

1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.

- What are some difficult conversations at work?
- Why are they problematic?
- What can happen when you have a difficult conversation with another person?
- What skills do you need to have difficult conversations successfully?

Dealing with difficult conversations

Getting and giving bad news is just part of professional life. It is difficult to tell an employee they are losing their job, a client you're not meeting a deadline, or a colleague that they've made a big mistake. These tips can help you communicate clearly and respectfully.

1 _____
It's important to plan **what** you're going to say. Get all the information you need before you start the conversation. This will help you explain your decision. Also, carefully consider how you will communicate the news and choose your words. Remember to be assertive, not rude.

2 _____
Never tell a colleague something negative in an informal place, like standing in the corridor, and always prepare a client before you give them bad news. You should let them know that there's a problem. A simple introduction like, 'I'm afraid I have some difficult news,' helps set up the communication and shows respect for the other person.

3 _____
It's important to deliver bad news quickly. If you know about a problem at the start of the week, don't wait until Friday for the conversation. If you wait longer, it will be more difficult. Agree on a time that works for both sides and find a private space to talk. Don't bring in any unnecessary devices so you are fully present.

4 _____
Avoid starting the conversation with small talk. It's better to get to the point and deliver the news. Speak clearly, giving the other person the relevant facts. Allow them to express their opinion and ask questions. If they get angry or upset, keep calm. Go over the facts and explain the next steps. Be supportive if possible, but don't make promises you can't keep. This can make the situation more complicated.

2 Reading comprehension

a. Read the article. Then, choose the correct title for each paragraph.

_____ Prepare the other person

_____ Prepare yourself

_____ Be direct and factual

_____ Choose a time and place

b. Which of these are **good** ideas according to the article? Select any that apply.

1. Avoid having difficult conversations if possible.
2. Make sure you have all the information you need.
3. Don't give explanations; just deliver the news.
4. Tell the person there's a problem before the meeting.
5. Never give bad news immediately.
6. Have these conversations in private.
7. Allow some minutes for small talk before delivering the bad news.
8. Give the other person the opportunity to express their opinion.
9. Talk about the future and what's going to happen next.
10. Never make promises you are not sure about.

3 Vocabulary

a. Match words from Columns A and B to form collocations.

A

1. lose
2. meet
3. make
4. get
5. start
6. deliver
7. turn off
8. get to
9. make

B

- a conversation
- (a) deadline
- promises
- (your) job
- the point
- (bad) news
- a mistake
- information
- (your) phone

b. Complete the sentences with collocations from Activity 3a.

1. My boss told me that I'm going to _____ my _____ in a group video call. That was really insensitive!
2. You need to call the client and tell them we're not going to _____ the _____. We'll have everything ready by 14 May.
3. You shouldn't worry if you _____ a _____. It's an opportunity to learn!
4. We spend a long time just chatting at meetings. We need to _____ _____ more quickly.
5. The best way to _____ bad _____ is face-to-face. If there is something wrong, I don't want to find out over the phone or via email.
6. I won't work with them again. They _____ _____ of more work, but then never contact me.
7. We should ask everyone to _____ their _____ at meetings to avoid interruptions.

4 Grammar

a. Choose the correct verb to complete the sentences from the article.

1. It's also important *to avoid / avoiding* comments that could be offensive or disrespectful.
2. Remember *to be / being* assertive, not rude.
3. Avoid *to start / starting* the conversation with small talk.
4. It's better *to get / getting* to the point and deliver the news.
5. Allow them *to express / expressing* their opinion and ask questions.

b. Work in pairs. How would you complete these sentences? Think of as many tips as possible.

- *It's important to* _____
- *Avoid* _____
- *It's better to* _____
- *Allow them to* _____

5 Communicative practice

a. Read some comments from different managers about having difficult conversations at work. Are they examples of good practice or bad practice? Explain your answer.

1. 'I haven't really prepared what I want to say, but, in brief, you will need to transfer to our branch in Oxford.'

2. 'I know it's not a convenient time as you are about to leave, but I wanted to inform you that the company will make redundancies.'

3. 'I understand how difficult this must be for you. Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.'

4. 'This is not the best place to have this conversation. Let's book a meeting room and discuss things there.'

5. 'I'm sure the company will start recruiting again, and they'll hire you back. Don't lose hope!'

6. 'Sorry, but I have to answer my phone. Perhaps we could discuss this further another time.'

7. 'I normally wouldn't comment on this, but since you've asked, I think there are some good opportunities in the market.'

8. 'I'm sorry, but I think it'll be better to hire a man for this job... if you know what I mean.'

b. Tell your partner about a difficult conversation you had at work. Tell them what happened, how you delivered (or were delivered) the news, and what happened in the end.