

## Easy Scripts for Hard Conversations

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During the breaks at a recent conference, where I was the keynote speaker, several participants sought guidance. They walked away with *scripts* for upcoming and challenging conversations along with a caveat, “You can only do your best with your fifty percent of the conversation. There is no guarantee how the other person is going to respond or react.” Below are scripts to assist in your next difficult interface:

### Tips:

- Confront privately, congratulate publicly.
- Choose or negotiate a convenient time for both people.
- Minimize the use of the words “you,” “never,” “always,” and “fault.”
- Listen as much or more than you talk.

**One: You have a problem with someone’s behaviour:** When an employee, co-worker or personal connection causes you difficulty.

- 1) **Own the problem:** “I have a problem I’d like to discuss. Is this a good time?”
- 2) **Name the offended value**--honesty, commitment, respect, timeliness, etc: “*Honesty* is important to me. When I’m given information that is incorrect it creates problems.
- 3) **Describe the behaviour:** “When I was told .....and what actually happened was (or “what actually is”) . . . . .
- 4) **Name the consequence for you:** “The consequence for me was .....
- 5) **Listen:** “Tell me your experience.”
- 6) **Invite cooperation:** “I am open to hearing how we might solve this problem.”

**Two: You have allowed another to verbally abuse you.**

- 1) **Level One: Ask clarifying questions:** “You sound angry. What exactly did I do that you want changed? Will you say that another way?”
- 2) **Level Two:** “I value being treated respectfully. I will no longer participate in verbal abuse. Please speak to me calmly.”
- 3) **Level Three** (if Step Two did not result in calm): “Stop! I will come back in fifteen minutes when you are calm.” (follow through)
- 4) **Level Four** (if Step Three did not result in calm): “Stop! Speak civilly or I will leave.” (follow through)

- 5) **Level Five** (if Step Four did not result in calm): “Stop. I do not feel safe in your presence. Goodbye.” (follow through)

**Three: You are over involved in some else’s work or decision making:**

Micromanaging others—employees, co-workers, friends or family.

- 1) **Resign verbally or in writing.** “I now realize what a competent and resourceful person you are. I have erred in perhaps giving you the impression I believe you are incompetent. I apologize for doing for you what you are quite capable of doing yourself. I hereby give you my resignation. However, I am here if you need my support or listening ear.”

**Alternatives:**

- “I care about you and know you are capable.”
  - “I will listen to your problem without making it mine to solve.”
- 2) Listen to the response or reaction.
- 3) Repeat, especially if they doubt your word or want to hook you back into the rescuing role: “I have resigned.”

**Four: You have a problem saying “no.”**

- 1) **Practise** with little items and safe people. Say, “No.”

**Alternatives to “no” include:**

- 2) “Thank you for asking but no.”
- 3) “It is not good for me to say ‘yes’.”
- 4) “My plate is full so I will delegate this request.”
- 5) “The consequences of saying “yes” are detrimental to my health (or other risk factors to you, others or the organization).”
- 6) If you need something stronger--“It is not in my best interest emotionally, mentally or physically to say ‘yes’.”
- 7) A drastic alternative—“I quit!”

**Five: When someone is hurting:**

**1) Offer assistance:**

“I will call once a week to see how you are doing. Does that work for you?”

“I will pick you up and take you to lunch. When will that work for you?”

- 2) **Ask:** “How can I help?”

3) **Listen:** “That sounds hard. Tell me some more. . . Tell me some more.”

- 4) **Avoid saying,** “I know how you feel.” Better to *seek to understand* how the other feels.

**Six: When you need/want help:**

Choose a wise mentor, co-worker or friend.

- 1) “I have a problem and I don’t need advice. I know my options. What I want is attentive listening. Are you willing to listen? When is a good time?”
- 2) “I have a problem. In the past your wise counsel and ideas were very helpful. Are you willing to listen and give me advice? When is a good time for you?”

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