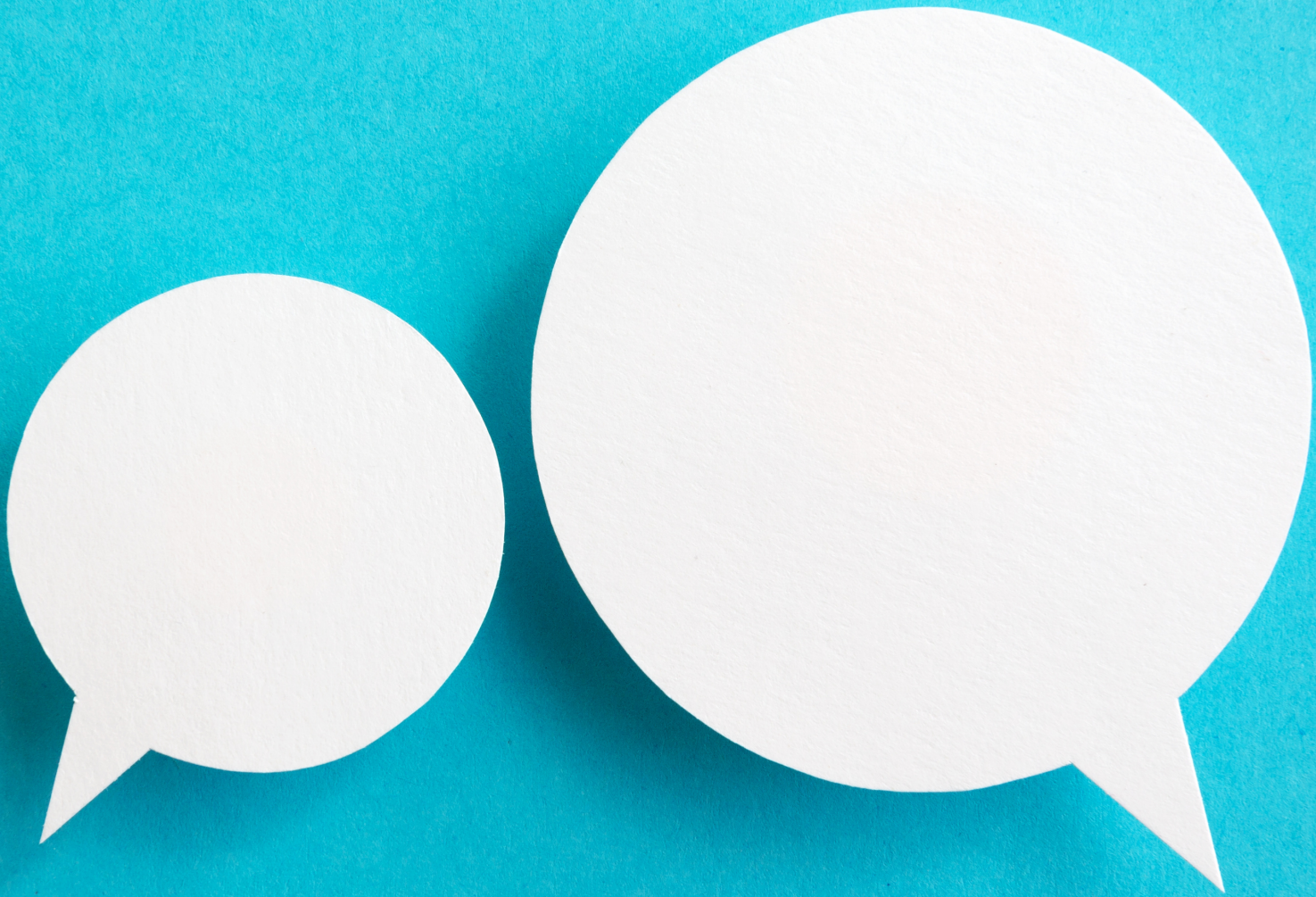


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EMPLOYER GUIDE

HOW TO HANDLE DIFFICULT
CONVERSATIONS WITH EMPLOYEES

HOW TO HANDLE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS WITH EMPLOYEES



A difficult conversation in the workplace, is when Managers have to discuss something with their employees that is not the usual day to day conversation, these discussions are usually of a sensitive nature, can stir up emotions, or are related to an employee's performance or can be about something confidential.

These conversations are usually on a one-to-one basis between an employee and their line manager. These meetings can really test the manager and can highlight their employee relations skills and how they manage and cope with hard or challenging situations.

These conversations can involve:

- Investigating complaints/dealing with grievances.
- Supporting an employee with personal problems.
- Dealing with and tackling personality clashes, between employee and manager, or colleagues.
- Discussing and dealing with poor performance or conduct.
- Supporting or reassuring someone - for example, if they are to be made redundant

WHY TACKLE ISSUES?

No one likes conflict whether it be in the workplace or at home, however, if Managers do not tackle situations as and when they arise, then they could:

- Mislead the employee by giving the impression that there is no problem.
- Deny the employee the chance to improve or put things right.
- Damage the productivity and efficiency of the business.
- Lower the morale and cause bad feeling amongst team members.

HOW CAN DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS BE REDUCED OR MADE EASIER?

Conversations with employees can be less difficult to handle or less of a frequent occurrence if managers:

- Talk to their employees frequently or at the first sign that something is wrong.
- Build trust with their employees and encourage employees to speak up if there are any issues, this can help to reduce the number of issues that may arise in the workplace.
- Frequently talk to their teams together, as this can help any issues to be seen or raised quickly.
- Use employee representatives or Trade Unions representatives as sounding boards to find out how employees feel about certain issues or changes.

It is far better to nip problems in the bud, wherever possible, rather than waiting for them to become more complicated.

WHAT SKILLS ARE NEEDED TO HANDLE A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION?

The skills required to handle having a difficult conversation can be referred to as 'soft' skills.

This is because when handling these conversations, the person needs to be able to deal with emotional or confrontational employees. Soft skills require compassion and understanding and the ability to be able to calm a heated situation.

Before having a difficult conversation, it is important for the manager to consider:

- The **way** they are going to communicate and **what** is to be said.
- How the employee is likely to feel during the conversation.
- The main points that need to be put across to the employee.
- Keep to the facts and use examples as evidence, so that it is not just done on hearsay.
- How to stay calm throughout the meeting.
- The ability to be able to control a meeting and deal with things if they get heated or emotional.
- Allowing the employee the time in the meeting to discuss their point of view.
- Possible solutions to the issue and how these can be implemented.



TRAINING FOR MANAGERS

It is vital that employers support their managers and provide training for them on how to manage employees and hold certain conversations with them. Just because someone has the job title of a manager, does not mean they automatically have the skills to do this.

When managers talk to their employees, it is important for morale and the working relationship that these conversations are done in a productive and constructive way.

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