“Having Difficult Conversations with Teammates, Employees and Managers”

Glenda L. Harris, MSW, LCSW
Personal Assistance Service
Communication Plays Such an Integral Role in The Ease and Satisfaction We Enjoy In Relationships

Healthy and Good Communication is Like a Road That:

- Connects people
- Transmits information and ideas
- Clarifies and solves dilemmas and mysteries
- Brings civility into most interpersonal situations
When Communication Goes Bad

• It Seems That Now The Road Is Full Of
  – Curves That Are Sharpe
  – Sudden Speed Bumps
  – Unexpected Potholes
We Wonder If We Should Travel A Road That is Filled With So Many Unwelcome Things

This Trepidation About Proceeding Down This Communication Road is There Because…

• The Potholes, Curves and Speed Bumps Represent
  • Sensitive topics
  • Fear of rejection
  • Fear of meeting with defensiveness or anger
  • Fear that our communication will make things worse.
• _____________
• _____________
Ignoring These Difficult Conversations Only Makes Things Worse

Time and Energy Spent In Addressing Issues or Concerns are Investments In Maintaining Work Satisfaction
To Succeed in These Conversations you Need AAA

**Assessment Is The Key**

- **Before You Begin, Determine:**
  - Is There an Important or Critical Need for This conversation
    - Seriously impacts the working relationship
    - Undermines your work
    - Barrier to you succeeding
  - Have You Made Assumptions About the Person’s Intentions
    - Perhaps there are personality, cultural & other differences that would give you a different perspective on the problem situation
  - Take Stock of the Buttons That Were Pushed For You
  - What Do You Want To accomplish
  - What Would Be an Ideal Outcome
To Succeed in These Conversations you Need AAA

Assessment Is The Key

• Map out your approach
  – Timing Is everything
    • Wait to discuss when you are less emotional
  – Discuss in private
  – Practice your approach so that:
    • you aim for a non-blaming and objective discussion
    • build up your confidence to expect a positive outcome
Activate Good Communication Skills

• Use *I Statements* When discussing your concerns regarding a problem in an interaction or any aspect of your working relationship
  • *I statements* describe how you experienced the situation opposed placing blame on the other person

• Use The *Sandwich Communication* When
  • Discussing a sensitive subject
  • Discussing an expectation for a change in another's behavior.
Activate Good Listening Skills

• Allow the other person to respond without interrupting them
  • Your attentiveness to their response brings ease to the situation

• Active listening or reflecting back what you hear the other person saying about their story is a useful skill
  • We are more open to working out a solution, when we first are convinced one understands our story

• You may learn something about their frustrations and work challenges that helps to mitigate how you feel about the problem
Activate Your Tracking Skills

• Keep your finger on the pulse of how the discussion is progressing
  • Has anyone become defensive, shut-down, overly intense?
    • Try to identify what you need at this point

• If things seem to get off track, go back to listening.
Adopt Solutions

• The road to solutions begins with a shift from my way or your way

• A problem solving process is now possible
  • Ask the other person for input on how they think the situation can be resolved
    • This encourages the other person to take co-ownership to a solution

• A sort of reconciliation is established
  • Offer apologies when needed, a “clean-up” is conducted, new rules of interaction are agreed upon
The AAA Approach to Succeeding With Difficult Conversations

• Assess
• Activate
• Adopt

Some materials taken from “We Have To Talk: Holding Difficult Conversations”, by Judy Ringer
Personal Assistance Service

- PAS staff are licensed counselors, clinical social workers and psychologists.

- Office is located at Erwin Square Office tower, on 4th floor, Suite 400.

- Call 416-1727 to schedule an appointment. Counselors are available Monday-Friday, 7:00 am - 6pm

- PAS website: www.hr.duke.edu/pas