Giving and Receiving Feedback

HARVARD SEAS HUMAN RESOURCES

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Harvard John A. Paulson
School of Engineering
and Applied Sciences

Agenda

1. Objective, Why, What, When, and Where

2. Preparation, Delivery, and Feedback Formulas

3. Listening, Open-Ended Questions, and Non-Verbal Reminders

4. Difficult Conversations

5. Meaningful Conversations: 2025

6. Key Takeaways, Q&A, and Resources

Today's Agenda

Objective

To provide managers with guidance and tools that enable you to have effective and meaningful conversations involving performance feedback.

Giving and receiving ongoing feedback is a vital driver of meaningful conversations.

Giving and Receiving Feedback: Why

- Creates **connectivity** around how peoples' work **impacts** the organization.
- Generates innovative **ideas**, **options**, and **solutions.**
- Improves **accountability**, **trust**, and **respect.**
- Influences **positive behaviors** and **outcomes**.
- Provides **clarity** and **transparency** around expectations.

Giving and Receiving Feedback: What, When, and Where

What?

- Feedback can be positive, constructive, or difficult

When?

- It can be a planned and intentional engagement or could occur "in the moment"
- Recommend a frequency of at least quarterly; ongoing even better

Where?

- Private 1:1 vs. in a group setting

Feedback in Times of Uncertainty

- Lead with **Empathy** and **Transparency.**

- Prioritize **Development** and **Growth, Not Just Evaluation**.

- Be **Specific** and **Fair.**

- **Separate Performance** from **Organizational Uncertainty**.

- Provide a **Path Forward.**

Giving and Receiving Feedback: General Preparation Checklist

❑ **Gather information** (e.g., goals, job description, achievements, client feedback).

❑ **Prepare key messages** and **conversation points** that are **specific**, **factual**, and focus on **behaviors**, and **not personality**.

❑ Develop **open-ended questions** to ask.

❑ Ensure **environment** for delivery is private and confirm time allotment for meeting.

❑ Determine which of the **feedback formulas** to utilize (to be covered shortly in this deck).

Giving and Receiving Feedback: General Delivery Checklist

☐ Maintain an **open mind**.

☐ Seek to **understand** and **avoid assumptions**.

☐ Focus on your **tone**.

☐ Recognize **emotions** and potential **impact of feedback.**

☐ Explore **facts** and use **concrete examples.**

☐ **Actively listen.**

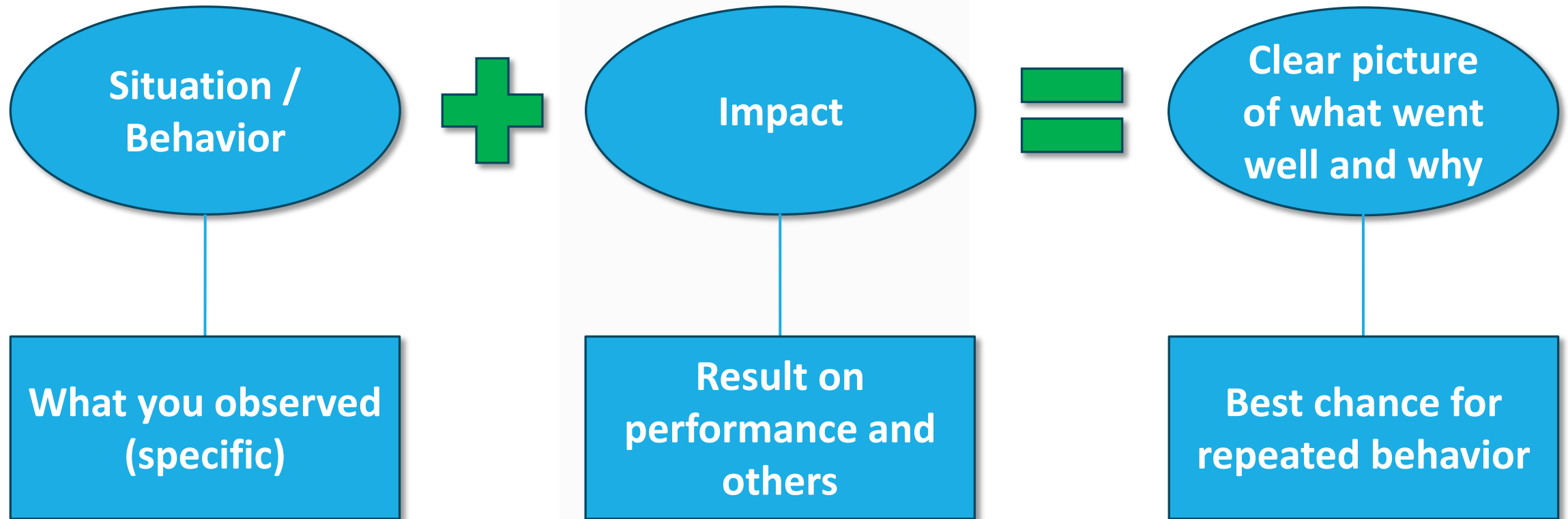☐ Create a **forward focus.**

Giving and Receiving Feedback: Biases

Type	Definition	Mitigation Strategies
Anchoring or Primacy	• Giving undue weight to initial impressions, potentially overlooking later achievements or improvements (or vice versa).	• Focus on the current review period and relevant performance data.
Attribution	• Attributing success to personal traits and failure to external factors (or vice versa) based on your relationship with them.	• Look for data and behavior-based evidence before making judgments.
Central Tendency	• Avoiding extremes by rating everyone as average or middle-of-the-road.	• Recognize and reward exceptional performance, and address underperformance appropriately.
Confirmation	• Looking for evidence that confirms a pre-existing opinion about an employee.	• Challenge your assumptions and seek disconfirming evidence.
Contrast	• Evaluating relative to others rather than against objective standards.	• Use pre-defined criteria and review each employee independently.

Giving and Receiving Feedback: Biases, Cont'd

Type	Definition	Mitigation Strategies
Gender and Racial	• Unconscious stereotypes that influence evaluations based on gender, race, or other identity markers.	• Provide constructive and positive feedback, to all directs, based on peer, direct report, and other manager input, consistently tied to objective performance indicators and observable behaviors.
Halo/Horns	• Allowing one positive (halo) or negative (horns) trait or incident to unduly influence overall assessment.	• Separate different performance dimensions and rate them independently.
Leniency or Strictness	• Consistently rating all employees too high (leniency) or too low (strictness), regardless of actual performance.	• Calibrate reviews with peers or HR to maintain consistent standards.
Recency	• Overemphasizing most recent events vs. the entire review period.	• Keep ongoing performance notes all year to provide a holistic view.
Similarity	• Rating individuals more favorably because they share traits, interests, or backgrounds with you.	• Focus on objective performance metrics and behavior-based observations.

Giving and Receiving Feedback Formula: Positive

Situation / Behavior + **Impact** = **Clear picture of what went well and why**

What you observed (specific)

Result on performance and others

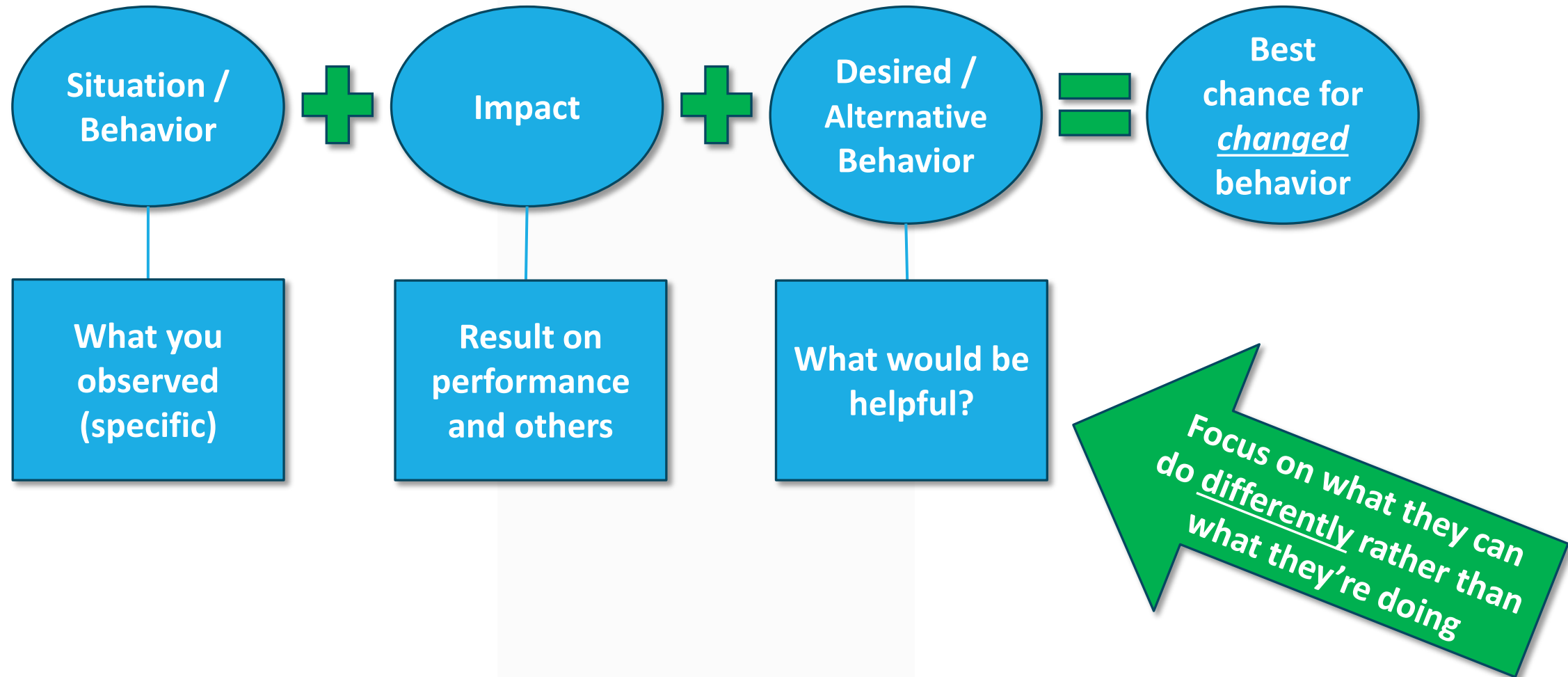**Best chance for repeated behavior**

Positive Feedback Example

- **Situation:** I really enjoyed your presentation at the team meeting this morning.

- **Behavior:** You explained a complex issue in an easy-to-follow-way and outlined potential solutions clearly and concisely. It was interesting and enjoyable. You checked in for understanding and questions throughout.

- **Impact:** The audience was participative and engaged throughout. They framed back understanding of the concerns raised and committed to implementing the solutions proposed. A follow-up meeting was set to map out next steps and owners. Good job raising this and gaining advocacy to resolve this issue!

Giving and Receiving Feedback Formula: Constructive

Situation / Behavior ➕ **Impact** ➕ **Desired / Alternative Behavior** 🟰 **Best chance for _changed_ behavior**

What you observed (specific)

Result on performance and others

What would be helpful?

Focus on what they can do _differently_ rather than what they're doing

Constructive Feedback Example

- **Situation / Behavior:** You missed your last two deadlines due to incomplete work submitted.

- **Impact:** The department incurred late fees which put us over budget. Teammates had to pitch in last minute to help resolve this which led to delayed completion of their other work.

- **Desired Behavior:**

  - Gather their Insights: What was this experience like for you? What do you think could've been done differently? Is there anything additional I can do to help?

  - Confirming Expectations: E.g., I'd like to see you implement steps earlier in your process to ensure you complete your work to submit ahead of deadlines. If you're still encountering challenges, let me know.

Exercise: Constructive Feedback

Scenario: Think about a time when you had to deliver constructive feedback and it didn't go as well as you would have liked.

- **Exercise (10 minutes):**
  - Pair up in breakout rooms.
  - Peer "Deliverer" briefly describes 1) their situation, 2) how they handled it, and 3) why it didn't go as well as they would have liked.
  - Peer "Coach" acts as listener and provides feedback and ideas using the Constructive Feedback Model as reference.
  - Given the feedback, discuss briefly what Deliverer might do differently in the future.
  - Switch roles and repeat the exercise halfway through.
- **Return (5 minutes):** Bring group back, how did it go?

Listening Skills

Skills	Phrases and Behaviors
Create the Right Environment: Set aside physical distractions to focus completely on the other person.	***Speaker:*** *"Can we talk about a challenging situation that I am having?"* ***Listener:*** *"This is a good time. I will silence my phone and close the door to give you 100% of my attention."*
Seek to Understand: Focus on the speaker's message, rather than your response.	***Bracketing:*** *Imagine putting aside your nagging thoughts or wanting to debate.* ***Body Language:*** *Lean forward, establish and maintain eye contact, comfortable posture.*

Listening Skills, Cont'd

Skills	Phrases and Behaviors
Paraphrase: Validate the speaker's message by rephrasing, using your own words to confirm their meanings. Use reflective language.	*"As I hear it, you…"* *"I'm picking up that you…"* *"It sounds like you…"*
Perception Check: Check your belief(s) about what the speaker feels or thinks – unspoken assumptions, conclusions, feelings.	*"It appears that you place a high value on…"* *"So, the way you're feeling now is that…"* *"You seem to have a sense of…"*

Exercise: Practicing Listening

Scenario: Pre-think about a topic you're familiar with and can speak to for 2 minutes.

- **Exercise (8 minutes):**
  - Pair up in breakout rooms. Decide who will be the speaker and listeners.
  - Determine topic: *Share a movie, book, article, work challenge, etc., that resonates*
  - Speaker: Speak for **2 minutes** about the topic. Listeners *just* listen.
  - Choose one listener to take **1 minute** to recap what the speaker has said (summarize -- do not debate / react). Other listeners can add anything that may have been missed.
  - With the remaining time, choose another speaker and repeat the exercise.
- **Return (5 minutes):** Bring group back, how did it go?

Open Ended Questions

Open-ended questions help managers and staff to more clearly understand what is happening, what is needed, and to discover different ways of thinking and acting to be more satisfied and fully contributing to our roles.

What, How, When, Where, Who, Why*

Open Ended Questions Examples

❑*What* priorities should I focus on this year?

❑*How* will I know if I'm on the right track?

❑*When* are the best days and times for us to meet?

❑*Who* else might be a resource to me (or us)?

❑*Why* do we use this process over that one?

❑*What* is your (our) understanding about the project?

❑*What* might I (we) do differently (to achieve success)?

❑*How* can I (we) best mitigate xyz risk?

Nonverbal Reminders

- Comfortable eye contact

- Listen nonjudgmentally

- Use affirming voice sounds

- Open hands / arms

- Engaging Posture
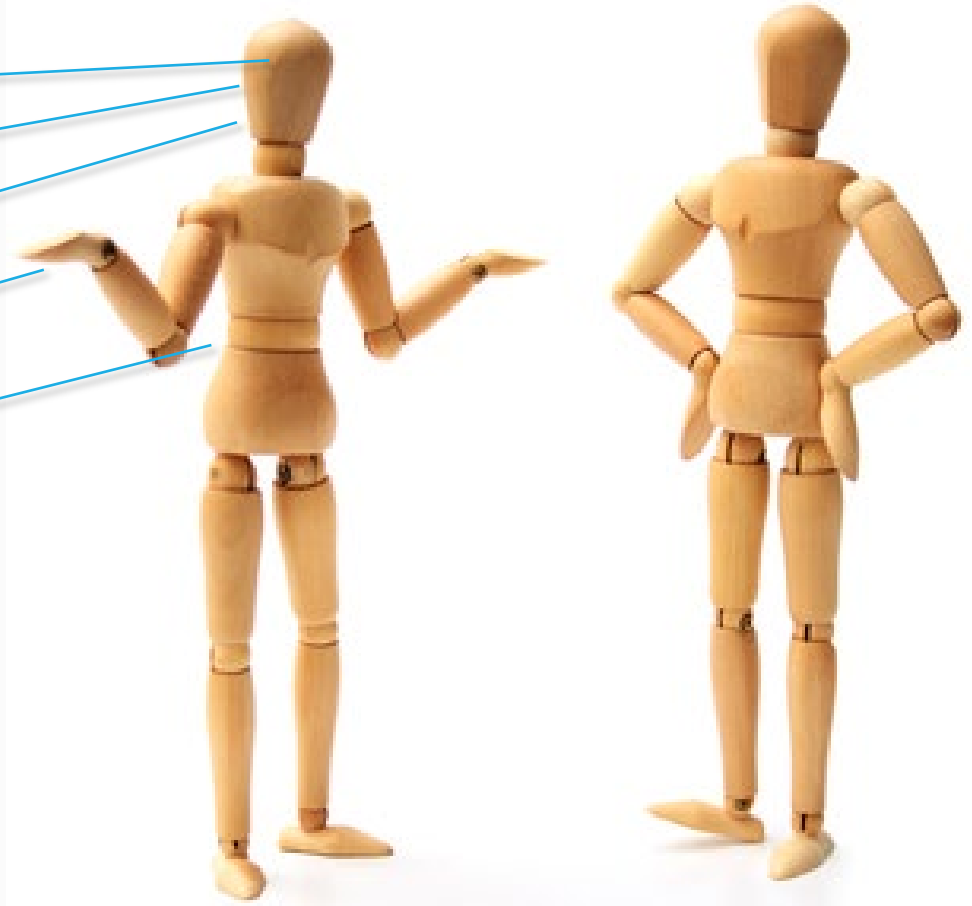
Source: Becoming a Coaching Manager Training, Center for Workplace Development

Difficult Conversations: Characteristics

- The need for the conversation **may arise** either **over time**, **or** it may happen **suddenly**.

- Could be related to a **personal** or **sensitive** issue, or it could be **performance** related.

- **Not always** about who is **right** or **wrong**.

- **May be about** achieving **results** and making positive **changes**.

- Consider **what about** the **conversation is difficult for you**.

Difficult Conversations: Impact of Avoiding vs. Engaging

Avoiding or delaying can result in:

- Damage to relationships.

- Increased conflict, stress, and anxiety.

- Missed opportunities, decreased productivity, and other disruptive impact.

- A difficult situation continuing.

Engaging can result in:

- Strengthened relationships.

- Additional insights, options, support, and resources to resolve identified.

- Identification of other challenges that if resolved improve outcomes.

- Improved environment, morale, etc..

Difficult Conversations: Preparation

Stages	Details
Specifics	• Confirm the issue and goal of the conversation. • Gather specifics, examples, facts. • Identify your own biases and assumptions.
Setting Meetings	• Meet regularly as a standard approach but remain flexible for "in the moment" conversations too. • Schedule appropriate times in private, neutral settings.
Mindsets	• Anticipate and acknowledge feelings, emotions, and personal impact for both of you. • Approach with curiosity to understand, positive intent, empathy, and honesty. • Consider power dynamics, cultural context, and interpersonal history. • Reserve judgement and blame.

Difficult Conversations: Execution

Stages	Details
Framing the Conversation	- Create psychological safety. - Open the conversation constructively. - Start with intent and shared purpose and seek to agree on shared goals or values. - Use "I" statements rather than blame-focused language. (e.g., "I need for us to have a conversation about xyz. I'd like to work through the challenges that have arisen and identify best path forward, together.")
Active Listening	- Ask clarifying questions, confirm issue and/or root cause(s). - Build trust by actively listening and framing back what you hear and understand. - Use silence to give space.

Difficult Conversations: Execution, Cont'd

Stages	Details
Staying on Track	• Gently redirect if the conversation derails. • Separate facts from feelings without invalidating emotions.
Managing Emotions in Real Time	• Acknowledge emotions when they arise and avoid passing judgment. • Pause the conversation if it becomes unproductive. • Regulate your own emotions – stay calm and centered.
Moving Toward Resolution	• Brainstorm options, solutions, and ways forward together. • Identify mutual understanding or agreements. • Summarize key points and clarify next steps. • Confirm where answers are still TBD.
Follow-Up	• Document the conversation, if needed. • Set a check-in or follow-up plan.

Exercise: Difficult Conversations

Scenario: *Think about a current or anticipated conversation you need to have.*

- **Breakout Rooms (15 minutes):**
  - Pair up in breakout rooms.
  - Peer "Describer": Relays: 1) Situation (specific or in general) and 2) What makes it difficult.
  - Peer "Coach": 1) Listens, 2) Asks open-ended questions (e.g., what about this is difficult for you?), 3) Provides feedback and suggestions.
  - After 7 minutes swap roles and repeat exercise.
- **Return and Debrief (5 minutes):**
  - Welcome back, how did it go?

Meaningful Conversations: 2025

- Process Same as Last Year
- Instructions for Completing the Development Conversation Form
- Additional Thoughts
- Questions?

Key Takeaways

- Provide regular opportunities to deliver and receive feedback (i.e., at least quarterly).

- Recognize conversations may be positive, constructive, or difficult.

- Approach with empathy and positive intent.

- Seek to understand, actively listen, and frame back understanding.

- Focus on situations, behaviors, impact, and ways forward.

- Use this deck as a reference guide and supporting resource.

- Partner with others (Manager, HRBP, peers) when needed.

Supporting Resources

Live Courses:

- *Giving and Receiving Feedback (CWD)**

- Navigating Difficult Conversations (CWD)

Videos:

- *High Impact Development Conversations**

- *Performance and Feedback Conversation**

- *Practical Tips for Coaching Conversations**

- Giving and Receiving Feedback

- *When Performance Conversations are Challenging**

Reference Guides, Articles, and Books:

- Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most

- *Giving and Receiving Effective Feedback**

- *Giving Feedback Guide Sheet**

- *How to Have Difficult Conversations**

SEAS Performance Page:

- FY25 Year-end Performance and Development Conversations

Managing at SEAS Page:

- SEAS Managers Toolkit

Q&A

Thank you!