up for not being perfect.
- Avoid following up because you’re worried about how it landed.



RECAP: BRAVE CONVERSATIONS CHEAT SHEET

A quick-reference summary to keep in your back pocket:

The 5 Steps



1. Ground Yourself First – Regulate, reflect, and clarify your intention.
2. Set the Tone Early – Be direct and kind from the start.
3. Say It Clearly, Stay Curious – Speak plainly, then listen deeply.
4. Collaborate on the Way Forward – Co-create next steps and accountability.
5. Reflect and Repair (If Needed) – Debrief, repair missteps, and learn.

What Not to Do (Highlights)



- Don't avoid the conversation or wait too long.
- Don't ramble, sugarcoat, or over-apologize.
- Don't make it about being right. Make it about being real.
- Don't skip next steps or follow-up.

Brave conversations don't have to be long. They just have to be honest.



REFLECTION & JOURNALING PROMPTS

Take a few minutes to sit with these questions. Write freely. You don't need to get it "right," just get it down. Reflection is the groundwork of wise leadership.

Personal Reflection:

- What's one conversation I've been avoiding? Why?
- What would it look like to approach it with care and clarity?
- How do I feel when someone is honest with me, even if it's hard to hear?

Before Your Next Conversation:

- What's the heart of the message I need to communicate?
- How can I show up in a way that invites openness?
- What values do I want to lead with in this conversation?

After a Conversation:

- What felt good about how I handled that?
- What could I learn from this for next time?
- Did I follow through on any commitments we made?



FINAL THOUGHT

Hard conversations are a form of care. You don't have to be perfect. You just have to be honest, human, and willing to show up.

Your Commitment: I will choose clarity over comfort, connection over control, and courage over avoidance.

Need Support Navigating Your Next Brave Conversation?

You don't have to lead alone.

If you're ready to grow in clarity, confidence, and courage, my 1:1 personalized leadership coaching is designed to help you unpack real challenges, practice brave communication, and build the kind of leadership presence your team truly needs.

Whether it's preparing for a tough conversation, strengthening team trust, or just having a sounding board, this space is for you.

 Let's talk.

Reach out today to set up a free discovery call.

I'd love to support your leadership journey.

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