

Starting tough conversations

with

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“think
learn?
succeed”

“Smart training for clever people”

Have you ever put off a “crunch point” conversation? Speaking up is easier with the FAST steps formula.

Crunch Point conversations are discussions that focus on critical situations: work performance problems, bullying or ending a relationship. The way you open these conversations sets their tone – here are four steps for starting on a positive note.

Focus on one issue at a time

Resist the temptation to raise several issues at once. This will only spark a defensive reaction. Instead, decide on the core issue you need to discuss. It’s a good idea to do this *before* you open the conversation. See page three of this newsletter for a template that will help you plan your Crunch Point conversation.

Acknowledge the other person’s feelings

If you’re breaking bad news or raising a touchy topic, the other person needs time to digest your message. Pause after describing the issue. Watch their reaction and listen to anything they say. Then acknowledge their feelings. Handy phrases for doing this include:

- I know this makes you feel...
- If I was you, I’d feel...right now
- I can see you feel...

Remember that acknowledging feelings does not mean you are taking responsibility for them.

Set boundaries

Boundaries are psychological ‘fences.’ They help you stay calm in tough situations. To create a boundary during tough conversations, imagine a transparent wall separating you from the other person. The wall protects you while you communicate your key message.

Thank the other person

Keeping the conversation civil is important. No matter how tough your message, you can still be respectful. You can do this by finding opportunities to thank the other person. For example, you can say:

- Thanks for listening to me, I know it is hard
- Thanks for your feedback
- Thanks for taking time to have this conversation

The more respectful you are, the more control you have over the discussion.

Book one of our conflict resolutions skills trainers to run a course for your team. [Contact us now.](#)

Megan Hills interviews

Jeff Shearer

Director

Evolve Natural Medicine and Ethical Practice



How to deal with a difficult client

“Before I became a natural medicine practitioner and health practice business trainer, I worked as a waiter in the NSW ski fields. A family at the resort were extremely unhappy with their room. A huge argument broke out between them and the reception staff. Then the owner got involved. And all the resort staff soon learned about it.

Guess who was given the task of serving them for the entire week? Yes, it was me. Realising I had to make this work right from the start, I swooped in on their table with bread and introduced myself politely. After taking their orders, I then explained when their meal will be served. When I found a spare moment, I returned to give them a run down of how the resort worked, what events were on for the week and how to negotiate the slopes.

Unfortunately, the room issue wasn't resolved, so the family left before the week was out. However they made a point of finding me to give me a huge tip and say goodbye, and thank me for my 'care'.

We only found out later they had recently lost a family member and were in a deep state of grief and not coping well. For me, this was a lightbulb moment. You don't always know what is going on with the client. So despite their difficult behaviour, you do everything you can to help.”

What are your Top 3 Tips for managing difficult clients?

1. Always, always, always listen...

...and acknowledge their concerns.

2. Find out what they need from you - and do it

Even if, as my mother always said, this means 'falling over yourself backwards'.

3. Don't take it personally

Even if a difficult client is getting personal, it's usually about them - not you. So don't get caught up in it.

What Jeff Shearer says about Think Learn Succeed

Eleanor has given me some excellent training tips and staff management advice. The thing that separates Eleanor from the herd is her versatility. When you are dealing with skilled people, turning up with a one-plan-fits-all approach isn't going to work. 'Dynamic' is the essence of Eleanor.

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Planning tough conversations

Real Life Success Story

Leanne was nervous about giving feedback to Diane. Knew Dianne would react aggressively. But she also knew Diane’s performance had to improve.

Leanne came to a conflict resolution training session seeking answers. Her Think Learn Succeed trainer gave Leanne a template for planning her conversation. You can use the same template to prepare for your Crunch Point conversations.

What is the core issue you need to raise?	
List concrete evidence that the issue exists (e.g. examples of what the other person has said or done)	
Which example best illustrates the issue?	
Describe the issue in neutral and non-judgemental words?	
Create an ‘I Statement’ using non-judgemental words. E.g. “When I received your email I felt upset that you had copied in the boss without talking to me first. And I’d like us to work out	When I... I felt/found... And I’d like us to work out...
List possible responses the other person might make	
List calm and assertive responses to the above	
Who can you rehearse with before having the real conversation?	

Learn more about it

If your team needs skills in managing conflict, book a session of FAST Ways to Resolve Conflict. After this workshop you’ll be able to see conflict coming, confront it confidently and get positive results in tough situations. Find out how to bring up an issue without inflaming a situation. Then get practical experience using a range of conflict resolution tools such as conflict maps, option generators, discussion planners and “yes and” techniques.

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What's New

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"Smart training for clever people"

New Courses For Your Team

Smart Ways To Use Powerpoint

PowerPoint can boost your clarity and credibility as a presenter – but only if you use it well. Learn to design a slide presentation that complements your speech. Avoid the five most common blunders made by PowerPoint users. Translate your ideas into high impact visuals. Prevent technical problems creating havoc during your speech. Turbo-charge your next presentation by becoming a master PowerPoint user.

Read course outline.

News from Eleanor Shakiba

January was a creative month, with preparations for my new Animated Learning[®] program taking place.

Stay tuned for new video-casts and podcasts that will help you learn at your desk. These will complement your newsletter and bring practical skills to your desktop.

This month, we bring you *Confident Feedback*.

New Resources For You

Confident Feedback Podcast

If you sometimes feel anxious about giving feedback, you'll love our new podcast. *Confident Feedback* is available on our **Newsletters page**. Newsletters page. It's a mind-programming audio file that you can use to prepare for any tough feedback discussion.

Great Books

101 Tough Conversations to Have with Employees

Falcone, P: 2009

This is a book for managers and supervisors facing performance issues. It's full of handy scripts for dealing with tricky scenarios – like poor work habits, personal hygiene problems and chronic lateness.