

Heemstra, Sarah

From: Heemstra, Sarah
Sent: Tuesday, February 19, 2019 1:40 PM
To: Heemstra, Sarah
Subject: Infection Prevention Champions Program: Difficult Conversations

Infection Prevention Champions Program



Dear Champion,

In every workplace there are times when difficult conversations with a colleague or peer are necessary. Learning to be skillful in addressing these situations can be challenging, but also very rewarding. Many times we avoid these conversations because they are uncomfortable. Although confrontation can be difficult, addressing issues head-on can make a positive impact in our work environment.

Difficult conversations can be as varied as our work environments. Examples include:

- Giving feedback
- Confronting low performers
- Pointing out behaviors that negatively affect the work environment
- Communicating changes

The key to success is to make sure to have the conversation in a timely manner. The longer the behavior or misunderstanding is allowed to continue the harder it is to begin the conversation.

Step One: Know Yourself

Before beginning any difficult conversation it is best to recognize our own emotions, stress level, body language and non-verbal communication. This allows us to be aware of our own triggers which can affect how the information is delivered and received. The intent is to clear up any misunderstandings and change behaviors.

In addition to knowing how we respond to the stress of a difficult conversation it is imperative to ask some basic questions:

- What is the intent of the conversation?
- What message do we want to convey?
- How will we open the dialog?
- What will the other person say?

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- How will they respond?
- How will we conclude?
- What is to happen next?

It is very important to practice crucial conversations. While we do not want to appear as if we are scripted, practicing allows us to become more comfortable with the message we are trying to deliver, and helps us concentrate on the coworker's answers and responses. Our stress level is reduced when we can articulate our position without struggling for the right words.

Step Two: Have the Conversation

There are many strategies for relaying the information during a difficult conversation. It is essential that the intended message be clear. One example of this process is the DESK model:

D - Describe the behavior

- Provide specific examples

E - Evaluate

- Evaluate how we feel about the topic and how it affects the department and the facility

S - Show

- Demonstrate what needs to be done to meet expectations or change in practice or behavior

K - Know

- Define the consequences for failure to improve and meet expectations

It is also very important to be prepared to handle emotional responses, which can range from anger to tears. It is essential to actively listen, acknowledge the emotion, and deal with it before moving on.

Step Three: Follow Up

The key to continued success is effective follow up. Without the proper feedback and positive reinforcement, it will be easy to resume old habits. Once you agreed upon a course of action, follow up with them to review how things have progressed.

It is also important that we evaluate ourselves after each difficult conversation. Write down what went well and what lessons were learned. This will make the next conversation a little easier.

Communication

Communication during these difficult conversations is the key to success. It is important to be aware of effective and ineffective communication styles.

Ineffective

- Hidden: not directly stating the issue at hand
- Antagonistic: angry, aggressive or hostile tone
- Indirect: never getting to the point
- One-way talking: more talking than listening
- Unresponsive: little interest in the other person

Effective

- Direct and to the point: leaving no doubt as to the meaning.
- Assertive: not afraid to state what is needed and why
- Clear: Issues are expressed articulately
- Open: no hidden agendas
- Two way: equal amounts of talking and listening

Tips on How to Approach a Coworker

Conversations with our peers are difficult when we are working side by side on the frontline. Often it is easier to expect a manager or supervisor to address conflicts and issues as they arise. We are often afraid of the reactions we will receive when we contemplate a difficult conversation with a peer. The best approach is to use "I" statements. An "I" statement focuses on us and our feelings. When we approach a coworker with "You" statements, this often places the coworker on guard and leads to defensiveness because they feel attacked. Using the term "I" such as "I have a concern about _____" or "I feel ___ when you ____" has a different tone than approaching them with "you always" or "you never" which has a more accusatory feel.

State your concerns specifically. Don't expect your peers to guess what you mean or read between the lines. Clearly express the impact of the issue. Be assertive and not afraid to state what is wanted or needed and why.

Every work place has difficult relationships and work issues which must be addressed. Given the fact that many of us spend more time at work than we do with family and friends, a positive and healthy work environment is vitally important. Difficult conversations can lead to positive changes in the work environment but should be done constructively using communication techniques and principles described in this letter.

Requirements should either be emailed to Champions@sgna.org or faxed to 312-673-6694 as due. The the upcoming assignments are as follows:

1. Continue to develop and implement infection prevention education for your peers (total of 120 minutes)
2. Seek opportunities to educate yourself on infection prevention topics (total of 180 minutes).

These bi-monthly letters will be [archived](#) for you to access as needed. As always, SGNA is available for any questions or difficulties you may have.

Sincerely,
The SGNA Infection Prevention Work Group

References:

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