

4 Ways to Get Positive Results From Uncomfortable Conversations



1. Recognize that uncomfortable doesn't have to be negative. Most of us assume that an uncomfortable conversation has to be negative---but it doesn't. It's the responsibility of the conversation initiator to set the tone, content and climate of the discussion. Even if the content of the conversation is not the best news, a collaborative climate and upbeat tone can transform a potentially negative moment into something better.

2. Have it sooner rather than later. If the conversation content and circumstances are unavoidably negative, don't delay the conversation but rather deal with it quickly. A great reminder of this fact is the oft-quoted phrase, "Bad news doesn't get better with time."

3. Establish clear expectations and next steps. Once the situation is out in the open, participants need to have clear expectations of each other and what's next. In my first corporate job, I inherited an employee that had a pattern of poor performance and a lousy attitude. With support from HR, I had a talk with the woman and placed her on a performance improvement plan with the stipulation that if she successfully completed it within 60 days and maintained a strong performance for six months, I'd assign her to a key account that I knew she was interested in. Setting those expectations and next steps worked incredibly well in this instance and every other time I've had to use them since.

4. Convey that the future will be better than the current reality. Sometimes the other individual is hesitant to admit the gritty reality of the current situation. It's critically important in those types of instances to clearly communicate that the current path is unsustainable and there needs to be a course correction by one or more of the individuals involved. Without that course correction in the form of attitude, behavior or mindset---everyone involved in the discussion needs to understand the consequences that will follow, affecting them all. Consequences are different than expectations; however, clarity around both is critical in any relationship.