



Six Steps to Confident Conversations for Managers and Teams

When we are equipped to respond or reach out naturally and sincerely and talk to people with appropriate levels of confidence and empathy, we automatically assure our colleagues and customers of our commitment and capability to provide options and solutions that we will collaborate on to find the best way forward in any situation.

The following six-step guide is a helpful overview of a framework to enable us to prepare for and embrace any conversations that may arise at work, at any level - whether they are straightforward or challenging.

Step 1 - Be in a positive, optimistic state of mind

Give yourself the best chance of success by managing your emotions and behaviour before you begin by checking in with yourself and asking, “Where am I emotionally? Am I composed and positive? Am I ready and prepared to start this conversation with good purpose and clarity?” If the answer is no, it’s important to take a breath and make sure you take the necessary steps to put yourself into the mindset to truly listen to the customer or colleague so that you can respond positively and confidently, whatever the situation may be.

Step 2 - Be clear on the objectives of the conversation

When we are clear on our goals it is much easier to stay on track and to bring others with us. It’s also important to think about what the other person’s goals might be and how they hope to achieve them, as this allows us to come up with the best solutions to help them and address their specific needs in a positive and timely manner. Prior to the conversation, having as thorough an understanding of the situation as possible will boost your confidence in moving things forward to a positive outcome. Asking the other person what is important to them in the situation can help us gain a better understanding and to start to formulate options and a way forward.

Step 3 - What are the possible solutions, options or alternatives?

Consider the goals you identified in Step 2 as well as any obstacles you may face if you are required to come up with alternative and unexpected solutions. It’s important to think carefully about the solutions you can take ownership and responsibility for, including the things we can do as well as other things the customer or colleague can do to help themselves.

Step 4 - Who, what and when should you influence?

To achieve the best outcome, consider who you might need to influence and engage with in finding the best solution. Consider your timing and method of approach when preparing for a conversation in which you need to influence someone. If you've had contact with them before, would they respond better to an email or a phone call? Is there any history in the relationship that you need to be aware of and take into account? This will all help to influence in the most positive, respectful way.

Step 5 - Prepare a positive strategy to deliver disappointing news if needed, and keep listening out for feedback

If you need to deliver disappointing news, have a clear plan in place so that you can quickly and effectively present alternative solutions and options. When offering solutions and alternatives that differ from what the other person is expecting or hopes for, clearly explain what is and what is not possible and the benefits of the solution you are presenting. Listen carefully for clues on how the colleague or customer is responding and be open to any feedback they provide. Make sure you are prepared to acknowledge and welcome any feedback or complaints. If the customer begins to express negative emotions, showing empathy can really help, however this must be done with care - we will cover this further below.

Step 6 - Get the people skills/technical balance right!

It's vital that your conversation starts with good people skills such as influencing, persuading, listening and empathising first before moving on to the more technical aspects of the situation. Being overly technical at the outset by quoting policies, processes and techniques can make us appear cold and indifferent, as if we are simply 'going through the motions' in a scripted or robotic way which will alienate the other person. Using positive, solution-focused, confident and reassuring language is much more likely to elicit and maintain a positive and open response, giving you the best chance of collaborating to find the most appropriate and efficient solution.

A final word on Empathy – how to get it right

There are times when we need to acknowledge challenging circumstances using appropriate empathy, and it's important to do so with sincere yet careful intent. When expressing empathy with customers and colleagues it is preferable to empathise about the circumstance or situation and the impact of that, rather than becoming overly involved in the emotions surrounding the situation, as we might in more personal relationships.

It's best to begin with a supportive, considerate and sincere statement such as "I'm so sorry to hear that," or "I can really appreciate the impact that must have had" - ensuring the person truly hears that you mean what you are saying - before moving straight on to the positive actions you can take to help them and progress the situation straightaway. This will reassure the other person that they are in safe and capable hands, making a lasting impression on the customer while moving swiftly towards a constructive and positive outcome.

This six-step model will help you to prepare for any conversations you need to have at work and should be used as a guide to help you maximise every opportunity to shine and provide excellent service, whatever comes your way.

To find out how MGI's Mindset, Language & Actions Toolkit and tailored Learning Journeys can empower your teams with the skills to ensure confidence in everything they do at work, please get in touch.

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Visit our website: www.mgilearning.com
Drop us an email: hello@mgilearning.com
Give us a call: +44 (0)330 1247 621
+61 423536348
(Australia & New Zealand)