

Preparing for a Difficult Meeting

Some common sense approaches to help you prepare for challenging conversations.

BEFORE THE MEETING:

1. What do you want to accomplish at this meeting? A change in behavior? A commitment? An apology? Figure out what's important to you before the meeting starts.
2. Make an honest effort to consider the other person's perspective. What do you think they want? Can you give that to them? If not, why? Can you offer alternatives?
3. Accept the fact that you can only know for sure what your intent and your motives are. You can't know what someone else is thinking; you can only speculate about that.
4. Conflicts don't happen in a vacuum. Are there any external factors contributing to the tension? Do they need to be addressed now?
5. Reexamine your personal and professional behavior in the situation up to this point – especially your email messages. Can you honestly say you're proud of everything you've written, said, or done to the person you're about to meet with? Would you have done anything differently? Is any apology warranted on your part?

DURING THE MEETING:

1. Try to start with an honest, positive statement about the other person that conveys respect, even though you may have a serious disagreement.
2. Do not debate – either aloud, or silently. The objective is not victory, it's problem resolution.
3. Listen with an open mind. Focus on the problem, not the person. Ask respectful questions, even if they're hard to answer. What are the real issues?
4. Saving face can help move things forward. Admit your errors. Acknowledge the other person's efforts.
5. Manage your own emotions, language and behavior.

AFTER THE MEETING:

1. Figure out what you're going to do differently to avoid this problem in the future.
2. Avoid using email with this person for a while. Talk face to face. Keep building the relationship.
3. Don't assume anything. If concerns arise, discuss them.
4. Don't let problems fester.
5. Be discreet and professional. Gossiping about conflict is neither discreet nor professional.