

# Preparing for a Difficult Conversation in a Remote Environment

Professional Development Session  
Human Resources Community of Practice

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Human  
Resources

# HRCP Subcommittee Members

Melissa Bowers, Business Manager, English Department

Dan Currier, Inter. Special Projects Strategic Partner, Employee and Labor Relations

Cory Farragher-Gnadt, Classification and Compensation Analyst

Peter Fehrs, Associate Director, Employee and Labor Relations

Tiffany Lundy, Learning and Development Manager

Patrick Moore, Associate Director, FASS Human Resources and Payroll

Danielle Parmenter, Executive Assistant, Office of Research and Innovation



# Why Do We Tend to Avoid Difficult Conversations?

- **WE THINK:** It will increase rather than solve the problem.
- **WE BELIEVE:** We don't have the skills to do it well.
- **WE SECOND GUESS OURSELVES:** No one ever identified this as a problem before, so maybe I'm being too [careful/sensitive/serious].



# Overview of the Session

- Review current practices in preparing for difficult conversations in a remote setting
- Share and discuss best practices for preparing for difficult conversations
- UO Employee group considerations
- Discuss why it's important to have difficult conversations



# Break-Out Rooms (7 minutes)

- In your break-out rooms discuss your current practices for preparing for a difficult conversation in a remote environment.
  - A link has been shared in the chat for you to record your group's practices and ideas. Please record your information under your break-out room number.  
[https://uoregon-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/mirabile\\_uoregon\\_edu/EQrl3ju0tRRAoasHw9Vtcp4BxJDnL-qwfkKZGMpqJA5UQ?e=xYVv0P](https://uoregon-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/mirabile_uoregon_edu/EQrl3ju0tRRAoasHw9Vtcp4BxJDnL-qwfkKZGMpqJA5UQ?e=xYVv0P)
  - If you are not the direct supervisor think about this from the lens of an HR partner supporting a supervisor.



# Set-up and Safety

- Timing
- Technology
- Communication



# Type of Conversation

- Get your motives right with this conversation by asking yourself:
- “What do I really want for me, the other person, for the relationship, for other stakeholders?” (HBR Grenny)



# Type of Conversation

## **CPR:**

**C**ontent: A single incident

**P**attern: A recurrence of the same issue over time

**R**elationship: A negative impact on working relationships  
(Trust, Respect, Competence)

Be clear about what level you are addressing before starting a performance management conversation.





# Break-Out Rooms (5 minutes)

- In your break-out rooms discuss your experience with getting your motives right for a difficult conversation.



# Preparing for a Difficult Conversation

- What is your role in the conversation?
- Gather the facts
- Create an agenda or talking points to share the facts
- Share your conclusion and state expectations clearly



# Preparing for a Difficult Conversation

- Ask yourself what else you may be missing or what resources you might need.
- Be curious about any facts shared during the conversation and ask questions

*What are your thoughts about that feedback?*

*What has your experience been related to XXX?*

*What is your perspective?*

- Practice to be comfortable



## **Ask questions to dig deeper and create true dialogue**

- *Can you help me to understand?*
- *Can you share an example?*
- *What was the impact?*

## **Clarifying what you've heard:**

- *To make sure I am understanding you correctly...*
- *What I believe I heard you say is...*
- *Did I get that right?*

## **Refocusing the Conversation:**

- *It seems like we're starting to talk about different things.*
- *I am noticing that ... (e.g. you're sharing less, we've stopped asking each other questions).*



# Responding to Different Reactions

How will you refocus the conversation if it takes an unexpected turn?

- Do emphasize your intention to be helpful
- Don't criticize reactions or intentionally escalate the situation
- Resolve to be calm, straightforward, and clear about what you expect from employees
- Pause the conversation if necessary



# UO Employee Rights

- We work in a unionized environment and our employees have certain rights
- If you believe discipline is possible (based on what was reported) contact Employee and Labor Relations (ELR)
- Until you hear from ELR
  - DO: clarify expectations even if you don't know exactly what happened.
  - DON'T: ask them about the situation, it could interfere with an investigation.



Please share in the chat other considerations for a difficult conversation that we didn't address today.



# Final Thoughts

## Having a Difficult Conversation

- If done right, can be a GIFT.
- Can be easier if you prepare.

*"Has less to do with how you use your mouth, and much more to do with what you do before you open it". [4 Things to Do Before a Tough Conversation](#) –Harvard Business Review, Grenny*

- Predicts the level of your influence, the health of your team, the consistency of innovation and strength of customer relationships.





# Campus Resources

- [Office of the Ombuds](#)
- [Employee and Labor Relations](#)
- [Office of Investigations and Civil Rights Compliance](#)

## LinkedIn Learning Trainings

- [Strategies for Difficult Conversations](#)
- [Virtual Performance Reviews and Feedback](#)
- [Navigating awkward work situations](#)
- [Having Difficult Conversations: A Guide for Managers](#)



# Reference Materials

- Supporting a Respectful Work Environment presentation, Employee and Labor Relations, University of Oregon
- [How to Have a Difficult Conversation with Remote Employees](#)  
Marek Grygier, May 2020, Remote-How Blog
- Performance Management presentation, Employee and Labor Relations, University of Oregon
- [How to Have a Difficult Conversation Virtually](#), Art Markman, July 2019, Harvard Business Review
- [4 Things to Do Before a Tough Conversation](#), Joseph Grenny, January 2019, Harvard Business Review



# Thank you!

If you have questions about this presentation please contact Jen Mirabile, [mirabile@uoregon.edu](mailto:mirabile@uoregon.edu).

