

5 Tips for Navigating Confrontational Conversations

In his article, “Don’t Shirk the Dirty Work,” (*Enrichment Journal*, Fall 2011), Pastor Glenn Reynolds says, “The best leaders do not delay or duck the difficult; instead they confront problems directly and quickly. The most challenging question is often what to confront and what to leave alone.”

One of the temptations leaders face is to put off a necessary conversation of which they fear the outcome. I’ve come to the conclusion that any leader who takes delight in confrontation may need some help. No healthy leader enjoys having to confront someone or engage in a tense conversation. But no leader escapes the need for such talks on occasion.

Often the solution to our problem is just a difficult conversation we don’t want to have.

And so we wait.

And things get worse.

A problem that was manageable months ago becomes overwhelming, simply because we let it fester and grow to something much worse than it would have, had we dealt with it sooner.

Hard conversations are not listed in most leaders’ job descriptions, but perhaps they should be. To be effective we must ask God to give us wisdom in this area.

These five points have helped my journey of handling tough conversations:

1) Say no to worry and fear

Worry does nothing to change the outcome of the conversation.

We are also commanded many times in Scripture not to worry. Scripture gives us instruction for such occasions:

“But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict” (Luke 21:14-15).

2) Deal with insecurity or approval issues

There are times I haven't wanted to have a conversation because of the fallout that may come from it. Sometimes it's not so much the person I'm meeting with that I have feared, but others they are connected to. As leaders, we all have the experience of meeting with one person over her issue. Then, a short time later, those she is in close connection with leave the church—displeased that someone they are close to was confronted, or did not get her way.

As leaders, we are cognizant of the possible ramifications of a difficult discussion when the person we meet with shares with others in her life. More difficult conversations, or losses, may follow the initial conversation. Out of a desire for self-preservation, we may put off the talk. Rarely is this best for us, for the other person, or for the church. We just delay the inevitable by our refusal to step up and lead, and do the hard thing that must be done.

Due to some of my life experiences, losses have the potential to be a greater challenge for me. Before I received help for my issues, I would do just about anything to prevent a loss in the church, including avoiding conversations I didn't want to have. I realized I needed to have a breakthrough in this area of my life to be the Christian, and the leader, God wanted me to be.

You may not need professional Christian counseling to move forward as I did, but then again you might. If you are avoiding making a difficult leadership decision because of fear of loss or approval, this will continue to hurt everyone around you until you get help.

Perhaps it will not take a counselor's help to move you through it. Getting honest about the struggle, making it a matter of prayer and seeking the support of a minister friend does wonders. The important thing is coming to a place where you no longer minister out of a need for approval of man.

"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

3) Remember that anything can be said with love.

If you tell someone something with love, you don't need to preface it with, *"I just want to tell you something ... in love."* When someone hears something in love, they feel it. They know it.

The fruit of the Spirit is always in style to serve up in a meeting! No matter how troublesome a discussion, the same thing can be said with gentleness rather than harshness.

Even when we may have to confront someone who is caught in a sin, Scripture gives clear indication of how to handle the situation:

"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently" (Gal. 6:1).

We can do anything with love. Anything!

4) Ask the Lord to lead the conversation.

No matter how skilled I would ever become at hard conversations, I will never want to do them alone. Although I have occasion to have confidential discussions with another person in the natural course of my role as a pastor, I am never by myself.

Well before I meet with the person, I have prayed, *Lord, please lead this conversation. I know I need to lead it as pastor, but I need You to lead me! I don't want to do this without You. I need Your guidance, Your wisdom, and Your peace. I ask You to lead me in every word that I say. Let me say what needs to be said and leave out what needs to be left out.*

God is faithful to meet us and dwell in the midst of the hardest conversation.

5) Get prayer support.

Support is available for you, if only you would ask. Many of us don't include others on the difficult parts of our journey in leading because we want to appear as if we have no problems. Truth be told, every leader has these challenges.

A support system is something I would never choose to live without. When I have a hard conversation coming up, I ask for the confidential prayer support of a close pastor or pastor's wife friend who understands and will be faithful to lift up my impending conversation. Depending on the level of challenge, a leader-friend may even join me in fasting and pray during the actual time of my meeting. It is my honor to do the same for others.

Stirring the Waters on the Way to Peace

At times we avoid a conversation because we believe we are

keeping peace. Sometimes we are not only preventing a breakthrough in a life or in the church, but causing a lack of true peace. Our refusal to have a necessary talk can cost us far more than we ever dreamed of paying.

In her book, *Strugglers, Stragglers and Seekers*, Peggy Haymes says, "Avoiding conflict isn't peacemaking. Avoiding conflict means running away from the mess, while peacemaking means running into the middle of it. Peacemaking means addressing those issues that caused conflict in the first place. Peacemaking can never be separated from doing justice. They go hand in hand. Peacemaking means having to stir the waters on the way to peace."

My prayer is for every leader reading this today, that God will give you courage to have a necessary conversation this week, if you have been putting it off. No conversation is too hard for God, and with His wisdom and empowerment, you *can* do this. You can do *all* things, even hard conversations, through Him who gives you strength!

*Reprinted with permission from the Assemblies of God Women's Ministries Department Her Green Room. **Deanna Doss Shrodes** is an Assemblies of God minister, serving for over 25 years in pastoral ministry. Currently she serves as the Director of Women's Ministries for the PenFlorida District of the Assemblies of God and is an in-demand speaker in the United States and abroad. An award-winning writer, she is a contributing author to five highly acclaimed adoption anthologies, contributing author of *Chocolate for a Woman's Courage*, sole author of the books *Juggle* and *Worthy to Be Found*, and a feature writer in scores of publications worldwide, including The Huffington Post. Deanna and her husband Larry make their home in the Tampa Bay area with their three children. She blogs at .*