

TIPS for DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- **Talk face-to-face and in private.** Don't chicken out by reverting to e-mail or phone.
- **Assume the best of others.** Perhaps they are unaware of what they're doing. Enter the conversation as a curious friend rather than an angry coworker.
- **Use tentative language.** Begin to describe the problem by saying, "I'm not sure you're intending this . . ." or "I'm not even sure you're aware. . ."
- **Share facts not conclusions.** Not only are conclusions possibly wrong, but they also create defensiveness. Say, "In the last two meetings you laughed at my suggestion. I expect people to disagree, but laughing?"
- **Ask for others' view.** Next, ask if others see the problem differently. You're now poised to have a healthy conversation about bad behavior.
- **Use equal treatment.** These skills apply to bosses and coworkers alike. Everyone should be treated like a reasonable, rational person who deserves your respect.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH. The study collected responses via an online survey of 990 individuals in September of 2009. Margin of error is approximately 3%.

LEARN NEW SKILLS. To learn how Crucial Conversations® Training can help you step up to difficult conversations at the office, visit www.vital-smarts.com or call 1.800.449.5989.

According to our study of more than 950 people, **70 percent of employees are currently facing a difficult conversation with a boss, coworker, or direct report.**

According to the research, the number-one person employees fear holding a difficult conversation with is their boss, and the most common topic of these difficult conversations is bad behavior. Respondents shared examples of the four most difficult conversations at work:

1. **Bad behavior:** "I had to tell my manager that my supervisor was a terrible leader and doing long-term damage to the company."
2. **Obnoxious behavior:** "My coworker was meddling in my life and criticizing my children. She actually said my daughter looked like a hooker."
3. **Illegal activity:** "An executive accused me of changing a document after he had signed it."
4. **Performance reviews:** "I had to explain to my direct report that his intentions/actions were not being well received by staff, and that it would hurt his credibility to continue on that path."

The study also revealed that 34 percent have put off holding a difficult conversation for at least a month while nearly one in four have put off the conversation for more than a year. Common escape methods include avoiding the person, dancing around the topic, and even quitting a job. One respondent hurried into the women's restroom to avoid the person with whom she needed to hold a difficult conversation—to her surprise, he followed her in there!

What's more, these conversations aren't only difficult, they're also destructive. According to the poll, people who are less than "fairly confident" in their ability to succeed in a difficult conversation are 59 percent more likely to live with poor productivity, 96 percent more likely to live with poor morale, and 86 percent more likely to live with a poor work environment.

An innovator in corporate training and leadership development, VitalSmarts combines three decades of original research with 50 years of the best social science thinking to help leaders and organizations change human behavior and achieve new levels of performance. VitalSmarts has identified four high-leverage skill sets that, when used in combination, create healthy corporate cultures. These skills are taught in the Company's award-winning training programs and *New York Times* bestselling books of the same titles: *Crucial Conversations*, *Crucial Accountability*, *Influencer*, and *Change Anything*. VitalSmarts has consulted with more than 300 of the Fortune 500 companies and trained more than one million people worldwide. www.vital-smarts.com

KEY RESULTS

70% avoid difficult conversations with their boss, coworker, or direct report

38% say the most difficult topics to discuss are broken promises, violated expectations, or competence concerns

34% have put off holding a difficult conversation for at least a month

25% have put off holding a difficult conversation for more than a year