

Respectful Conversations for Leaders

Supplementary Reference

Initiating difficult conversations using the experience cube

This approach is helpful for initiating a discussion with a team member when:

1. You have observed behaviour that is concerning
 2. You have received an informal complaint and it is impractical or unreasonable to expect the staff person to address it directly with the other party/parties involved.
- The experience cube is a way to approach a challenging subject as a leader with curiosity rather than judgment.
 - The below questions describe each box of the experience cube in order:

Observing: What I can see and hear (like a video recording).

Thinking: What is the story I am making in my head, my self-talk, my judgments, imaginations, assumptions, beliefs

Feeling: What sensation(s) I am experiencing and what is the emotion attached to the sensation?

Wanting: What do I need/want? What do I want to have happen?

Observing <i>Yesterday, in the nursing station, I heard you say to Jessica that you were tired of dealing with her.</i>	Thinking <i>I wondered what caused you to sound so abrupt.</i>
Wanting <i>I want to hear from you what was happening.</i>	Feeling <i>I felt uneasy about the interaction.</i>

Tips for handling an informal complaint of disrespect at work and facilitating a conversation between staff

Receiving an informal complaint about disrespect at work when it is reasonable for the parties involved to resolve it directly.

Ask staff person:

1. What happened or is happening?

- Allow staff person to give a comprehensive account of the issue as they see it. Do not judge or “agree” with situation as described but empathize with the impact it’s had on the person.
- This may be a good opportunity to refer staff person to EFAP.
- Assess whether this is a serious situation that needs HR involvement (i.e. ongoing bullying/harassment, involving discrimination or harassment on Human Rights Code protected grounds such as race, religion, gender, or involving criminal activity).
- Examples of conversation starters are listed below:
 - I would like to talk to you about some concerns that I have about how you’re feeling at work. Do you have time to talk right now?
 - I would like to talk to you about some things that I’ve noticed because I am worried about you. Do you mind if we arrange a time to talk?
 - I would like to talk to you about how you’re feeling because I’ve noticed you seem frustrated. Is this something I can talk to you about right now?

2. What steps have you taken so far?

- If the person has not yet addressed the issue directly with the other party assess whether this is a viable option.
 - If so, coach staff person on how to raise the issue using the DES model.
 - If there is an acceptable reason the person cannot raise it directly, such as realistic fear of retribution, severe anxiety, power differential between parties, consider bring parties together for facilitated conversation.
- If the person has addressed the issue directly with other party but without success, moving directly to a facilitated discussion will be appropriate unless it is determined that HR needs to be involved.

3. How do you want to take this matter forward?

- It is assumed that the complaining staff person will have a role in the resolution of the situation.
- If the staff person declines to move forward with addressing the situation directly or participating in a facilitated conversation AND the situation does not appear to require HR involvement, the leader can determine their level of involvement in the situation, including not pursuing the matter at all, depending on their assessment of its effect on the workplace.

Inviting the second party/other parties to a facilitated discussion:

Explain:

1. *I have received a concern/complaint about respect at work.*
 - At this point, it is best not to get into details about the complaint or complainant – this may force you into a position of interpreting the experience of the complainant and lead you to judgments about the situation, usurping the effectiveness and empowerment of the facilitated conversation between staff.
2. *I would like to get you together with the other person involved to talk it through.*
 - Communicate that this is an opportunity for the staff involved to resolve the issue rather than it being a leader-initiated/directed process.
3. *This is not a disciplinary meeting or investigation, this is an informal discussion.*
 - This may not be necessary to explain if the staff person seems comfortable with the meeting. This can be a response to a query about the nature of the meeting or whether having representation is appropriate. If the staff person states that they want a union representative at the meeting, contact your HR Advisor before moving ahead with the facilitated conversation.

Facilitating the Discussion

Facilitated Conversation Agenda:

- What's been going on?
- What would resolve this issue for you? or
What would you need to work professionally with the other person?
- What will you do differently to make this work?

1. Set guidelines for the discussion:
 - State that the conversation is not disciplinary, it's about trying to make sure people are comfortable working together
 - What's discussed in this meeting is confidential and should not be discussed with colleagues
 - Ask the participants to use neutral, non-blaming language to describe the issue and come to an agreement.
 - Ask that participants not interrupt and that each party has equal time to talk.
 - The purpose of the meeting is to determine how the parties will move forward to work well together. i.e. not to dwell in the past but to be future focused.
 - The discussion should steer away from assuming the intent of the other person's actions and emphasize the impact it has on the person, i.e. talking about the

feelings that came out of the actions, not why the other person might have done it; encourage “I” statements.

- Explain that any person at the meeting can end the meeting at any time and refer the matter to a formal process if they feel the need to do so.

2. Notes for leader’s responsibilities in the meeting

- Ensure that the meeting takes place in a quiet place, free of interruptions, at a mutually agreeable time, as soon as possible.
- Ensure the discussion guidelines are followed.
- Avoid interpreting statements or the experience of each party. Expressing the impact of events and generating solutions for resolution should be driven, when at all possible, by the staff involved.
- Contain the discussion to the matter at hand. If a staff person feels defensive, they may redirect the conversation away from the initial concern. If further complaints, such as about performance, operational issues, etc. come up, assess whether a second discussion or different process is required or whether these issues are directly related to the original issue.
- If the meeting becomes hostile and unproductive, stop the meeting and consult an HR Advisor.

3. Initiate conversation with prompt: *Please describe what’s been going on*

- Allow complainant to begin, encouraging them to state what has happened and how it’s affected them.
- Allow the other party to explain their version and any impact they have experienced.
- Note this is not an investigation; it is an opportunity for direct communication between parties.
- This is another opportunity to assess the seriousness of the situation and whether you should involve HR.

4. Ask: *What would resolve this issue for you? or What would you need to work professionally with the other person?*

- Resolution may not always be possible such as if parties can’t agree on what happened, so determining a path for staff to have a professional relationship is an important alternative.
- Note that resolution and working professionally do not require the staff to be friends – but does require that they can be civil and productive together.

5. Ask: *What will you do differently to make this work?*
 - Have the parties state what they need and what they commit to doing in future. This is the agreement for moving forward.
 - Check in with staff to ensure that the commitments made here address the needs of each party.
 - The action commitment may be more heavily weighted on the respondent's responsibilities but there is always a role for both parties.

6. Clarify the agreement for moving forward as determined by the participants.
 - Parties may want the agreement written down for their reference or not.
 - Consider providing paper copies of the Respect at Work policy to the meeting participants.