

# **10 tips for Dealing with the Tough Stuff**

*How to deliver results from critical conversations*



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#### Acknowledgements

The content contained within this workshop and associated materials are not a ground-breaking ideas or concepts. In today's information-rich age, a simple half-dozen clicks of a button may find you all the information you need. Having said that, we hope our efforts to encapsulate human skills relating to dealing with the tough situations in your work role have been of benefit to the reader.

Throughout our research, we have tried to keep an accurate bibliography list of thought leaders that have shaped our own writings. In no particular order, we are indebted to John C Maxwell, Matt Church, Gerd Gigerenzer, Martin Seligman, Carl Jung, Steven Covey, Marcus Buckingham, Malcolm Gladwell, Michael Grinder, Russ Harris and a host of thought leaders whose ideas have had lasting and impactful change upon our humble thought processes, and ultimately our lives.

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# Introduction

Within our work roles we are faced with tough situations everyday. Arguably the toughest of these situations come from having to have critical conversations with others. If you are able to build your confidence to have these conversations your ability to move forward to success is greatly enhanced.

On many occasions the real tough stuff can be having a conversation with a team member who has a great work output, but doesn't get along with someone else in the team. Or on other occasions it could be someone within the team who is socially fantastic and is a friend to many, but has some technical issues within their work that need to be addressed.

These conversations are the really tough ones; as a consequence many managers struggle with the process and in many cases, managers actually avoid them completely.

Avoidance unfortunately is not a sound strategy. It reinforces undesired behaviours, and may precipitate further problems. The fact remains one of the biggest responsibilities that can come with a leadership position is the importance of addressing and dealing with staff issues. At times this requires you to 'step up to the plate' and ultimately deal with the tough stuff.

By it's very nature, and because you are dealing with people, with their emotions, their reactions and uncertainties this is not easy to do. It only gets harder if you are not equipped or trained in the necessary human skills to make the process work.

This e-book was written to provide you with 10 practical tips for building your confidence for dealing with the tough stuff at work.



# 10 tips for Dealing with the Tough Stuff

1. **Get on with it** Avoiding the tough stuff doesn't make it go away, take the steps necessary to deal with it.
2. **Get down to it** Focus on addressing specific behaviours rather than generalising with traits.
3. **Get clear on it** Understand what comes before and after to understand the behaviour better
4. **Get tuned-in to it** It is easy to fall into the 'tell' mode and offer advice but communication is a two-way street. Seek out ways you can both work through this together.
5. **Get real with it** When others ask questions then provide them with the best answer you can. Be comfortable with saying "I don't know". Honesty will be more appreciated than secrecy.

# 10 tips for Dealing with the Tough Stuff

6. **Get strength in it** Use strengths-based language when talking with others. See their strengths, see their potential. If you believe in the capacity of others to change and improve they will begin to reflect this.
7. **Get true to it** Role model the behaviours you want to see in others. Teams reflect their leadership and this is never as evident as through the process of performance appraisals. Have the courage to make the changes you want to see in others.
8. **Get respect into it** Whenever you are addressing critical conversations with others uphold and respect the person, but be unrelenting on changing the behaviour.
9. **Get balanced with it** 'Seek first to understand and then be understood'. Assertiveness involves using both empathy and presentation of your own needs. Use the right balance for the right situation.
10. **Get busy with it** Ego's aside, solutions first - Offer solutions by utilising the supports and resources that are available. This may be using the resources within your team, within the organisation (specifically your HR section) or even on a community level.

# 1. Get on with it

Many individuals and managers actually will do everything they can to avoid dealing with the tough situations, so the first tip is to get on with it.

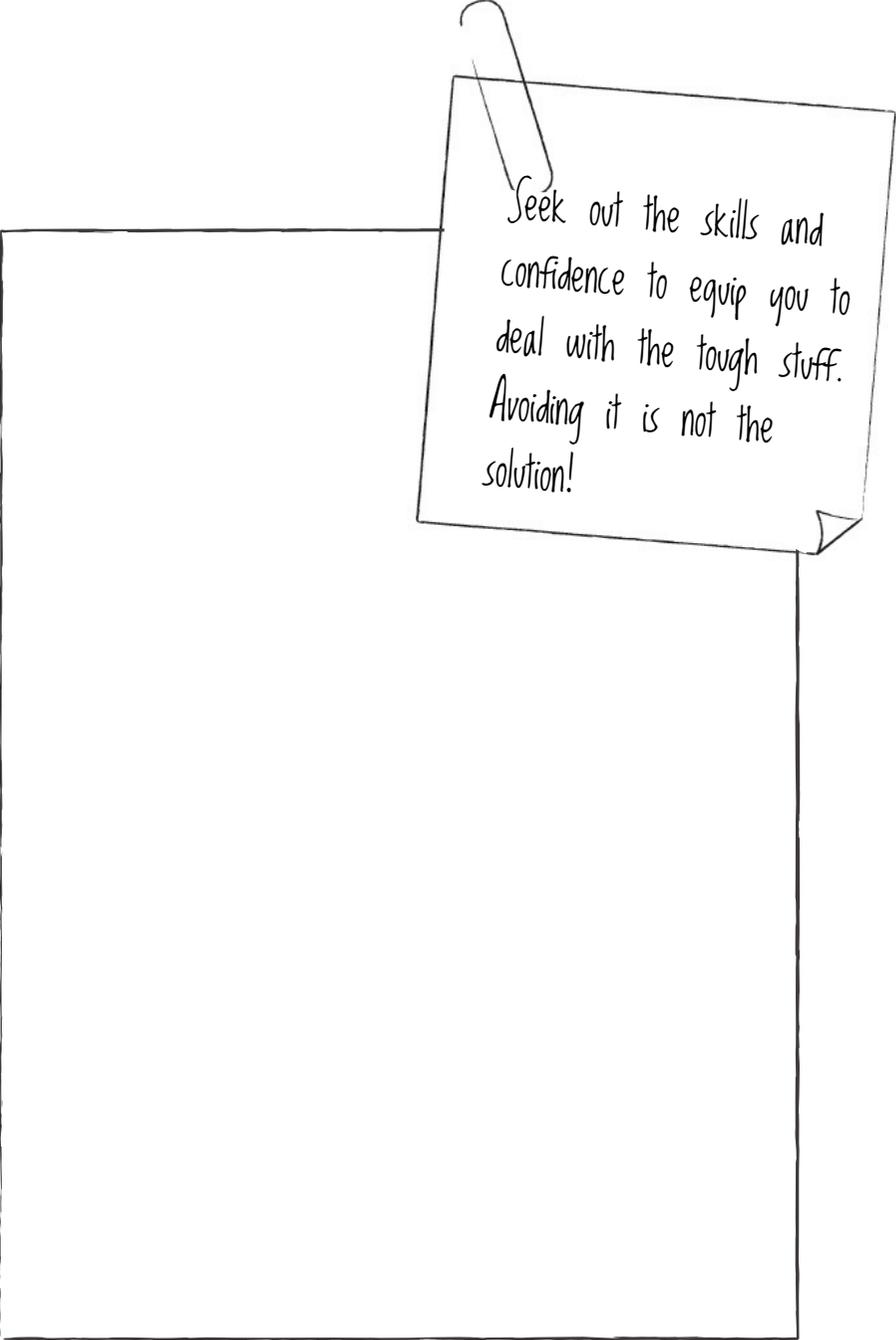
Avoiding the tough conversations does not make the situation go away, and often times it actually can mean that the situation is blown out of proportion. One of the reasons that people avoid dealing with the tough stuff is a concern about upsetting another person or being upset by their reaction. Unfortunately this approach does not allow the opportunity for greater connection and understanding to ever occur.

Emotions are not something that we should be avoiding, in fact they can never be put aside. They are always in the picture and part of developing the skill of dealing with tough stuff is managing your emotions and not 'owning' the emotions of others.

As mentioned in the introduction, avoidance is not a sound strategy. A 'head-in-the-sand' approach only leads to a reinforcement of the undesired behaviours and misses the opportunity to role-model resilient behaviour to others.

Being an effective leader requires you to step up, address what is unsaid and look for strategies for moving forward. It has been said that the definition of a great leader is 'someone who can breathe through a crisis'. It is this quality in leaders that we all greatly admire and are drawn.

**Even though it may feel uncomfortable the result of not addressing or dealing with the key issues is that they can grow and become bigger issues. Develop the skills and confidence to deal with the tough stuff, and then get on with it**



Seek out the skills and confidence to equip you to deal with the tough stuff. Avoiding it is not the solution!

## 2. Get down to it

Dealing with the tough stuff, particularly at work, often-times requires sitting down with others and drilling down on the key issues. Generally when addressing tough situations with others our tendency is to talk in terms that are traits, rather than deal with specific behaviours.

A fundamental step in observing and analysing human skills is the ability to determine the difference between a trait and a behaviour.

### TRAIT VS BEHAVIOUR

A trait is merely a label, usually a descriptor of a combination of behaviours together. For example, if someone is considered courteous, then this would be a trait. It is a convenient way to describe a collective of behaviours, such as; holding a door open for someone, wishing people good morning, asking people if they would like anything at the shops etc.

#### Why is it important to identify behaviours rather than traits?

Studies have shown that traits are difficult to change in comparison to behaviours. Remember, because a trait is a collection of behaviours, there are variable behaviours that need to be addressed.

To increase or make changes to how people (including ourselves) interact, we need to change specific behaviours to change a trait.

## Case Study

### Tim

Tim is considered by his coworkers as lazy (trait). Whilst Tim is told he is 'a lazy bugger' and his manager has regularly asked him 'to pull his finger out' there are few changes to his day to day output over the past six months.

To help improve Tim's work output, his manager or workmates need to concentrate on the behaviours that combine to label him with the trait of laziness:

- 🌀 Tardiness in starting work
- 🌀 Projects not finished in accordance of agreed deadlines
- 🌀 Allowing other team members to perform his tasks for him
- 🌀 Not contributing in team meetings

If Tim's behaviours are addressed by his supervisor or workmates, rather than the trait, he is able to (in a step-by-step fashion) modify his trait of laziness through his behaviours.

So if they could get Tim to start work on time, finish his projects on time, cease his reliance on others doing his work and get Tim contributing in team meetings, then his trait of laziness will be lessened.

# ABC MODEL

Antecedents  
↓

Behaviour  
↓

Consequences  
↓

## 3. Get clear on it

Understanding human behaviour can be very complex, and has essentially spawned an entire science of psychology. Being equipped to deal with the tough stuff requires getting clear on the behaviours that you want to address. The key building blocks of behaviour can be best understood through a simple yet effective ABC Model.

### **The ABC Model**

The ABC behavioural model suggests that:

“a person’s behaviours are caused by present events that occur before and after the behaviours have been performed”.

The ABC stands for:

**Antecedents:** are events that occur or are present before the person performs the behaviour.

**Behaviour:** is what they did.

**Consequences:** are events that occur after and as a result of the behaviour.

For example, feeling tired is an antecedent for sleeping, sleeping is the behaviour, and feeling rested the next day is a consequence of sleeping.

In order to have an impact on behaviour (your own or the behaviour of others) any of these three factors can be changed and they will have an impact on the outcome. Broaden your view to better understand the behaviour.

The golden rule is “**if there has been a change in a person’s behaviour, there must be a change in the antecedents...**”

## 4. Get tuned-in to it

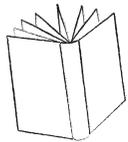
Often when we are immersed in tough situations we focus on our own agenda and point of view, and worry about how to 'deliver' this with conviction.

What can be forgotten is the importance of really listening to and tuning into the other person in order to seek clarity and understanding about their perspective.

This means listening, and really listening. Not that kind of listening where we use the time when the other person is talking to think about what we're going to say next (yes I know we've all done it). But the sort of listening where we are actively engaged in the conversation.

Rather than assume you understand the other person, approach the conversation like the scientist intrigued to understand. Scientists are curious, non-judgmental, and eager to understand why things work a certain way. This involves asking open-ended questions, using why, what, where, when, & how. And check with the other person that you've understood what they were saying.

Ultimately these tough conversations should have all parties driving towards a solution together.



John C. Maxwell is an expert in Leadership and unpacks amazing skills to support you to deal with the tough stuff in his book **'Winning with People'**.



Darren shares his thoughts on the power of humanity on a video clip at :  
[www.toughstuffprogram.com](http://www.toughstuffprogram.com)

## 6. Get strength in it

Our society is largely focused on developing a persons weaknesses.

For example, if you bought home a report card at school, and it showed and four A's and an F, which would get the most attention from your parents, your teachers and probably even yourself? The F right?

But biology and a new approach led by Marcus Buckingham amongst others encourages us to focus on our strengths.

We subscribe to this too..in using strengths-based language.

Looking towards a persons strengths is a key strategy for personal growth, and so too is using positive based strengths language.

If you use negative based language, and to make it worse, use a trait, we make it incredibly difficult, if not impossible for people to make meaningful change in their behaviour. The likely response is going to be either defensive or aggressive.

At all times, look for ways to turn unhelpful traits into positive strength-based based traits – from here you will be able to move from traits into behaviours.

## 7. Get true to it

Role modeling the behaviours you want to see in others is an important step to being able to deal with tough situations. Teams reflect their leadership and this is never more evident than through the process of dealing with tough situations at work. Have the courage to make the changes you want to see in others. If you want individuals in your team to be 'stepping up to the plate' and using their initiative, make sure that you are doing this in your own role.

Often what you do has a greater influence on others than what you say. Being congruent between your actions and your words gives others the permission to do the same. Avoid sending mixed messages, for example holding others accountable for getting reports done on time, and then consistently sending out information late yourself. Make sure your behaviours and your words are as congruent as possible.

When it comes to addressing tough stuff, get true to it, hold a mirror up to your own behaviours and make sure that you are reflecting the change you want to see in others.

'Be the change you want  
to see in the world'  
- Gandhi

## 8. Get respect into it

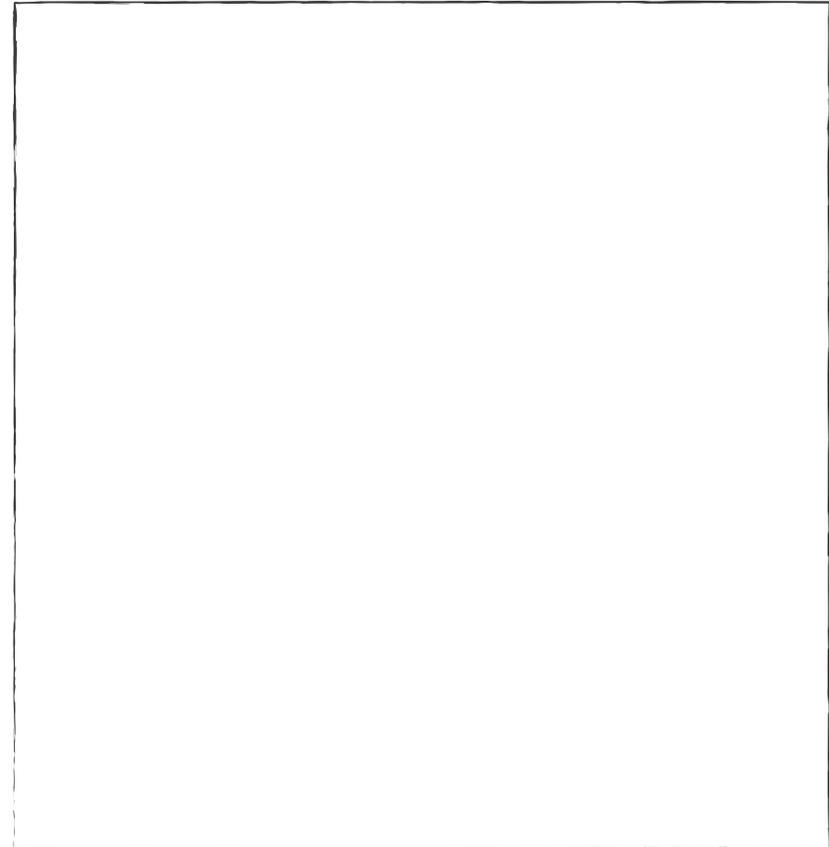
So we all know we should maintain respect for the person when giving feedback or having a critical conversation, but what does that actually mean? How do you 'depersonalise' a tough situation?

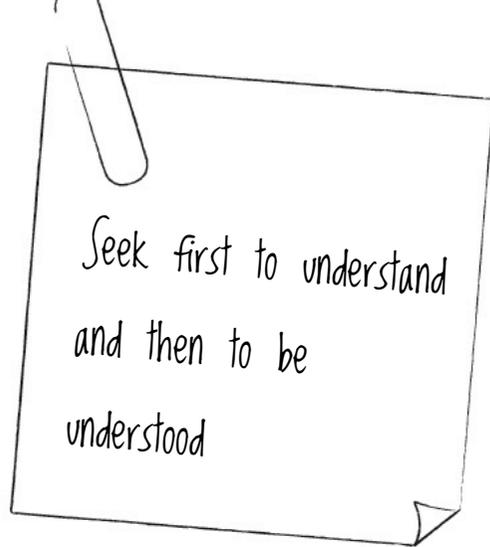
One of strategies is to challenge the specific behaviour whilst maintaining respect for the person in the language that you use. It is entirely possible to separate a person's behavior from who they are. The intent is to express a sense of 'who you are is worthwhile, but what you have done needs to be addressed'. Individuals will become less likely to be defensive, and therefore more likely to be open to changing, if they realise they are still valued by you.

This subtle change in language can have significant impact to seeing the behaviours you wish at work.

For example, if you were to address a staff member who was arriving late to team meetings, instead of saying, 'you need to be more punctual', you might say, 'I always value your contribution at our team meetings, but the behavior of arriving late is not ideal. It is important for us to arrive on time so that we can start the meetings together'.

When you are having the critical conversations, respect the other person by highlighting what you value about them, and be specific about what needs to be addressed.





## 9. Get balanced with it

'Seek first to understand and then be understood' (Stephen Covey) is the mantra that needs to sit behind most critical conversations. Empathy and compassion bring about understanding of the other person's point of view and emotions.

Oftentimes, assertiveness is seen as a one-way communication street - expressing my needs is what is most important in this situation. What happens though is that we are less open to understanding the other person's position or point of view.

The success of a critical conversations increases if we seek first to understand through empathy, and then express our own needs. Weighing up conviction and compassion will help to move your critical conversations towards success.

The exception to this rule is when the intensity of the situation is such that getting your opinion and needs across quickly and swiftly is what is most important. Assertiveness involves using both empathy and presentation of your own needs. Weigh it up and use the right balance for the right situation.

## 10. Get busy with it

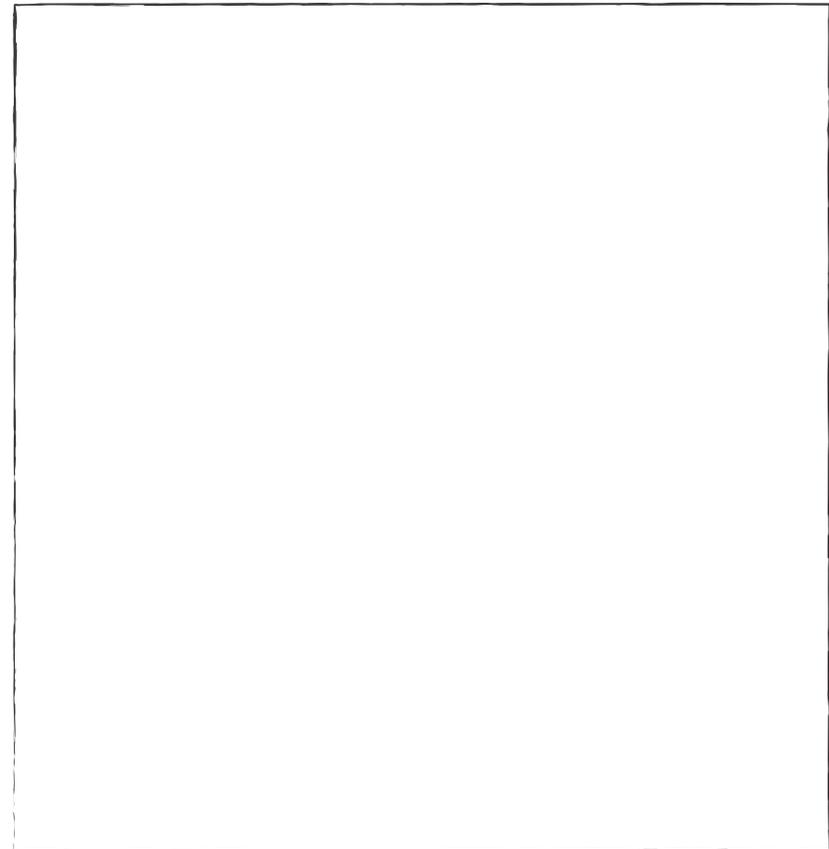
When addressing the tough stuff, having critical conversations it is the time to put ego's aside and ensure that your intent is to aim for solutions first.

Getting into a situation of defending your ground, or at the extreme a 'right-fight' can be the quickest way of bringing about conflict. This approach means that if I'm right, then you must be wrong. Within tough situations things are generally not black-and-white, so find the grey areas, bring them out onto the table and open up the communication to be able to work towards a solution together.

Think outside the square, think of new and innovative ways of doing things, think of other possibilities rather than sticking with something because 'it's the way we've always done it!' Ask the question, what else is possible here?

Offer solutions by utilising the supports and resources that are available. This may be using the resources within your team, within the organisation (specifically your HR section) or even on a community level.

Dealing with the tough stuff can be provide the fertile ground for deeper connections, innovative strategies and greater commitment to a cause. And we believe these are all worth pursuing.



# About us

## DARREN HILL

Darren understands people like few others. A Corporate Behavioural Scientist, Darren studies people at work for a living. Darren is often consulted for his unique expertise as a behavioural trend-spotter; someone who can understand and predict the behavioural drivers within workplaces, organisations and even at a societal level. Forward-thinking organisations and leaders across Australia have reaped the benefits of Darren's foresight in behavioural trends.

Obsessed with uncovering the often-hidden power of humanity at work, Darren is one of Australia's experts in re-humanising workplaces in the pursuit of success.

## ALISON HILL

Alison's extraordinary listening skills literally change people's lives. A Psychologist with a wealth of experience as a trainer, mentor and coach, Alison has a passion to support people to interact with principle, influence with purpose and inspire with passion. Alison's every-present empathy, compassion and insight ensures that she works closely with individuals and organisations to achieve sustainable results.

Alison has particular expertise in supporting, training and helping HR professionals to build, polish and improve their 'human skills'.

TOGETHER Darren and Alison have co-authored 'Humanity at Work', 'Courage as a Skill' pocket book, and numerous e-books including '7 Behavioural Trends to start the next decade'.

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