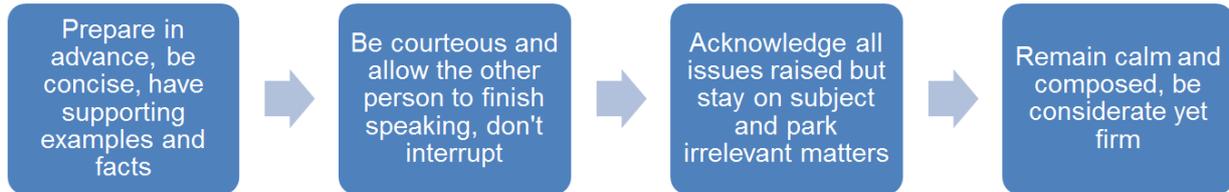


Fear of how an employee will respond is one of the key reasons managers avoid, delay, and often completely abandon performance and behaviour conversations. Understanding these reactions, particularly and timely in providing valuable feedback. General principles managers and conversation leaders should follow to manage difficult conversations are:



Guidance on working with specific employee reactions:

Employee Reaction & Sample Statements	Guidelines for Manager Response	Sample Manager Responses
Indifference "Maybe; I'll see what I can do." "I can't make any promises, but I'll try." "Sure, whatever you say."	Do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Remain open to understanding the employee's current situation and potential competing priorities. ✓ Ask the employee to reflect on the request / development area and confirm whether he or she is able to commit. ✓ If it's a personal issue, ask the employee if there is anything that you could do to assist them to meet the agreed standard, such as approving some leave or discussing with HR the option of entering a temporary flexible working arrangement adjusting deadline dates if appropriate. ✓ Set an agreed time for when you will get back together to discuss how they are going. Don't: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Overlook the employee's indifference. ✗ Accept an outcome that will disadvantage others. ✗ Lose patience with the employee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ "It's important to let me know if you can commit to this. If you have competing priorities, let's discuss them, the consequences of different choices and agree on an outcome." ■ "Is there anything I can do to assist you at the moment? Would you like to take some leave or alter your commitments for a limited time whilst you deal with that personal issue?"
Skirting responsibility "It's not my fault..." "I'm sorry, but when people ask such basic questions it is very annoying."	Do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Listen to the employee's reasons and situation. Genuinely consider their explanation. ✓ Clarify that the employee will need to meet expectations and improve if his or her reasons are invalid. ✓ Make it clear that it is part of their job description and their responsibility to meet set standards. ✓ Relate your own experiences and confirm that sometimes, you just have to get things done. Don't: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Agree with the employee when he/she blames other people. ✗ Change your perspective based on the reasons or excuses if they are not valid. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ "I know this might be difficult for you, but the fact remains that I need you to work productively with your peers." ■ "I know there have been a lot of changes recently, but I still need you to support the change and increase your output." ■ "I don't enjoy doing XYZ but it's part of my job so I just get it done. For me, it's easiest to get it done first thing in the morning."

Employee Reaction & Sample Statements	Guidelines for Manager Response	Sample Manager Responses
<p>Lack of Confidence/ Self-Pity</p> <p>“I don’t know where to start from.”</p> <p>“I knew this would happen; I can never do anything correctly.”</p>	<p>Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Emphasise things the employee is doing well to show to them what they are capable of. ✓ Break down the actions of what is going wrong to try and identify the root cause of the problem. ✓ Look for options such as mentors or peer support that might be a better option in the circumstances. ✓ Provide examples of small steps the employee can take toward improvement and offer support. ✓ Refer the employee to the Employee Assistance Program EAP, if appropriate. <p>Don’t:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Accept that they are not capable of getting it right. ✗ Focus on the employee’s past inability to achieve outcomes. ✗ Moderate your feedback to alleviate the reaction. ✗ Reflect the employee’s negative attitude. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ “Now that we have identified this area for development, it is an opportunity for you. I firmly believe you are capable, I’ve seen you achieve similar development goals in the past, for example...” ■ “You will have support from me as you work on this. For example...” ■ “XYZ is going so well, let’s look at what you are doing there that you can apply to ABC”
<p>Shock / Anger</p> <p>“This is not fair! I always knew you didn’t like me, but this is unreasonable.”</p> <p>“I’ve been working so hard to meet all of my deadlines, and this is what I get to hear?”</p> <p>“I was expecting a promotion and I think I deserve it.”</p>	<p>Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Acknowledge the fact that the employee is not satisfied with the feedback. ✓ Ask the employee for their opinion and comments. ✓ Take a break for both parties to collect their thoughts. ✓ Restate examples, and explain your perspective. ✓ If they refuse to participate or won’t tone down their reaction, stop the meeting and contact HR for advice. ✓ Refer the employee to the EAP, if appropriate. <p>Don’t:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Try to speak over them, just sit quietly and listen until they stop speaking. ✗ Attack the employee’s personality based on his or her reaction or become defensive. ✗ Moderate your feedback to alleviate the reaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ “I can see that you are upset with these results. I would like to hear your opinion.” ■ “Let me explain what I think happened so you can understand my opinion. Then we can work this out together.” ■ “I’m sorry but you don’t appear to want to listen to me. So what I’m going to do is end this meeting and reconvene at a later time.”
<p>Resistance/ Denial</p> <p>“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I work really hard.”</p> <p>“I do not accept your feedback regarding my skills.”</p> <p>“The incident you mentioned did not take place.”</p>	<p>Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Speak to the person immediately after you become aware of the problem, while the issue is fresh. Don’t wait for a scheduled meeting later on. ✓ Document the discussion, so it can be referred to at a later time if needed. ✓ Acknowledge all issues raised, but stay on the subject and park irrelevant matters. ✓ Acknowledge the person’s resistance or denial and then inform the person it is your responsibility as the manager to have the conversation. ✓ If the conversation relates to performance or behaviour, bring reference documents to the meeting. For example, the myCareer plan or code of conduct. ✓ Refer the employee to the EAP, if appropriate. <p>Don’t:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Be afraid of any threats to get the union involved. ✗ Attempt to speak over the person. Just wait until they have finished and then speak. If they attempt to interrupt you, request they respect your time to talk just as you have respected theirs. ✗ Be afraid to end the meeting to take advice from HR and then re-convene at a later time. ✗ Don’t respond to any threats, if a threat is made immediately end the meeting and contact HR. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ “I was informed this morning that XYZ occurred, as a result I am required to discuss the matter with you.” ■ “I’m sorry you feel that way, however I can’t ignore the facts.” ■ “I acknowledge ABC, however this discussion is focused on XYZ. For the purposes of this discussion we need to park ABC and return to it at another time.” ■ “I can see you are upset, let’s take a break, get some fresh air and continue on in 15 minutes.”