

Best Practices to a Caring Conversation

While we cannot change the circumstances that may have led to these conversations, we can make every effort to treat people with dignity and respect as they navigate what's next for them.

Guiding Principles: Lead with Purpose, Deliver with Care: Set a Tone of Empathy and Compassion

1. Be available and present, provide support and counsel
2. Treat people with dignity and respect
3. Be direct, candid and transparent; do not sugar coat or over commit
4. Share the why behind decisions
5. Above all, be caring and express gratitude for hard work and dedication



1. Prepare

Setting Up the Conversation:

- Review available resources so you can prepare for the conversation in an authentic and caring way
- Understand the situation
- Review the Conversation Guide and Do's & Don'ts
- Connect with HR support to be with you in person or by phone

Consider the Person:

- Think back to previous conversations you may have had with your team member about the current situation, and if applicable, build on those for this conversation. This will help orient the team member to receive the message.
- Tailor your communication style to what works best for your team member and anticipate what their reaction might be based on their preferences.

Environment Matters:

- Depending on your work environment, whether in the office or working from home, these conversations require full attention. Having these in-person or on video chat is highly encouraged.
- Determine when you want to have these conversations completed by and feasible options to have the conversation (e.g. Video chat, in-person, etc.)
- Ask your team member, "Is there a time we can connect for 15 min of your full attention?"
- *Note: Block more time than necessary in the event the person has additional questions.*
- Block your calendar before and after to allow time to prepare and process.
- *Note: It's best not to schedule these calls back-to-back with other engagements.*
- Eliminate all distractions. Ensure you will not be interrupted for the duration of your call.



2. Deliver

7-Step Conversation Guide:

1. Be clear and direct. Start with the news that their position has been eliminated rather than increasing someone's stress level by delaying the news.
 - "I have some tough news to deliver. At the end of next week, we are eliminating your position. I'm so sorry to relay this message to you."
2. Give a brief synopsis of the economic conditions that led to this decision.
 - "As we've shared, our best estimate is that our industry will not recover to pre-COVID levels for quite some time. We anticipate that our company will be smaller than it was, even when people return to normal activities. Unfortunately, this means the company has had to make some really tough decisions to eliminate on average X% of positions within our staff; as you know, this percentage has varied across work groups due to the nature of work and business needs now and the foreseeable future."
3. Reiterate this is not about them personally.
 - "I want you to know this is not about you personally. The decision was made based on the need to be a smaller organization."
 - "It does not go unnoticed all of the hard work you've contributed to the success of our team. I am personally grateful for your contributions and will miss working with you."
4. Pause for their reaction. LISTEN.
5. Ask if they have any questions.
6. Walk through resources and next steps.
 - "I know this is a lot of information coming to you at once. I have a packet of information for you that includes information on pay, COBRA, unemployment as well as next steps for returning your company-issued materials."



3. Recover

Decompress and Debrief: It's important to take care of yourself and manage your emotions so you can be fully present for each of your team members, especially if there are several conversations in one day. Here are some tips to help:

- Talk to a colleague or friend in between
- Go for a walk, run or simply, get outside for fresh air
- Do activities that make you feel more resilient
- Focus on something else



What to Expect

Not everyone will react in the same way. While you can expect people will experience some level of emotion, their behavior and how they show up may be very different. Remember, you may have had time to process the change that is occurring, while your team member may not have.

Sometimes when hearing difficult news, before people are ready to move forward and act, they may need: time, space, someone to listen or more information. Allow time for your team member to share their thoughts and ask questions. You may or may not know all the answers, and it's OK to say, "I don't know.". When in doubt, listen and ensure your team member feels valued and cared for.

Empathetic Listening Skills:

Attending behavior: Remove all distractions, make eye-contact (even over video), avoid looking at your phone or any other technology.

Acknowledgements: Nod your head, encourage people verbally to please share more if they like.

Door openers: Inviting statements or open-ended questions such as

- "I know this is a lot to process right now."
- "What is most helpful for you right now?"

Silence: Slow down the conversation and pause, allowing your team member time to think and absorb what you are sharing.

- Note: If the person is looking up, away or down, it's a cue that they are thinking. Do NOT rush to fill the space. When they are ready to continue, they will turn their attention back to you.

Empathetic response: Convey that you understand by relaying back to the person the facts and feelings of what they just shared.

- "I understand that you are blind-sided and confused by this decision."
- "I hear you saying that you are hurt and have a lot of questions you'd like answered."

Anticipating Emotion: *Sometimes no matter how good your intentions or how much you prepared, we are all human at the end of the day, and there are many possible reactions to be prepared to support. These may range from Anger to Gratitude.*

Angry or Agitated

- Do not enter into a debate or argument
- Maintain the same amount of empathy

Disbelief, Possibly in Tears

Pause, give space and allow the person to set the pace of the conversation. At the right moment, ask what would be most helpful

- Time and space with an offer to reconnect
- Sit together for a while longer
- Inquire if they have any questions

Appearing numb, silent

- Do not rush to fill the silence. Allow time for your team member to absorb the information.
- Calmly walk through the resources and what to expect

Matter of fact

- Focus on the resources available and answer any questions they might have
- Do not extend the meeting unnecessarily

Refusal to discuss or an abrupt end to the meeting

- Ensure resources are sent via email and you offer an opportunity to reconnect

Gratitude

- While perhaps unexpected, there may be some who saw this conversation as a possibility and have already processed their departure



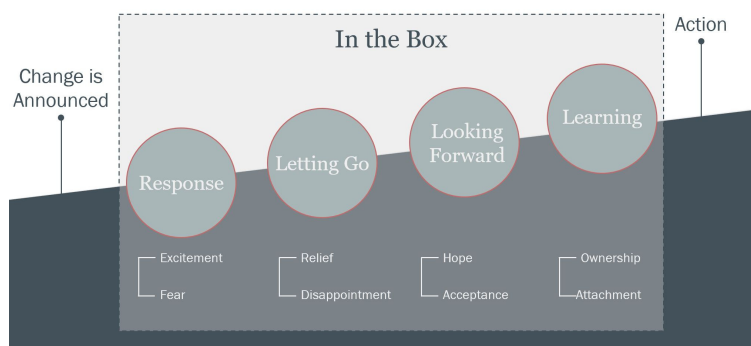
Best Practices (Do's)

- Follow the Guiding Principles, displaying empathy and compassion
- If you don't know the answer, answer with "I don't know"
- Respond with empathy

Empathetic	Non-Empathetic
Understanding: - What has this this been like for you? - It sounds like you are saying... - I want to understand, can you share more about...?	Dominating: - Go be a part of the solution, not the problem - This is what you need to do - It doesn't help to get upset
Recognizing: - You must feel very frustrated - How are you handling this? - This must be hard to talk about. Thank you for sharing.	Avoiding: - This will all blow over - You will be fine - Something good will come of this
Accepting: - I hear you - I can see where you are coming from - I appreciate your perspective	Judging: - I can't believe you said that - I would not have acted that way - That's not how I would respond



What to Avoid (Don'ts)



As you navigate each conversation, remember that people may be "in the box", processing in their own time difficult news or changing circumstances. When "in the box" our emotions tend to rise and our behavior might look different. The most helpful thing a person can do when someone else is in the box is to listen.

Don'ts:

- Talk about how this has impacted you. The person being laid-off will not want to hear that this was a "difficult decision for you." Or, "This is really hard for me."
- Enter the conversation "cold". Without preparation, we are more likely to ramble, use a lot of words or deliver the message in a confusing way. Be clear on how you'll start the conversation and the answers to frequently asked questions (below).
- Take up all the airtime. Be cognizant of how much and how fast you are talking.
- Deliver the news via writing (text, email). All decisions should be communicated in-person or via video call, one-on-one
- Read from a script. While you may need to reference your notes periodically throughout your conversation, these are one-on-one dialogues.
- Blame others for the decision, i.e., "this wasn't my call."