

Hard Conversations

Cheat Sheet

The four conversations no one wants to have, and how to actually have them.

01 BEFORE YOU OPEN YOUR MOUTH

1. Write down the one thing you need them to hear. If you can't say it in a sentence, you're not ready.
2. Pick the time and place with intention. Never in passing, never at the end of a 1:1, never on a Friday at 4pm.
3. Decide what outcome you want before you walk in. You're not just delivering news. You're shaping what comes next.
4. Practice the first sentence out loud. The first sentence is everything.

02 THE FOUR CONVERSATIONS

1 PERFORMANCE

"I want to talk about [specific thing]. Here's what I'm seeing: [two recent, specific examples]. Here's what I need to see instead. What's getting in the way?"

2 BEHAVIOR

"Something I've noticed: [specific behavior, not personality]. I want to flag it because it's affecting [specific impact]. I'd like to understand what's going on."

3 THE 'I CAN'T SAY YES' CONVERSATION

"I've thought about your request and I'm not going to be able to do [the ask]. Here's why: [one real reason, not five]. Here's what I can do instead, if that's useful."

4 THE 'THIS IS HAPPENING' CONVERSATION

"I have hard news. We're [making the change]. This decision is final. I want to walk you through what happens next, and then I'll answer your questions."

03 WHILE YOU'RE IN IT

- Stop talking after the headline. Let them respond.
- Don't fill silence. Silence is the work.
- Don't soften the message. Soften the delivery.
- Stay grounded. If you spiral, the conversation will too.

04 AFTER

- Document it the same day, while it's fresh.
- Check in within 48 hours, not 48 minutes.
- Tell your manager or HR partner before they hear it from someone else.

You don't need to be a perfect communicator. You need to be a clear one.