



Hi Emily,

Ah, difficult conversations. You know, that conversation with your partner, co-worker, boss, or family member that you just don't want to have. The kind of conversation that makes waterboarding sound tolerable.

Sure, you may start these conversations calm, composed, and with the best intentions, but you can soon end up feeling like a one-legged man in an ass-kicking competition. It's easy to find yourself in a downward spiral of frustration, hurt feelings, and even shame.

While there is no magic formula that applies to every tough conversation, I have found that the following 7-steps makes it much easier.

The next time you are dreading a conversation, take time to prepare:

1. Check your emotional temperature

Before entering into any difficult conversation, ask yourself how you want to show up. The feelings and thoughts that are dominating your mood will show up in your behavior. Because emotions are contagious, this will dramatically affect the other person.

2. Define the problem

Describe the behavior and be as specific as possible. Example: Rather than saying, "you're always late", try "I've noticed you have been coming in later than usual. For instance, on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, you were over an hour late."

3. Describe the impact

What impact is that behavior having on you, the team, or the family? Sharing a wider impact helps put the problem in perspective. For example, “When you are late, it has an impact on my schedule as well.”

4. Let them vent

Before you get defensive and jump in, ask the person to tell you more and allow them to vent. You might say something like, “Tell me about what’s going on” or “help me understand”. It is important to listen without arguing, justifying, or defending yourself. Be quiet and let them share their perspective.

5. Agree on the problem

If you both have different perceptions of the problem, or both don’t agree it is a problem, moving forward can be a challenge. To gain alignment around a solution, you first have to agree on the problem. For example, Is being late really the problem? Or is it more about being considerate?

6. Brainstorm solutions and come to an agreement

Listen openly and avoid criticizing or judging ideas. It’s important to help make the other person feel heard and involve them in the solution. Rather than focusing on the past, focus on solutions moving forward.

7. Follow-through

The only thing harder than a difficult conversation is having the same one twice. Make it a priority to follow-up and provide feedback. People repeat behavior that gets attention. Catch someone doing something right, and they are likely to do it again.

Difficult conversations can be uncomfortable, but not having them leads to resentment, anger, and damaged relationships.

How do you navigate challenging conversations? Reply to this email with your favorite go-to strategies. I’d love to know!

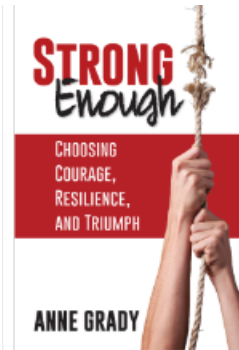
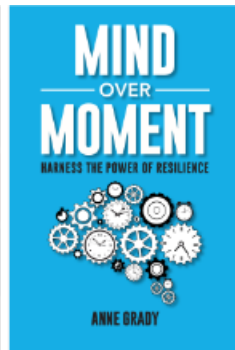
Stay brave and resilient,

Anne



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