

The No Hard Feelings Guide to:

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Difficult conversations can feel so daunting that we're tempted to just avoid them. But if you avoid discussing an issue with a coworker, you deny him (and yourself) the opportunity to improve an uncomfortable situation. We've all seen miscommunications devolve into long-held grudges, just because neither party addressed the initial issue.

It can also be a mistake to rush into a difficult conversation: you're more likely to make incorrect assumptions about the other person or just start venting. At its worst, confronting a problem without a plan may make the other person feel attacked or have a meltdown.

To prevent the discussion from devolving, wait until you can:

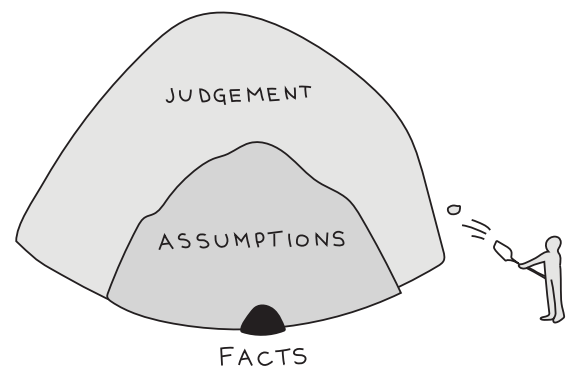
1. **Label your feelings.** ("I'm hurt")
2. **Understand where those feelings are coming from.** ("I'm hurt I wasn't included on the email about Evan's birthday celebration")
3. **Feel calm enough to hear the other person out.** A good rule of thumb: if you think you have all the facts ("You didn't CC me because you hate me"), you're not ready to have a difficult conversation.

This process takes time—don't decide to have a difficult conversation and then start the conversation five minutes later. When you're ready, calmly address your emotions, but do bring up how you feel. Most likely, you're sitting down with the other person because you feel frustrated, ignored, or upset. If you don't talk about those feelings, you guarantee a central piece of the problem will remain unresolved.

But getting visibly upset will only make the situation worse (often when we become extremely emotional we don't actually express much of anything). To talk feelings without letting them hijack the discussion, business school students at Stanford learn to use the phrase, "When you _____, I feel _____." This avoids creating a victim and a perpetrator.

What if you have a difficult conversation and nothing changes? If the other person seemed receptive during your conversation or you weren't able to communicate everything you wanted to, take another crack at it. Maybe you were nervous the first time and didn't quite get your point across. That said, some people won't care how you feel and won't change. In cases where the other person isn't ready to be self-reflective and meet you halfway, you are allowed to give up. Pursuing difficult conversations with these people is like trying to cook spaghetti with a straightening iron.

HOW TO MAKE A MOUNTAIN
OUT OF A MOLEHILL



No Hard Feelings teaches you how to figure out which emotions to toss, which to keep, and which to express in order to be successful at work. Available everywhere books are sold on January 22.

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Sources:

Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen, *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*, (New York: Penguin, 2010).

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Joyce W. Yuan, "Physiological Down-Regulation and Positive Emotion in Marital Interaction Emotion," *American Psychological Association* 10, No. 4, (2010): 467– 474, http://www.gruberpeplab.com/teaching/psych231_fall2013/documents/231_Yuan2010.pdf.

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