

7 Keys to Having a Courageous Conversation with Anyone



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“The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment” Dorothy Nevill

Do you have issues in your professional and personal relationships that are weighing you down? Is your boss asking too much of you but you don't know how to let him know that you are not coping? Do you have questions that you want to ask your partner, but you are too afraid to ask? If the answer is yes – then it is about time you had a “Courageous Conversation” – a conversation where you speak up and express how you feel about these issues that are weighing you down.

There have been many times in my life when I should have had a courageous conversation but I didn't. One of the main reasons why I didn't was because I didn't know how. When I discovered these 7 keys to having a courageous conversation I found a framework that helped me to have a “Courageous Conversation”, in which I was able to express and articulate my thoughts and opinions in a way that avoided awkward situations, quickly cleared up misunderstandings and created positive relationships in my life.

According to the Oxford Dictionary Courage is derived from the Latin word Cor which means heart. In Old French there is the word Corage which denotes the heart as the centre of all feelings. The following 7 keys will help you to be courageous and have conversations in which you are able to express your deepest feelings. A Courageous Conversation will lighten your heart and your life.

These 7 keys have helped me to find the courage to have conversations that I was too afraid to have before.

1. Deal with your Fears

Fear is one of the main reasons that stop you from having a Courageous Conversation. Fear has many disguises. One way through which you can recognise fear is to identify excuses like “the situation is not that bad” or “maybe the problem is not worth mentioning”. These thoughts are dangerous because here fear tries to keep you from being courageous.

Self Limiting Beliefs fuel fear and it is important that you get clear as to what these specific self limiting beliefs are. Maybe you fear rejection, maybe you fear that you could make it worse, or maybe you feel vulnerable. The list of excuses goes on and on.

There are two questions I ask myself when I'm dealing with fear:

1. What are the consequences if I do nothing?
2. Am I willing to accept these consequences?

To be honest there have been a couple of times when I have said “Yes I am ok with the consequences of not having the conversation”. The outcome was that the relationship did not improve and that the nagging feeling of resentment grew. The outcomes from not having courageous conversations never served me well.

2. Deal with your EGO

Sort out your ego. It can get in the way of being objective and achieving a solution targeting the good of a relationship, not you, the individual. In a Courageous Conversation you express your feelings and are true to yourself. If your ego is controlling your heart and if you are protecting your ego you will focus on being right instead of being true. Your conversation will be about your

frustration or anger towards the other person. If the conversation is about you and your sense of entitlement then the conversation will not end well. I guarantee that if you are focussed on pleasing your ego it will go down hill. The other person will feel attacked and will fight back. There will be no resolution.

Once you get your ego sorted and you are authentic about sharing your thoughts and feelings, you will be more open to listening to the other person's side of the story. Remember that a Courageous Conversation aims to seek resolution for the benefit of the relationship rather than the individual. When you speak true to yourself, the message will be received and felt by the other person.

"The single most important thing you can do is to shift your internal stance from "I understand" to "Help me understand." Everything else follows from that. . . Douglas Stone

3. Know WHY you want to have a Courageous Conversation.

Before you start a Courageous Conversation be very clear as to WHY you are having it. What is the purpose and what do you hope to achieve? Once you have sorted out the WHY you will be able to decide what the "risks" of having the conversation are. If you decide to have the conversation, you need to clear up the following 3 things:

- 1.What you are trying to ACHIEVE?
- 2.What you are LISTENING for?
- 3.What gives you the RIGHT to initiate the conversation?

4. Be Prepared to Experience Discomfort

In a Courageous Conversation you have to be prepared to discuss the "undiscussable" – the issues that you don't want to deal with, but that you know you have to face. Also, the other person may not like what you are saying and may not want to hear it at all. After having sorted out the reason why you are having the conversation, you have to think about how you should set up the meeting. The first step to minimising the feeling of discomfort is to GET AGREEMENT from the other person on having the conversation.

Once you have agreement, begin the conversation by telling your side of the story which includes the following 3 points:

- 1.WHY you want to have the conversation
- 2.WHAT the issue is that you want to discuss
- 3.HOW this issue is affecting you

In telling your story you are opening up the opportunity for a dialogue and you invite the other person to join in. If the response is favourable the next step for the two of you is to start exploring each other's stories and to work out how to move forward.

5. Be Real about Your Expectations

We can prepare and plan for a Courageous Conversation. However we can not control what the outcome will be. We are only in control of ourselves. Most people are more comfortable with keeping old problems unresolved rather than working on a solution, so you may not be able to find a common ground. Be prepared for that. If the potential solution requires the other person to make some significant changes then they may need time to reflect about the conversation. So don't expect that by having a courageous conversation you will get immediate results. Be realistic about your expectations.

6. Set the Emotional Tone for the Conversation

The more sensitive the issue is, the more likely it is that your emotions are raw and exposed. If the issue is emotional for you, then you need to make sure that you are calm enough to be clear about what you want to say.

In this situation it is a good idea to write out what you want to say and practise with a friend or supporter. Getting your emotions under control enables you to listen objectively to the other person and to respond calmly. With preparation and practice you are less likely to allow your emotions to take over. If you do get upset and find it difficult to continue then you have to suggest that you both take a break. Get commitment to reschedule the meeting for another time.

“The big three blind spots are tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language. The listener is very aware of these, the talker is not.” Douglas Stone

7. Avoid these 7 Key Mistakes at ALL Cost

The intent of a Courageous Conversation is to look forward to solutions not backwards to blame. It is also about speaking the truth, being transparent and vulnerable. This is very hard and chances are that you will mess it up sometimes. That's ok, Don't give up. Keep going, keep practicing. Like with a sporting activity which is new to you, the more you practice the better you get! There are however 7 key mistakes which will turn a Courageous Conversation into a toxic conversation.

1. Talking too much
2. Having an unclear message
3. Not thinking about the other person's feelings
4. Starting the conversation by saying “So how is it going?”
5. Trying to oversimplify the issue .If it was simple then it wouldn't be difficult to deal with!
6. Over-rehearsing and memorising the script – this will block you from being real
7. To get caught off guard and to lose sight of the goal. When this happens, we tend to fall back into our defence mode or if it's really bad we go back to “combat mode” and it can turn ugly! If it does get really difficult remember to come back to the 7 keys – keep your content clear, stay calm, keep your tone neutral and your EGO in check.

A Courageous Conversation is a tool that helps to resolve relational conflict. The 7 keys help you to prepare to have successful courageous conversation. You may not always get the outcomes you want, however, if you keep having courageous conversations your relationships in your professional and personal life will thrive and prosper.

So go be COURAGEOUS and have that conversation you know you need to have but are too afraid to.