



# All It Takes Is Starting the Conversation

Building Trust Through Everyday Conversations



**Audience:**

Supervisors, Foremen, Crew Leaders,  
Safety Leaders, Managers, and  
Everyday People



**Duration:**

15–20 Minutes



**Campaign:**

I Choose to Listen

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*We're not teaching people how to have difficult conversations.  
We're teaching them how to build the relationships that make  
difficult conversations possible.*

*Because sometimes the hardest part of asking for help isn't  
knowing what to say.*

*It's knowing who you can say it to.*

”



## The Toaster Principle

The conversation doesn't have to matter for the connection to matter.  
Sometimes trust begins with something simple, ordinary, or even a little ridiculous.

This toolbox talk is designed to help leaders and everyday people build trust,  
strengthen relationships, and create an environment where conversations  
feel natural long before they become difficult.





## 1. Start with Something Simple

Sometimes the easiest way to begin is with a question that has nothing to do with work. Try something simple, ordinary, or even a little ridiculous.



### OPENING EXERCISE

## Why do toasters go to 5?

Ask the question. Let people laugh, answer, debate, and tell stories. Then ask: 'What did we just do?' The answer is simple: you had a conversation.

“

*The conversation doesn't have to be important for the connection to matter.*

## 2. Leadership Starts with Connection

If the only time you approach someone is to give direction, correct a problem, or ask for something, don't be surprised if they hesitate to approach you when life gets hard. Leadership is not only about managing work. It is also about connecting with the people doing it.

## 3. Small Conversations Build Relationships

Trust is rarely built through one extraordinary moment. More often, it develops through ordinary conversations repeated over time.



### CONVERSATION STARTERS

- How was your weekend?
- Did your kid win their game?
- How's that truck project coming along?
- Doing anything fun after work?
- What's the best barbecue place around here?
- Seriously... why do toasters go to 5?



**The real power is not just asking. It's remembering the answer and following up later.**





## 4. You Never Know What Someone Is Carrying

People do not leave their personal lives at the gate when they come to work. Financial pressure, family strain, grief, health problems, and stress can all follow someone onto a jobsite. Often, nobody knows what they are carrying.



### What a Leader Might Notice

- A person who is normally talkative becomes quiet
- Someone dependable seems distracted
- Patience turns into frustration
- A usual routine or behavior changes

## 5. Listening Is Not the Same as Fixing

When someone begins sharing something difficult, our instinct is often to solve the problem immediately. But not every conversation needs an instant solution. Sometimes the most valuable thing you can offer is your attention.



### What Listening Looks Like

- Put the phone down
- Give the person your attention
- Let them finish speaking
- Do not minimize what they are feeling
- Ask whether they want advice or simply someone to listen
- Follow up later when appropriate

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*You don't have to have the answers to be willing to listen.*

”



### Approachable, Not Intrusive

The goal is not to pry into someone's private life. The goal is to become the kind of person people feel comfortable talking to.





## 6. Caring and Accountability Belong Together

Building relationships does not mean lowering standards. A good leader can care about the person and still correct the behavior. Sometimes protecting someone or protecting everyone else means stopping the behavior, holding the line, or removing a person from the site when necessary.

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*You can care about the person and still hold them accountable.*

”



### Correct the Behavior. Respect the Person.

- ✓ Address the behavior clearly
- ✓ Protect people and the standard
- ✓ Be fair and consistent
- ✓ Do not humiliate the person

## 7. The Five-Day Leadership Challenge

For the next five working days, have one genuine conversation each day that is not about production, safety correction, schedules, or performance. Ask something simple. Listen to the answer. Remember something. Follow up later.



### Rules for the Challenge

- ✓ Don't force the conversation
- ✓ Don't pry
- ✓ Don't turn it into a management checklist
- ✓ Respect personal boundaries
- ✓ Focus on connection

## 8. When a Conversation Becomes Something More

If someone shares that they are struggling, listen without judgment, thank them for trusting you, and help connect them with appropriate support. You are not expected to become a mental health professional.



### If There Is Immediate Concern



**988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:**  
Call or text 988



**Emergency:** Call 911

*Take concerns about suicide seriously and follow your organization's emergency procedures.*

## Closing Message

You can't expect people to have the hard conversations with you if you have never taken the time to have the easy ones.  
Start simple. Start human. Start today.

**All it takes is starting the conversation.**  
*Doesn't matter what it is.*

