

AIEBOOKGENERATOR.AI EDITION

The Difficult Conversation Prep Workbook

A practical rehearsal for new managers

By AI Ebook Generator Studio

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Acknowledgments

This book was produced internally by the AI Ebook Generator team as a product demonstration. It is not a customer book, testimonial, sales claim, or publishing result.

Separate the event from the story

When a conversation feels difficult, the mind starts rehearsing before the meeting begins. It guesses motives, predicts objections, and builds a case. This first module slows that process down.

The aim is not to become emotionless. It is to know which parts of your concern another person could observe and which parts are your interpretation.

Exercise: the camera test

Write the situation as if a camera and microphone had recorded it. Include dates, actions, words, missed agreements, and visible effects. Leave out motive.

What happened?

Now underline anything that assumes intent. Phrases such as "didn't care," "wanted to undermine me," or "was being lazy" may describe your fear, but a camera could not record them.

Exercise: name the effect

Complete these sentences with one concrete effect.

1. When this happened, the work was affected because: _____
2. The team or client experienced: _____
3. I had to change, repeat, delay, or repair: _____

Keep the effect close to the event. "Everyone has lost trust" is broad. "The client received two different delivery dates and asked which one was correct" is something both people can examine.

Reflection: what am I protecting?

Choose no more than two.

- ☐ A clear standard

- [] A deadline or commitment
- [] A working relationship
- [] A fair distribution of work
- [] Safety or compliance
- [] The other person's chance to improve
- [] Something else: _____

Write one sentence about why this matters now.

Module check

Before moving on, you should be able to describe the event and its effect without diagnosing the other person. If you cannot, return to the camera test and make the scene smaller.

Choose the useful outcome

A difficult conversation can carry too many goals. You may want an explanation, an apology, an immediate behavior change, reassurance, agreement, and proof that the problem will never happen again.

Trying to secure all of that in one meeting usually makes the opening heavy. Choose the smallest useful outcome that moves the work forward.

Exercise: sort the outcomes

Write every outcome you are hoping for, even the ones you would not say aloud.

Mark each item with one letter:

- **C** if you can control it yourself;
- **A** if it requires agreement;
- **H** if you can only hope for it.

You can control whether you describe the issue clearly. You can ask for a new check-in rule, but it requires agreement. You can hope the other person feels grateful for the feedback, but you cannot make that the condition for a useful meeting.

Exercise: write the meeting outcome

Use this frame:

*By the end of this conversation, I want us to understand _____ **and agree on** _____.*

Draft one version:

Test it against three questions:

1. Can this reasonably happen in the time available?
2. Does it leave room for information I do not yet have?
3. Would the agreement be visible in later work?

If the answer to any question is no, reduce the outcome.

Boundary: what this meeting is not for

Complete one line:

This meeting is not the place to resolve _____

That issue may need another meeting, a different person, or a formal process. Naming the boundary helps you notice when the conversation drifts.

Module check

Your outcome should describe understanding and a next agreement. It should not require the other person to feel a particular emotion or accept a judgment about their character.

Rehearse a direct opening

The opening only needs to do three jobs: identify the subject, describe the observed event and effect, and invite the other person's view.

Long openings often signal that the speaker is trying to prevent every possible response. You do not need to argue the whole case before the other person speaks.

Build the opening

Fill in the four lines.

Subject: I want to talk about _____

Observation: We agreed _____. **I observed** _____

Effect: The effect was _____

Invitation: I want to understand what happened from your side. What did I miss?

Now combine the lines in your own voice.

Read it aloud

Use a timer. The opening should normally take less than a minute. As you read, circle any word that sounds like a verdict: always, never, careless, unprofessional, disrespectful, attitude, commitment.

Some of those words may belong in a policy or performance process. In the opening, they often create an argument about labels before the event is understood.

Rehearse three turns

Write a short response for each possibility. Do not script the other person's exact words.

They share information you did not know

My response: _____

They disagree with the event or effect

My response: _____

They become quiet or need a pause

My response: _____

A useful response can be simple: "I want to make sure I understand that. Let me repeat what I heard." Or: "We remember that differently. Let's look at the timeline together."

Grounding note

Before the meeting, choose one physical cue that helps you slow down: place both feet on the floor, take one breath before answering, or keep a glass of water nearby.

My cue: _____

Module check

You are ready to continue when the opening sounds like something you would actually say, names one issue, and leaves space for a different account of what happened.

Plan the agreement and follow-up

Good intent at the end of a meeting is easy to misremember. A useful agreement names the next behavior, the owner, the timing, and how both people will know whether it is working.

Do not force an agreement before you understand the other person's account. This page is preparation, not a verdict.

Draft one workable agreement

Behavior or action: _____

Owner: _____

When it happens: _____

What support is needed: _____

How we will review it: _____

Check the agreement

- [] It can be observed.
- [] It has an owner.
- [] The timing is clear.
- [] The other person had a chance to shape it.
- [] It does not quietly add unrelated work.
- [] A follow-up date is on the calendar.

Prepare the close

Write one sentence that summarizes the agreement without reopening the whole conversation.

Write the question you will ask before ending.

What feels unclear or unrealistic about what we agreed?

My version: _____

After the meeting

Record facts while they are fresh. Follow your organization's policies for sensitive notes and formal performance matters.

- 1. What new information did I learn?
- 2. What did we agree?
- 3. What support or escalation is required?
- 4. When will we check progress?

Notes:

Final page

A respectful conversation can still be uncomfortable. Preparation cannot control the response. It can help you arrive with a smaller claim, a clearer purpose, and enough room to listen.