

Leadership Tips - Summer 2026

Challenging Conversations: Staying Clear, Calm, and Constructive Under Pressure

From Marilyn and the Consulting Team



Dear Friends,

Most of us don't struggle with communication during easy conversations. The real test comes when negative emotions rise, expectations collide, or accountability is on the line. Whether you're addressing performance concerns, navigating conflict between team members, or responding to resistance and frustration, challenging conversations impact trust and credibility.

Handled poorly, these conversations create defensiveness, confusion, and lingering tension. Handled well, they strengthen relationships and improve accountability. In this issue, we'll give you tips on how to stay calm and focused.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Marilyn".

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Join us **Monday, September 14, 2026** at Noon for our next complimentary 30-min. webinar: "**High Stakes Conflict Resolution - Practical strategies for difficult conversations under pressure**"

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Challenging Conversations: Staying Clear, Calm, and Constructive Under Pressure

The good news?

Navigating difficult conversations is a skill—and like any skill, you can enhance your conflict resolution skills with intention and practice.

Let's face it, most of us probably rather avoid challenging conversations and just wish they would go away. Sound familiar?

Many difficult conversations fail not because of the issue itself, but because of how the conversation is approached. Common pitfalls include: waiting too long to address the issue, letting emotions override listening, or focusing on blame instead of solutions.

When tension is high, we often become reactive instead of intentional. The key is learning how to stay grounded while still being honest and direct.



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Before the Conversation, Pause and Ask Yourself 3 Questions:

1. What is the real issue?

What's happening beneath the surface?

Are you addressing the root cause—or just reacting to symptoms?

2. Why does it matter?

Why is this conversation important now?

What impact is the issue having on the team, trust, or performance?

3. What outcome do I want?

What does success look like for both sides?

What are you hoping to clarify, restore, or improve?

Clarity before the conversation increases clarity during the conversation.

Listen More Than You Talk

Strong personality types are often strong problem-solvers—but difficult conversations are not always solved by immediately giving advice.

People are more likely to engage when they feel heard. Instead of jumping straight to solutions; try asking:

- “What do you think is contributing to this?”
- “What options do you see?”
- “What would help move this forward?”
- “What outcome are you hoping for?”

Questions create ownership. Listening reduces defensiveness.

Be Direct Without Damaging Trust

One of the biggest communication challenges is balancing honesty with respect. Too soft, and the message becomes unclear. Too blunt, trust can erode.

A few tips to be direct AND compassionate:

- Address behaviors—not personality
- Separate facts from assumptions
- Provide specific examples with compassion
- Keep calm body language; use pauses; listen deeply

The goal is not to “win” the conversation. The goal is clarity and accountability.

Adapt Your Communication Style

Not everyone processes conflict the same way. Some people want directness and efficiency. Others need time to think, reassurance, or more detail.

Adapting your approach can increase your effectiveness. For example:

- Direct communicators value clarity and immediate action steps
- Relationship-focused employees respond better to tone and collaboration
- Detail-oriented individuals want specifics and examples
- Steady communicators need reassurance and time to process

Awareness of communication styles can dramatically improve outcomes.

Trust Is Built in Difficult Moments

Trust is not only built during positive interactions. It is strengthened—or weakened—during uncomfortable ones. We all want to feel respected and heard in a setting that feels psychologically safe.

When triggered negatively, let's all pause for a moment, exhale, then respond with compassion and focus.

Leadership Reflection

Think about one conversation you may be avoiding right now. Ask yourself:

- What needs to be said?
- What outcome do I want?
- What would help the other person feel respected and heard?

- What is one thing I can do to approach the conversation more intentionally

The ability to stay calm, clear, and constructive during challenging conversations is one of the most valuable skills we can develop.

The Consulting Team, LLC

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[Click here to register for our next complimentary 30-minute webinar, "High-Stakes Conflict Resolution," on Monday, September 14, at noon, Pacific](#)

Join Us for a Complimentary Zoom Session:

"High-Stakes Conflict Resolution" Practical Strategies for Difficult Conversations Under Pressure



Facilitated by Senior Associate Jamie Knox

In this 30-minute session, you'll learn how to:

- Staying composed when emotions run high
- Recognizing causes of conflict before escalation
- Reducing defensiveness and mixed signals
- Communicating clearly toward resolution

Monday, September 14, 2026

Noon - 12:30 PM Pacific

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