

7 Ways to Handle Difficult Conversations

In my keynotes and workshops on "Getting Along Better with Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere", one of the questions that ultimately comes up is, "how do I tell someone about a character or behavioral flaw in their personality?"

If you work with customers or have co-workers, are a manager, coach, or care about your friends, there will come a time when you will need to have a difficult conversation.

Uncomfortable topics such as personal hygiene, sexism, inappropriate behaviors, vulgar language, lack of cooperation with others, bullying, rudeness and dress need to be addressed.

The problem is many times we don't address them because we are uncomfortable in providing feedback to others. And when we don't the problem continues to persist.

As someone who works with companies and organizations to improve customer and workplace relationships, I am often hired as a coach to provide the feedback and engage the "perpetrator" in the difficult conversation.

Here are some ways to help you hold these difficult conversations:

*** In a nice manner let the person know you have some feedback you would like to share. Ask if they have a few minutes to talk now or if they would like you to come back later. Don't start the conversation at such times as before lunch and when they are going home.**

*** Don't go directly into the feedback. Tell them the feedback you are going to share is difficult for you. If you are uncomfortable let them know that too. I sometimes mention that "feedback is like a gift. If you don't like it, you can return it to the store."**

*** If others have complained about this person's behavior, don't go into specifics about who the "accusers" are. This tends to get people madder and makes the feedback even more uncomfortable for the person.**

*** Depending on how comfortable you are, you may want to go in and directly state the problem. Sometimes keeping it simple, straightforward and honest is the best policy. As an outside coach, this is the one I use the most. Many times the person doesn't realize that they are being a bully, are rude or are using inappropriate language. Many times the problem is "cured" immediately by stating the problem directly.**

*** Tell the person the benefits (what they can save, gain or accomplish) to them by changing their behavior. The key to persuasion is WIFM (What's in it for me?)**

*** If you are the manager, set up an agreement of what the person will do to change their behavior. When I am hired to coach someone with poor behavior, I ask them to tell me what they are going to do to change. I then set due dates and a time frame. I measure the results by asking other employees on a regular basis to provide feedback about the person.**

*** Follow up on an ongoing basis. As a coach, I have a four month contract where I continually monitor the person's behavior. When I see them going backwards I immediately confront them on their behavior and let them know what I expect. Also, make sure they understand how to "fix" the problem.**

Arnold Sanow, MBA, CSP (Certified Speaking Professional) is a professional speaker, trainer and coach who helps companies and organizations to build stronger customer and workplace relationships through better communication and people skills. He is the author of 6 books to include, "Get Along with Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere" and "Present with Power, Punch and Pizzazz." He was recently named by Successful Meetings Magazine as one of the top 5 "best bang for the buck" speakers in the USA. www.arnoldsanow.com – speaker@arnoldsanow.com