

Difficult Conversations

How to Engage in Effective Communication
with your Colleagues

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**What are some
examples of difficult
conversations?**



Race

Ending a relationship

Finances

Investigating complaints of misconduct

Politics

What are some examples of difficult conversations?

Religion

Disciplinary Action

Confronting hurtful behavior

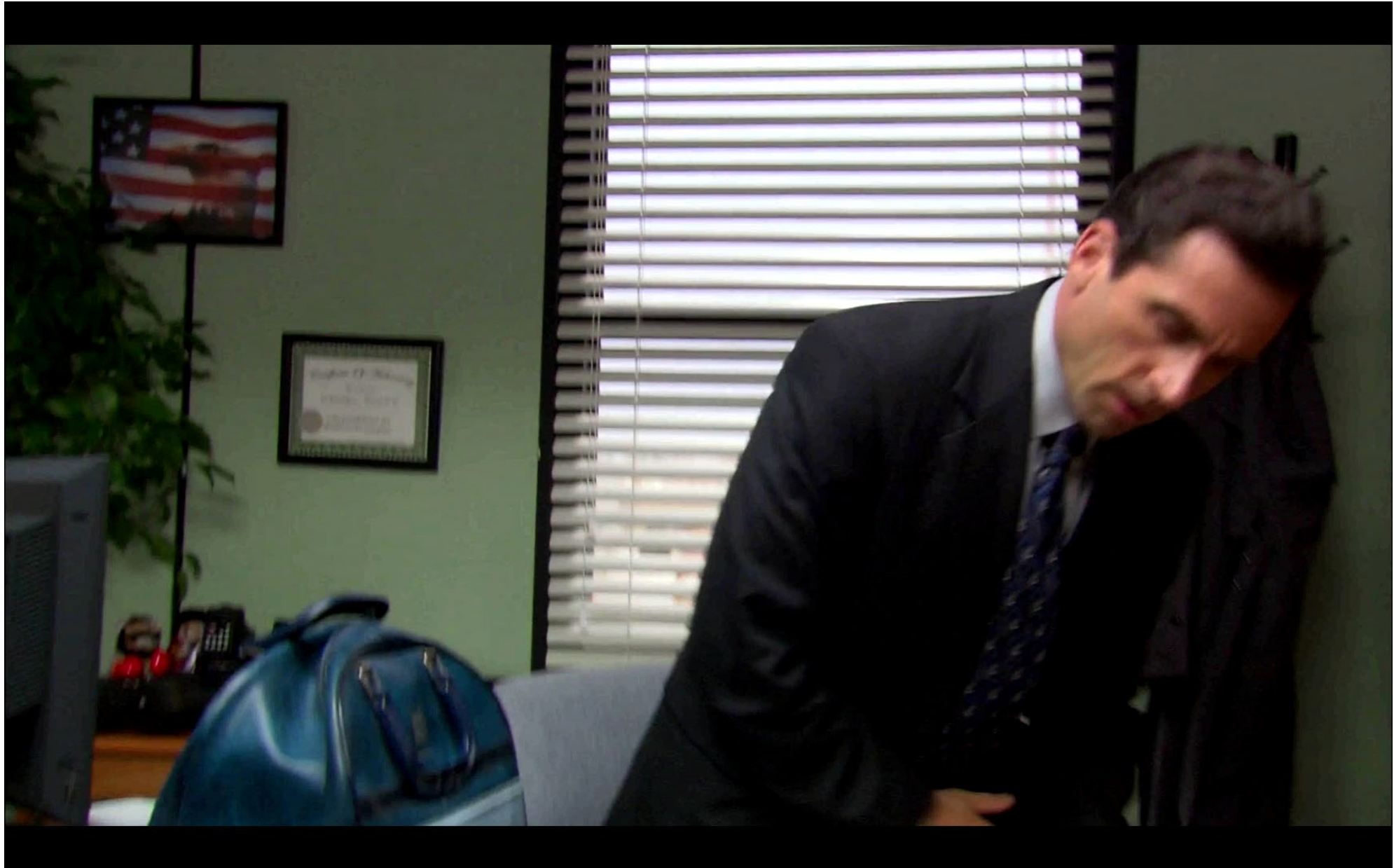
Illness

Addressing poor performance

Gender

**A difficult conversation
is anything you find it
hard to talk about.**

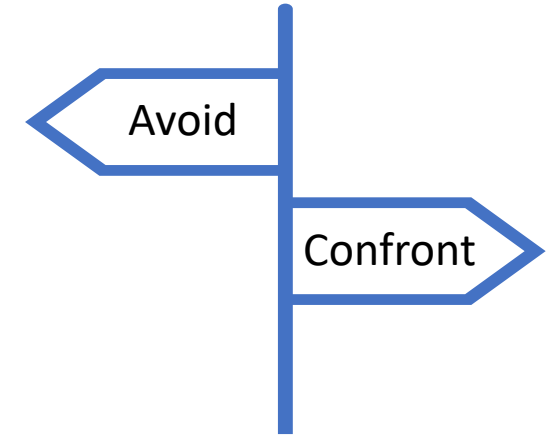




There often seems to be no good path forward

Avoid:

- Tensions mount
- Bad behavior continues
- Resentment grows
- Employee misses learning opportunity



Confront:

- Feelings are hurt
- Good relationships are strained



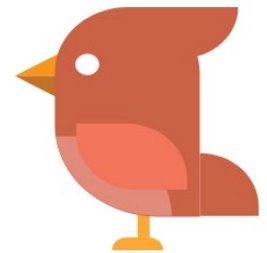
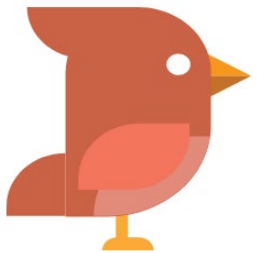
The True Cost of Avoidance

- Prolonging or exacerbating the problem,
- Giving the impression that there is no problem and denying the employee a chance to improve,
- Damaging the productivity and efficiency of the office,
- Reducing staff engagement,
- Reducing staff confidence in your ability to manage,
- Lower morale amongst team members,
- Higher absenteeism and employee turnover,



Recognizing When to Have a Conversation

- Is there a health or safety issue?
- Are students being impacted?
- Is the problem affecting moral?
- Is the problem affecting efficiency?
- Is the problem temporary or trivial?





Kevin

You learn Kevin has been sleeping in his office because of troubles at home.



Angela

You receive an email from a student letting you know Angela was five minutes late to start of her class.



Mindy.

Debra has been in a bad mood since her mom died last week.




Ryan

Ryan frequently wears headphones at work and sometimes cannot hear when colleagues ask a question.

Preparing for your Conversation



Streaming now on Peacock 

Info



the
office

Preparing for your Conversation

Set the stage for a productive meeting



Decide What You Want to Achieve

Before you start preparing for the conversation, ensure that you have a clear understanding of the problem that you want to resolve.

Ask yourself:

- Why do you want to have the conversation?
- What's important to you?
- What do you want to achieve?
- Is the outcome you're looking for realistic?



Kevin

You learn Kevin has been sleeping in his office because of troubles at home.

- **Why do you want to have the conversation?**
You're worried about him. It is not safe to be on campus alone at night. It is a liability for the college.
- **What's important to you?**
Kevin's safety
- **What do you want to achieve?**
Kevin sleeping in a safe place other than his office.
- **Is the outcome you're looking for realistic?**
Yes



Ryan

Ryan frequently wears headphones at work and sometimes cannot hear when colleagues ask a question.

- **Why do you want to have the conversation?**
- **What's important to you?**
- **What do you want to achieve?**
- **Is the outcome you're looking for realistic?**

Check your Facts and Gather Relevant Documents

Make sure you know the facts of the situation before approaching the employee.

Review relevant documents such as contracts, CBAs, and District policies.

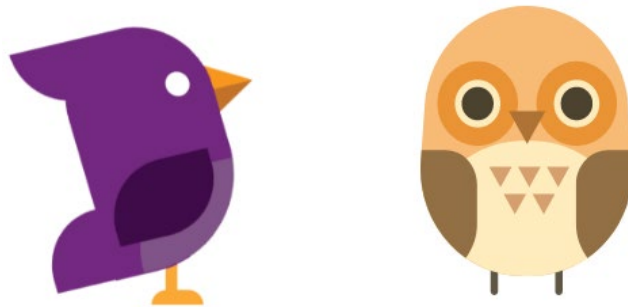
Print copies of any documents you need to bring to the meeting. For example, if the matter is about poor performance, you may want to bring a copy of the job description, previous evaluations, or a past PIP.



Think About the Employee's Perspective

After you have gathered the facts, you should think about the situation from your employee's perspective.

Try to see the situation from their point of view. How will they feel coming into this meeting? How may they describe the version of events?



Think About Whether You Need Support





Think About Whether You Need Support

HR is here to help!

We can give you feedback on your plan, help you develop a script of what you want to say, be a neutral party in the room, just let us know!



Consider the Logistics

Create a comfortable space for your colleague

- Is the location private?
- Will you be rushed or interrupted?
- Is there appropriate seating?
- Are you on neutral ground?

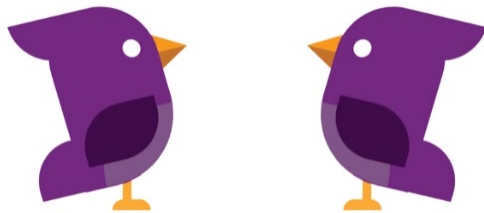


Prepare What You are Going to Say

If you are having a conversation about something that is important, plan ahead and do not be casual about it.

An overly casual approach may trivialize the issue or appear disrespectful to the employee.

Write down the key points you need to cover, so that you can keep your conversation on track and stay in control.



Prepare What You are Going to Say

When preparing, it is helpful to think about these questions:

- What is the purpose of the conversation?
- What outcome do you want? (for example, an improvement in performance or a change in behavior)
- What information do you need from the employee? What questions do you need to ask to obtain this information?
- How do you think the employee will react?
- What solutions can you propose to resolve the matter?

Give the employee time to prepare

Make an appointment with the employee and provide some context to give them some time to prepare.

Depending upon the subject this may be a few hours to a few days.

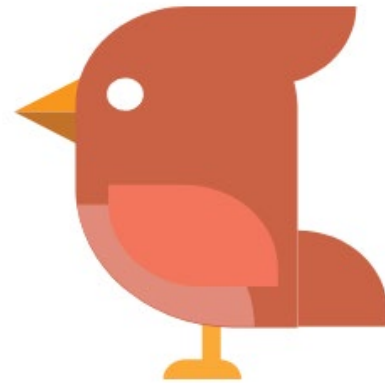
Knowing that the conversation is coming may cause stress for the employee, so phrase the approach carefully and don't leave it too long.

Give the employee time to prepare

Depending on the nature of the conversation, you can say:

- Do you have some time this afternoon? I have some feedback I would like to discuss with you”
- “I’d like to talk about _____and get your point of view. Can you come see me tomorrow?”
- “I think we have different perceptions about _____I’d like to hear your thinking on this. Are you free this afternoon?”
- “I’d like to see if we might reach a better understanding about _____. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well. Would it be ok to sit down and discuss it on Wednesday?”

The Conversation



Six Steps to a Successful Conversation

Step 1 – State the problem

Step 2 – Listen and question

Step 3 – Acknowledge

Step 4 – Reassess your position

Step 5 – Look for solutions

Step 6 – Close the conversation



State the Problem

State the problem and provide examples.

State the impact that the problem is having on the college, your department, and / or students.



State the Problem

Begin the conversation by explaining the purpose of the meeting and the problem you are trying to resolve or goal you hope to achieve.

Avoid unnecessary small talk to “ease them into it”. This will only make the conversation harder and heighten anxiety. The importance of the message may also be lost if it is hidden between other messages.

Clearly state the problem and your observations and provide examples where relevant. Give specific examples and refer to dates, documents, work or specific interactions.

Listen and Question

Put aside your view and let the employee explain their side of the story and motives.

Try to understand their point of view.



Listen and Question

Be curious and ask open questions to explore the employee's story, such as:

- “How do you see it?”
- “How do you feel about that?”
- “What was your intention there?”
- “What leads you to say that?”
- “Tell me about that...”

Express empathy using statements such as:

- “I can see that this has been frustrating for you”
- “It sounds like this is upsetting you”
- “I want to make sure I understand you”.

Listen and Question

Ask questions to clarify what you are unsure about or don't understand.

Use words such as 'Could you explain X further', or "Can you elaborate on X?"

Let the other person finish what they have to say - don't interrupt except to acknowledge. If you do interrupt, apologize and ask them to continue.

Acknowledge

Acknowledge the employee's feelings and view of the situation.

Confirm and clarify your understanding of what they have said and validate them where appropriate.



Acknowledge

After the employee has expressed their side of the story, clarify what they have said, e.g. “I want to make sure I understand you. You said...”

Acknowledge that there may be differences in how you see things.

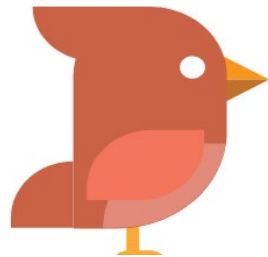
Acknowledge the employee’s feelings. For example, “I can see this is hard for you” or “It’s ok to be upset about this”

Reassess Your Position

After the employee has put forward their point of view, it is your turn to clarify your position without minimizing theirs.

What can you see from your perspective that they've missed?

Has your position changed based on the information they provided?



Reassess Your Position

After the employee has put forward their point of view, it is your turn to clarify your position without minimizing theirs.

You may say something like “From what you’ve told me, I can see how you concluded that... However...”.

If the conversation becomes adversarial, go back to listening and questioning. Asking for the employee’s point of view usually creates safety, and they’ll be more responsive.

Look for Solutions

Work with the employee to develop solutions.

Agree on a way forward.

If this is a disciplinary meeting, state your expectations and direct the employee's change in behavior.



Look for Solutions

Make suggestions about ways to move forward and resolve the situation. Phrase your suggestions by saying: “I think...”, “I’d prefer...” or “I wonder whether...”, instead of demands like: “I want...” or “I have decided”.

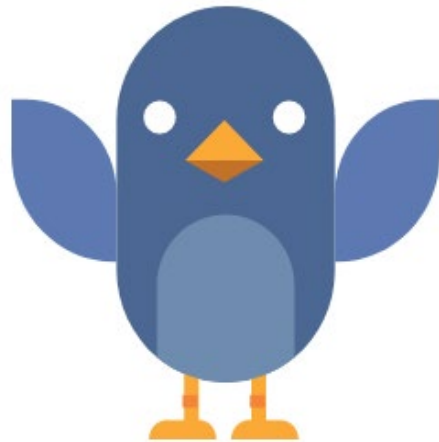
Invite the employee to make suggestions for an outcome as well.

If this is a disciplinary meeting you may need to say, “I am directing you to...”

Close the conversation

Clarify and document the agreed actions and next steps.

Thank the employee.



Close the conversation

As you finalize the conversation, agree on your action points and next steps.

Confirm the key points of your discussion, paraphrasing them in a concise and clear manner.

Check where you are now, what needs to be done to resolve the issue and what happens next.

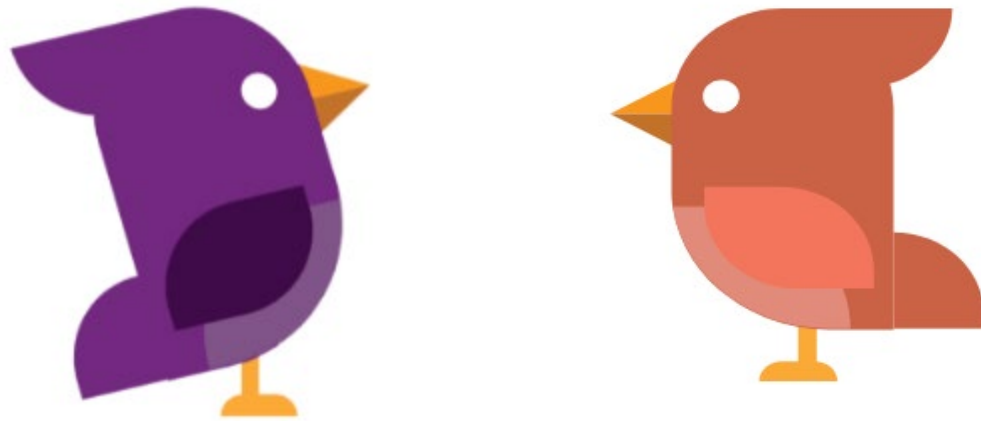
Note what actions need to be taken, who they will be taken by and when, e.g. “So to move forward let’s ...”

Close the conversation

Make a time to discuss the issue again. This will allow you both time to take your agreed actions, and check whether the issue has been resolved.

Close the conversation by thanking the employee for being open and listening to you. For example, “I want to thank you for being open to this and for taking this to heart”.

After The Conversation



Document the Meeting

Write down notes as the conversation progresses.

Review your notes after the meeting and document the salient points. Share a copy of these notes with the employee where appropriate.

Notes may include:

- agreed outcomes with dates and standards,
- any support or training to be provided to the employee,
- any consequences if the agreement is breached.

Reflect

After the conversation, take some time to reflect on the matter and regroup.

Learn from the experience and think about what you could do differently next time.

Debrief with human resources or a more senior manager if you feel you need to discuss the matter. Avoid discussing the matter with other staff members.

Follow up

Take the steps you agreed to take.

Allow the employee sufficient time to take the steps they agreed upon. Then follow up with the employee to find out whether the issue has been resolved or needs revisiting.

Provide the employee further guidance or support if they need it

Let's Practice!





Toby.

Toby is a faculty member who delivers "ok" lessons but it never seems like his heart is in it. He was previously an outstanding instructor but sadly, not any more. He hasn't made much progress on his performance objectives from his last evaluation.



Pam

Pam works in IT. She is proud of the quantity of work she is able to produce each day. However, you notice that she makes a lot of mistakes in her work.



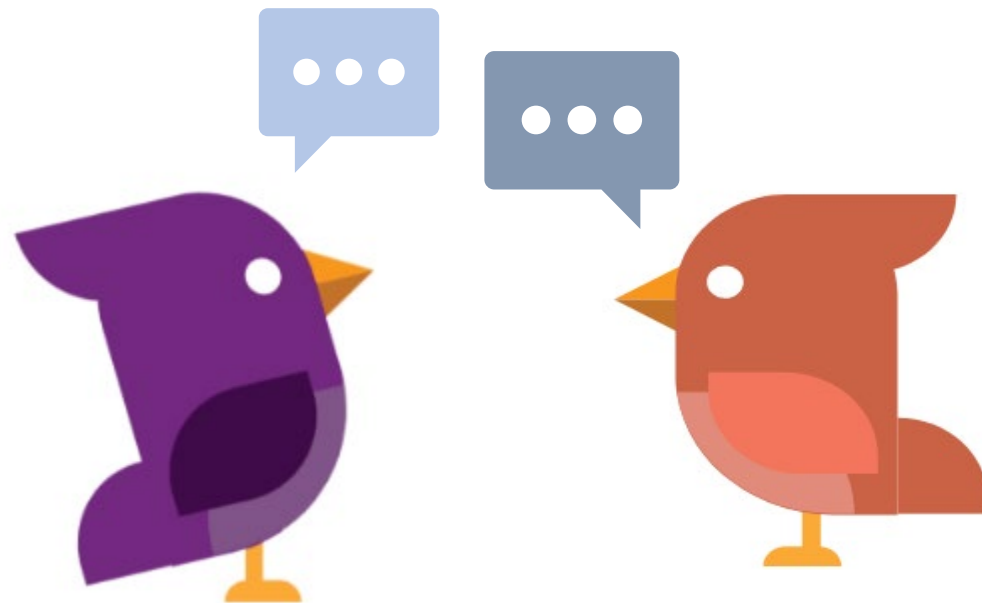
Dwight

Dwight has worked in your department for a long time. He is comfortable with the way things have always been. You want to make some changes to improve student service in your department. Dwight is having a hard time getting on board with these changes.

**One final tool for
your toolbox...**



Name, Notice, Guess, Wonder, Share



NAME (NAME what you see)

- You were very quiet during our staff meeting.
- You were abrupt with that student who just came in.
- Wow, you're getting really close to me as you talk.
- You look like you may be upset right now.

NOTICE

- I NOTICE that you're raising your voice.
- I NOTICE that you've called in sick the last four Fridays.
- I NOTICE that you haven't turned in the project that was due last week.

GUESS

- I'm GUESSING you are wanting help with this and that's why you brought it up (you can add, "is that right?").
- I'm GUESSING you are having a hard time right now.
- I'm GUESSING you're already contacted EAP, ("Is that right? Can I help you connect to someone?")

WONDER

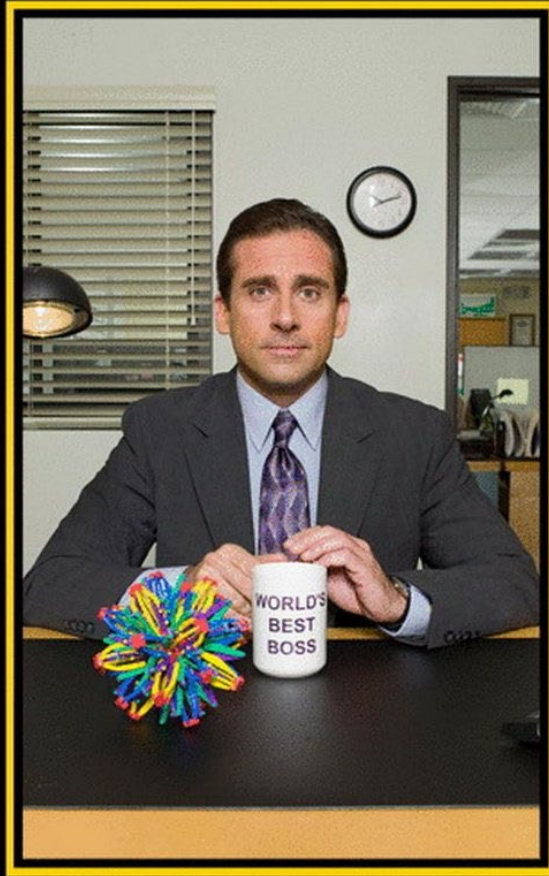
- I WONDER how I can be helpful to you right now.
- I WONDER if you feel you be able to catch up on all that work when you just volunteered to serve on another committee.
- I WONDER who is supporting you on our team.

SHARE

Share what is happening inside of you in that moment.

- I feel concerned when you tell me you haven't been sleeping.
- I feel like I want to help but I don't know how. I'm going to trust that you will let me know what you need from me.
- I'm not sure how to solve this problem. Let me reach out to HR and see if we can come up with a plan.

Remember...
difficult
conversations are
part of being a
leader



L·E·A·D·E·R·S·H·I·P

IT'S NOT JUST A BIG BOAT, IT'S A WAY OF LIFE.

Any Questions?

