Difficult Conversations: Real Talk Job Aid

Have the conversations that matter—clearly, respectfully, and effectively.

Lifelong Learning Lens
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Why We Avoid These Conversations

- Fear of the other person's reaction.
- Not knowing what to say.
- Wanting to be liked.
- Past conversations that didn't go well.
- Worry about making things worse.

Avoiding it doesn't make it better.
It makes it unclear.

Why They Don't Go Well

- We use labels instead of behaviors.
- We're too vague or too indirect.
- We wait too long, then come in too strong.
- We focus on being comfortable instead of being clear.
- We don't think about the outcome we actually want.

What Good Looks Like

Be clear, not vague
Say what actually needs to be said. Avoid softening it so much that the message gets lost or confusing.

Use facts (observable, measurable behaviors)
Focus on what you saw or heard, not assumptions or feelings. This keeps the conversation grounded and fair.

Be specific
General feedback creates confusion. Specific examples help the other person understand exactly what needs to change.

Timing matters
Address the issue in a timely way, but not in the heat of the moment. Give yourself time to think and approach it intentionally.

Be respectful and direct
You can be honest without being harsh. Tone and delivery matter just as much as the message.

Know your goal
Be clear on what you want to achieve before the conversation. Are you looking for clarity, behavior change, accountability, or alignment?

Say It Better (Simple Starters)

- I've noticed...
- I want to talk about...
- Can we discuss what's getting in the way of...
- My goal is to make sure we're aligned on...

Avoid This

Labels: lazy, negative, difficult, no sense of urgency

Use behavior instead:
- The report was submitted two days late

Vague language: This isn't working

Over-softening: Just checking in...

Avoiding it: It gets unclear

Getting Better at This

- Practice
- Write it out
- Say it out loud.
- Ask for unbiased feedback
- Focus on progress, not perfection

Quick Self-Check

1. Am I clear on the behavior?
2. Am I using facts?
3. What's my goal?
4. Am I direct and respectful?

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Final Thought: *Clear is kind.*