



STOP
HIDING
FROM
DIFFICULT
CONVERSATIONS


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MEET DR. MARCIA REYNOLDS!

Specializing in emotional intelligence, communications expert Dr. Marcia Reynolds has worked with global organizations and coached leaders for more than 30 years in 34 countries. In her latest book, *The Discomfort Zone: How Leaders Turn Difficult Conversations Into Breakthroughs*, she shares her insights on what it takes to have transformational conversations in the workplace.



Marcia answered questions about difficult conversations from members of *Connect: Professional Women's Network*. Here's some of her most popular advice.

Tenets of The Discomfort Zone:
**DON'T TELL THE OTHER PERSON
WHAT TO DO.**

You're there to discover what it would take for the person to want the result you want. What's in it for them? Do they want to be seen as a leader? Do they want respect from their peers? Do they want to advance in their career? Once you discover what they want, you can help motivate them to move forward.



What should I do if I initiate a difficult conversation and the other person becomes defensive? People who lack confidence in their own knowledge can be threatened if they feel others know more than they do. Make it a point to acknowledge their good ideas, and even ask for advice now and then to show you value what they know.



I feel that I've proven I'm due for a promotion, but I'm afraid to ask. Any tips? What are you afraid might happen if you ask? Put your fears on the table to see if any are valid. Then be clear on the good work you can accomplish if you're promoted. State your case and back it up with facts. Accept that action might not be taken today, but at least your desires will be known when the time is right.



I have an extremely rude client, but I hesitate to drop him because his business is valuable. How should I proceed? You need to set professional boundaries. If the client is disrespecting you, state what behavior you will tolerate and what you won't. If this client makes you feel bad about yourself, it will affect your confidence and business. Be willing to let him go to make space for more appreciative clients.

Tenets of The Discomfort Zone:
PUT THE OTHER PERSON FIRST.

Enter the conversation with the purpose of helping the other person discover solutions. The purpose is not to “fix” or change them. They must feel that you have their best interest at heart. If they sense you’re there for yourself alone, they will not engage.



I'm hoping to switch to a department that I'm passionate about, but I don't want my supervisor to think I don't value her. How can I bring this up? Begin with the desired outcome. Explain to her that you're looking to add new challenges and broaden your career. Have the courage to share your vision and ask for her support.



When terminating an employee, is a short, simple approach best, or should you review the reasoning that lead to your decision? As long as it's not a surprise to the person being terminated, a clear, quick message is best, stating that the decision was made because of the specific behavior. Do not engage in argument or long explanations. Of course, you should also get legal guidance from HR to make sure you're saying things correctly.



How can I professionally get across to a male colleague who is dismissive and uses terms like “aggressive” when I voice opinions? First, let him know the impact his words and actions have had on you. If this doesn’t help, have a conversation with his manager. Focus on the impact of his actions more than the actions themselves. For example, are they preventing you and your team from doing your job? Is he creating silos in the organization that could hurt results today or innovation tomorrow?

Tenets of The Discomfort Zone:

SET AN EMOTIONAL INTENTION FOR THE CONVERSATION.

If you're angry or disappointed from the beginning, the other person will never open up. What do you want him or her to feel? Inspired? Hopeful? Courageous? Use this word as an anchor during the conversation, repeating it to yourself if things get uncomfortable or off-track.



I have a colleague who talks nonstop about her personal life during work hours—so much that clients and coworkers comment on it. How should I address this with her? Ask her if she wants to do good work and help the organization. Then ask if you can help her achieve that goal before you share what people have said. Yes, it could hurt her feelings, but if we aren't told these things, we sabotage our growth.



My colleagues are extremely intelligent, but they're so focused on technical details. How do I talk to them about the personal side of work? Figure out what motivates your colleagues. Do they want to be recognized by their peers for what they know? Then let them know that people will judge them on how they treat others regardless of how smart they are. Do they need to work on a team to get good results? Then they must learn to "play well with others." Everyone's success depends on how we affect one another on a personal level.



How do you get your colleagues to respect new concepts? Try to discover what they want that will motivate them to move forward. Then, help them understand what's stopping them. What do they doubt? What do they fear might happen? Once you help them uncover the sources of their resistance and blind spots, they'll be more likely to commit to doing something differently.

Tenets of The Discomfort Zone:
SHOW AUTHENTIC RESPECT.

Recall the person's good work and remember that they're doing their best with what they know how. Even if you disagree with their perspective, honor the human in front of you.



I have two employees who don't get along, and their behavior has become disruptive. How can I have a productive conversation with them about this? When you get them together, determine if they're both willing to find a way to repair the relationship. If they are, then you need to find a mutual goal for improving things: How will it benefit them? Don't get lost in the backstory—focus on moving forward.



I've always enjoyed my job, but my boss has become extremely negative about the company lately. How can I talk to him about this? People often don't know that their negativity has such a big impact on others. Try telling him that his words are bringing you down. State the impact on you and what you have tried to do to lift yourself up, and what you would like from him instead. Then ask what you can do to support him on this.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION!

LinkedIn and Citi's *Connect: Professional Women's Network* is an online community with more than 385,000 members that helps women achieve the careers they want and discuss issues relevant to their success. Visit [linkedin.com/womenconnect](https://www.linkedin.com/womenconnect) for more information and to join the group for free!

For more insights on having transformative conversations at work, check out Marcia Reynold's [discussion in Connect](#).

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