



Leading With Clarity

A Guide Through Tough Conversations for effective
Leadership

Presented to

**HR Business Partners, People Operations Leaders,
and Corporate Trainers**

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About the Author

A Guide Through Tough Conversations

I've spent over 20 years helping managers have the conversations they've been avoiding.

As a leadership coach and employee relations specialist in high-stakes hospitality and regulated environments, I've sat across the table from hundreds of leaders who knew something needed to be said-but didn't know how to say it. They were promoted because they were excellent at their jobs, not because anyone taught them how to address poor performance, disrespectful behavior, or repeated missed expectations

I wrote Lead With Clarity because most management training skips the hardest part: what to actually say when someone isn't meeting standards, when emotions are running high, or when you've avoided the conversation so long that the problem has gotten worse.

This book gives you the structure, language, and confidence to have those conversations well-not perfectly, but well enough to move forward with clarity and respect.

My approach is practical, not theoretical. Every framework in this book has been tested in real workplaces with real consequences. I focus on what works: clear expectations, calm delivery, and follow-through that builds accountability without destroying relationships.

If you're a manager who cares about doing this right, this book is for you.



PREFACE: WHY TOUGH CONVERSATIONS ARE A MANAGER SKILL

If you've ever put off a difficult conversation with an employee, you're not alone.

You know the ones I'm talking about:

- The team member whose attitude is affecting everyone else
- The employee who keeps missing deadlines despite multiple reminders
- The performer who used to be great but has been slipping for months
- The person who gets defensive every time you try to give feedback

These conversations don't happen because we're bad managers. They don't happen because we're afraid of conflict (though sometimes we are). They don't happen because no one ever taught us how to have them.

Most of us were promoted because we were good at our jobs—great individual contributors, strong technical skills, reliable performers. Then suddenly they become responsible for managing people, and the playbook changes completely.

This book is your playbook.

Lead With Clarity is written specifically for managers who want to address performance and behavior issues directly, respectfully, and effectively—without the anxiety, avoidance, or aftermath that usually comes with tough conversations.

Who this book is for:

- Newly promoted managers who need a framework for conversations they've never had before
- Experienced managers who know they've been avoiding certain conversations and want to reset
- Technical leaders (engineers, designers, analysts) who excel at the work but struggle with the people side
- Any manager who wants clear language, not corporate jargon, for real workplace situations.

What you'll learn:

- A simple, repeatable structure for any difficult conversation (Good-Bad-Action)
- How to prepare so you feel steady, not panicked
- What to say when someone gets defensive, shuts down, or disagrees
- When to keep coaching and when to move to formal accountability
- How to repair trust when a conversation goes poorly
- Ready-to-use scripts and worksheets you can reference during actual conversations

WHAT THIS BOOK IS (AND ISN'T):

This IS:

- A practical guide with specific language and scripts
- Based on real workplace scenarios and 20+ years of experience
- Designed to be used, not just read—with worksheets, templates, and quick-reference tools
- Focused on clarity, respect, and forward progress

This is NOT:

- A cure-all that guarantees perfect outcomes every time
- A legal compliance manual
- A psychology textbook
- A way to avoid difficult conversations—it's a way to have them better

The cost of avoidance:

Every day you delay a necessary conversation, the problem gets worse:

- Performance gaps widen
- Team morale drops as others watch the issue go unaddressed
- Your credibility as a manager erodes
- The eventual conversation becomes harder because now you're addressing a pattern, not a single incident

The good news? Once you have a framework, these conversations become manageable. Not comfortable—but manageable.

How to use this book:

Option 1: Read cover-to-cover

If you're new to this or want a comprehensive understanding, start at the beginning and work through each chapter. The frameworks build on each other.

Option 2: Jump to your scenario

If you have a conversation coming up this week, go straight to the relevant chapter:

- Chapter 5: Performance issues
- Chapter 6: Missed expectations and follow-through
- Chapter 7: Behavior and attitude problems
- Chapter 8: Conflict between team members
- Chapter 10: Repairing a conversation that went poorly

Option 3: Use the tools first, read the context later

Go to the worksheets (starting on page 21), use the conversation prep template, have the conversation, then come back and read the chapters for deeper understanding.

What "good" looks like:

You'll know these frameworks are working when:

- You stop rehearsing conversations in your head at 2am
- Employees know exactly what's expected and what needs to change
- Follow-up conversations feel less awkward because you established clear next steps

Chapter 1-The coaching mindset: clarity + care + steadiness



Core Idea

The core idea is that a leader's mindset directly shapes employee performance and outcomes. Our mindset can be the deciding factor of the conversation.

Coaches Note:

Leaders who coach with a strong, clear mindset create focus and alignment by removing ambiguity around expectations. Their approach models calm, effective decision-making under pressure and strengthens accountability through intentional guidance. Clear coaching builds trust and engagement by delivering feedback with confidence and consistency. Most importantly, it develops employee capability and resilience, driving sustainable performance rather than short-term compliance.

Try This

The 5-Step Leader Mindset Framework

Define the Outcome. Be clear on what success looks like before the conversation.

Focus on Facts. Base feedback on observable behaviors, not assumptions or emotions.

Manage Yourself First. Stay composed and intentional to model professionalism.

Coach for Growth. Prioritize development and learning over correction.

Reflect and Follow Up. Reinforce progress and refine your approach for continuous improvement.

Chapter 2-The Conversation Map (your repeatable framework)

Purpose: A simple structure for any tough conversation.

As most managers have learned, there is a three-step process to conduct a conversation with an employee. This default model is sometimes called the “Feedback Sandwich” or Good-Bad-Good.

However, there is a different three-step model that has been proven to be much more effective.

Here it is. Good-Bad-Action

We always want to start a conversation with a welcoming tone. “Thank you for meeting with me before we dive into the topic.

Here is an example conversation that models this framework. In this case we are going to use Paul as the team member.

“Thank you, Paul, for meeting with me.” “I wanted to talk about this project.”

The **“Good”**: You always do such a great job on projects like this; you are insightful and you always provide the correct information.”

The **“Bad.”** However, this one fell short of the expectations.

The **“Action”**: I wanted to give you some examples or ideas on how it can improve.

CONVERSATION MAP:

GOOD: PROVIDE THE EMPLOYEE WITH A POSITIVE ASPECT ABOUT THE JOB OR PROJECT.

BAD: EXPLAIN WHY THE JOB OR PROJECT DIDN'T MEET EXPECTATIONS.

ACTION: PROVIDE INSIGHT OR EXAMPLES THAT CAN BE USED TO CORRECT THE OUTCOME.

WHY THIS WORKS.

Paul knows he does a good job but failed to meet the expectations on this one project. When we employ the “Action” by citing examples or ideas we can clearly define the desired outcome in the future.

This gives Paul the direction he needs to improve without any emotional turmoil, giving him the opportunity to improve.

Chapter 3-Preparation that reduces panic (facts, stories, goals, requests)

Preparation:

"Preparation is the ultimate safeguard against the anxiety that often haunts feedback sessions. By grounding the conversation in objective facts and specific stories (examples), a leader shifts the tone from a personal critique to a professional post-mortem. Clear goals act as a roadmap, ensuring the dialogue stays focused on growth rather than blame. When a leader arrives prepared, they project a sense of stability that prevents the employee's 'threat response' from spiraling into panic, transforming a potentially tense encounter into a collaborative strategy session."

What is the goal of this conversation?

What facts can I point to?

What story am I telling myself?

What request or expectation am I making?

What's a fair next step if nothing changes?

Tip:

Using the Good - Bad - Action framework, this checklist will help you develop the appropriate feedback chain that will empower them to make the necessary adjustments. Plan out the conversation beforehand so it flows naturally.





Chapter 4-Regulating Emotion: The Defensive Mindset

As we have all experienced, people become defensive almost immediately when confronted with a problem. It is an automatic behavior due to a perceived threat. Psychological research shows they are largely unconscious attempts to reduce shame, anxiety, or identity threat-prioritizing emotional safety over learning or problem-solving.

Signals they are defensive psychological mechanisms:

- **Denial**, refusing to accept blame to protect their self-image.
- **Blame shifting**, “It’s not my fault”
- **Rationalization** is a construct they have created to defend their position.
- **Avoidance**, when all other mechanisms “overload.”

It is important for us to understand that these are unconscious reactions. This does not mean they are trying to sabotage internally. It is rooted in the mind to help with coping or reducing anxiety.

Tools:

Behavior: The discussion needs to be anchored on observable facts, not interpretations. If they feel this is a personal attack, they will immediately go into defensive mode, where listening is no longer an option.

Validation: As we learned in the three-step model. We need to provide the “Good.” In a defensive situation acknowledging the employee's strengths and value will often calm them down, opening up a more receptive state

Be curious: Ask them what happened; never assume. This can shift the conversation from defensive back to collaboration. We may find out that it may be a deficiency in training or lack of understanding.

Try this:

Before the discussion, make sure we have fact-based evidence on the problem. It is important that we give a detailed explanation of what they did wrong.

Prepare your notes.

Make sure to give them some positive feedback to help reduce anxiety and let them know we appreciate them.

Always try to look at the issue through the eyes of the employee. If this could have come from a lack of training or understanding, it may fall back on us to revise our systems.

Chapter 5-Performance: naming the gap early (before it becomes formal)

When to have this conversation:

- As discussed in the previous chapter, we need to be able to look at the issues through the eyes of the teammate.

How do we know when to address a possible skill gap? As managers we need to be able to identify patterns in behavior. Are we noticing an a sign of struggle or repeated mistakes? If so this may mean we need to reevaluate our training methods or the systems we have in place.

Sample Script:

- Open: “I wanted to talk to you about your role and make sure you have what you need to be successful. Development-Focused
- Facts: “I’ve noticed (specific, observable behaviors or outcomes) such as (example)”
- Impact: “When this happens, it can affect (results, workflow, customer experience or expectations) in these ways”
- Ask, “How are you experiencing this?” and “What feels most challenging from your perspective?”
- Support: “Let’s talk about the skills that would help you close the gap. I’m here to help”
- Next steps + timeline: “Let’s meet back on (date) and we can check progress or address any difficulties that you still have”
Research on feedback and performance shows that earlier, Development-focused conversations increase learning, reduce defensiveness, and improve outcomes.

If they react with...

- **Defensiveness:** Stay calm; escalation can bring on additional defensiveness. Acknowledge the frustration. “I know this can be frustrating.” Keep with the facts; try to redirect back to behaviors and outcomes. Collaborate: “Let’s figure this out together”
- **Shame:** “I’m just not good at this.” Slow down the conversation. This is not a self-worth discussion. Separate identity from behavior. “It’s not about you not being good at this. It is to help grow your skills, instill value and belonging, and shift to support. “What kind of support would help you the most right now?”
- **Disagreement:** Competing interpretations of reality. We don't want to jump into a power struggle. It is important to acknowledge their viewpoint and understand that they see this differently. Stay with the facts, remind them of the shared goals, and remain collaborative while clarifying expectations.

Follow-up plan (24h / 1w / 1mo):

The follow-up plan is just as important as the discussion. We need to be able to see and measure results. When do we meet? You may need to meet as soon as a week. If you are on a deadline, time is important. Or maybe you can go out for a month. Each situation is unique to you. Follow up and hold them accountable while being able to support them. Remember, we are searching for alignment by introducing key skills.



Chapter 6-Accountability: missed expectations and follow-through

Common patterns:

- **Excuses without ownership.** “I didn’t have time” and “It’s not my fault” often lead us to understanding that they are in self-preservation. They do not understand ownership or problem-solving.
- **No follow-through.** They agree but do not change. What does this look like? It can be avoidance, low commitment, or a lack of belief in understanding.
- **Inconsistent.** Expectations are often sporadic. This can show us accountability gaps.
- **Deflection onto others.** They turn the focus onto what others have done wrong or unclear constraints.
- **Silence.** They don't ask questions; they show low engagement after a feedback meeting.



Script blocks:

- **Reset expectation:** “We need to reset expectations so we are fully aligned.” The expectation is (outcome) by (date).
 - **Clarify ownership:** “I want to be clear of the outcome; it sits with you. Others may support this work, but it is up to you to ensure it is completed as expected.”
 - **Confirm constraints:** “Before we continue, let’s check constraints. Is there anything that is preventing you from meeting the expectations? If so, lets discuss them”
 - **Agree on check-ins:** “To stay on track, we need to check progress (time). These are just to confirm that we are meeting the goal.”
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Try This:

Break expectations into smaller milestones. This can cause extra work for us; however, when we have someone that is consistently missing expectations, we may need to manage them a bit closer. If the need arises, we may need to name the change if expectations continue to be missed.

Keep in mind, if you have decided that we have explained too much or we have gone too far, it simply may need to progress to a formal disciplinary. This is always at your discretion.

Chapter 7-Behavior: respect, tone, and team impact (without moralizing)

What this conversation is really about:

- **Observable behavior.** Use language that keeps the topic on observable behavior and work outcomes.
- **Structure the conversation** in three parts. Behavior, Impact, Request. We need to remain neutral, specific, and forward-looking.
- **Swap moral words** for operational words. Again using the three steps: Behavior Impact Request. Remember this isn't about character.
- **Explain the team standard.** We always want to avoid the “you vs. me.” Never make it personal while you define how the team works together.
- **Curiosity without debate.** Asking questions can help uncover triggers without it becoming a courtroom.
- **Explain the consequences of** the process. “If we cant improve this behavior, we will need to document this as a formal improvement plan”.

Chapter 8-Conflict: two people, one team, and your role as manager

Now we are getting into containment, alignment, and accountability. This is the unavoidable conflict we all go through.

Your role: When conflict exists between two employees, the manager's role is to protect the team, reset standards, and guide resolution, not to decide who is “right.”

- Contain the conflict so it does not spill over to the rest of the team. We do not need to take on the role of therapist, we need to focus on restoring alignment. We never want to allow this type of conflict to affect the “the whole”.

Tools:

- **Ground rules are essential for this meeting.** We need to set clear boundaries, no interruptions, and a respectful tone. This creates psychological safety and prevents emotions from taking over.
- **Behavior framing.** We need to direct the conversation to observable facts and how it affects the team and each other. Keep the discussion neutral.
- **Time to listen.** Allow each person to express their viewpoint and summarize the issue to confirm understanding. Being heard decreases defensiveness.
- **Shared outcome.** Explain shared responsibility (how it affects productivity or the team); this can help reduce personal friction. Both need to understand this type of conflict will spill over to the rest of the team.
- **Agreements.** Line out specific agreements that they both come to. This will help them connect to the common goal. Finally, schedule a follow-up. Either one-on-one or together if time and schedule allow to reinforce accountability.

Note:

Remember that this will be an emotionally charged meeting. It is important that we are clear about the direction of the meeting upfront. As the mediator it is important that we do more listening than talking while maintaining boundaries

Chapter 9-When Coaching Isn't Enough: Deciding What Comes Next

What this conversation is really about

- Recognizing patterns vs. one-off misses
- Understanding when effort \neq progress
- Distinguishing fairness from avoidance.

Key Decision signals

- Repeated missed expectations despite support
- Behavioral standards acknowledged but unchanged
- Accountability conversations that reset-but don't stick
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Manager mindset shift

- Manager mindset shift
- From helper to decision-maker
- From hoping \rightarrow acting
- From clarity without consequence \rightarrow clarity with follow-through

Neutral language examples

- "We've had multiple conversations about this expectation."
- "Support has been provided, and the outcome hasn't changed."
- "At this point, we need to shift how this is addressed."

At the point where we have to make a decision, that can be unavoidable. A common leadership trap is "over-coaching." We have to decide if the issue is even coachable anymore.

"Strong leaders know when to persist, and when to decide"

Chapter 10-Repair: when a conversation goes poorly (and how to reset trust)

What is repair?

A repair conversation is not an admission of failure-it's an act of leadership maturity. When a conversation derails, becomes tense, or lands differently than intended, the damage is rarely in what was said. The damage is in what remains unaddressed afterward.

“Even great leaders get tough conversations wrong”

When repair is needed:

You should consider a repair conversation when you notice:

- The employee disengages or withdraws after a discussion
- Trust feels strained or communication becomes guarded
- Emotions escalated and the conversation lost focus
- You recognize that tone, timing, or wording may have caused harm
- The issue remains unresolved because the relationship now feels brittle

A repair conversation has one purpose: to acknowledge impact, reestablish intent, and reopen the door to progress.

What it's not...

It is not:

- A defense of what you meant
- A re-argument of the original feedback
- A request for reassurance

It is a signal that the manager values the relationship and will work to address misalignment directly.

Here are five examples of accountability on our part.

- Own your part-"I've been reflecting on our last conversation, and there are parts of it I could have handled better."
- The unintended impact - "I think my tone may have come across as more critical than intended, and that may have made it harder to hear the message."
- Re-state or clarify your intention - "My intention was to support your success in the role and be clear about expectations, not to undermine your confidence.""
- Ask for their perspective-"How did that conversation land for you? What stuck with you afterward?"
- Propose a reset - "I'd like us to reset and move forward with clarity and trust. Here's how I suggest we do that..."

Note: Psychology research shows that employees will show trust can be re-established when they believe that things can go wrong and how we respond. Accountability isn't always the employee's responsibility. There are times when we must model self-reflection, even humility.

"Repair is not weakness-it is how trust is maintained, credibility is reinforced, and momentum is restored when things don't go as planned".



Script library:

- **Openers:** "Thank you for meeting with me. I want to talk through something important and make sure we're aligned."
- **Openers:** "I want to have a clear, productive conversation focused on how things are going and what support might help."
- **Openers:** "This conversation is about expectations and outcomes, not personal judgment."
- **Openers:** "My goal here is clarity and forward progress."

- **Redirects:** From intent → impact: "I'm not questioning intent. I want to focus on how this landed and its effect."
- **Redirects:** From emotion → facts: "Let's pause and come back to what we can observe and measure."
- **Redirects:** From debate → alignment: "We may see this differently, but we still need to align on what success looks like."
- **Redirects:** From explanation → ownership: "I understand the context. Let's talk about what's within your control going forward."
- **Redirects:** From shutdown → support: "This feels heavy. Let's slow down and talk about what would help you move forward."

- **Boundary statements:** Time / availability: "I'm not available after hours for this type of work. We'll address it during business hours."
- **Boundary statements:** Behavior/tone: "That tone doesn't align with how we work together here. We need to reset it."
- **Boundary statements:** Scope/priorities: "That request falls outside your current scope. Let's discuss trade-offs if it needs to move forward."
- **Boundary statements:** Repeated issues: "We've discussed this before, and the expectation hasn't changed."
- **Boundary statements:** Process clarity: "If this doesn't improve, the next step will be a formal process."

- **Closes + next steps:** "Here's what we've agreed to, and here's what success looks like."
- **Closes + next steps:** "You'll take ownership of X by Y, and we'll check progress on Z date."
- **Closes + next steps:** "If obstacles come up, I expect you to raise them early."
- **Closes + next steps:** "We'll revisit this in [timeframe] and assess what's changed."
- **Closes + next steps:** "I appreciate the conversation. Let's move forward with this plan."

LEAD WITH CLARITY CONVERSATION WORKSHEET

1. Purpose of the Conversation

Why are we meeting?

Briefly state the reason for the discussion. Keep this neutral and factual.

2. Desired Outcome

What does success look like?

Describe the ideal result of this conversation if it goes well.

3. Facts

What are the objective details?

List only clear, observable, and verifiable information. Avoid assumptions or interpretations.

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-
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4. Impact

Why do these facts matter?

Explain how the situation affects the team, business, patients/customers, or the individual.

5. Likely Reactions

How might the other person respond?

Consider possible emotions, concerns, or defensiveness so you can stay grounded.

-
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6. Key Message

What is the core message you need to communicate?

Summarize your main point in one or two clear sentences.

7. Your Expectation

What needs to change going forward?

Clearly state the behavior, performance, or outcome you expect to see.

8. Support Offered

What support or resources will you provide?

List tools, coaching, training, or adjustments you are willing to offer.

9. Accountability & Follow-Up

How will progress be tracked?

Define next steps, ownership, and timing for follow-up.

- Action Items:
- Review Date:
- Measurement of Success:

10. SELF-CHECK BEFORE YOU GO IN

- CALM AND REGULATED
- CLEAR ON FACTS
- FOCUSED ON IMPACT, NOT INTENT
- READY TO LISTEN

REMINDER: THE GOAL IS ALIGNMENT AND PROGRESS. STAY GROUNDED, NEUTRAL, AND FORWARD-FOCUSED.

- ASSUMPTIONS VS. OBSERVATIONS
- GOAL LADDER (WHAT YOU WANT / WHAT THEY MIGHT WANT)



Some Coaching Thoughts...

“Coaching starts with noticing what you’re bringing into the conversation.”

“A self check-in helps you lead from intention, not reaction.”

“Before guiding someone else forward, take a moment to ground yourself.”

“Self-awareness is the quiet work that makes coaching effective.”

“A brief self check-in creates space for better questions and stronger listening.”

1. WHY THIS CONVERSATION MATTERS

What is at risk if this conversation does not happen now?

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY AND ADD NOTES.

PERFORMANCE TEAM TRUST CULTURE/STANDARDS CLIENT IMPACT
ACCOUNTABILITY OTHER: _____

NOTES:

2. WHAT PROBLEM AM I ACTUALLY ADDRESSING?

Name the issue in neutral, operational terms. Not character, intent, or emotion.

3. FACTS ONLY

What have I directly observed?

Dates, behaviors, outcomes. No assumptions.

4. ASSUMPTIONS CHECK

What story might I be telling myself?

What else could explain the behavior?

5. MY EMOTIONAL READINESS

What emotion am I bringing into this conversation?

FRUSTRATION CONCERN DISAPPOINTMENT URGENCY UNCERTAINTY

What do I need to manage before going in?

6. LIKELY EMPLOYEE REACTION

What reaction is most likely?

DEFENSIVENESS SHAME DISAGREEMENT MINIMIZING SILENCE

What is my planned response to stay steady?

7. MY CORE MESSAGE

If nothing else is remembered, what must be clear?

(One sentence.)

8. MY ASK/EXPECTATION

What specifically needs to change going forward?

(Behavior, output, or standard.)

LEAD WITH CLARITY

9. SUPPORT I AM WILLING TO PROVIDE

What help, resources, clarity, or time can I realistically offer?

10. MY AUTHORITY & BOUNDARIES

What is non-negotiable?

What flexibility exists?

NON-NEGOTIABLE:

FLEXIBLE:

FINAL SELF-CHECK (PAUSE HERE)

- I am calm enough to listen without interrupting
- I am clear on expectations and impact
- I am prepared to hold the line respectfully
- I am open to information I may not expect

Reminder: Enter the conversation steady, not rushed.
The tone you bring sets the ceiling for the outcome.



Quick Reference Card: In-the-Moment Conversation Guide

Use this guide during the conversation to stay grounded, structured, and steady. This is not a script to read verbatim - it's a pacing and focus tool to keep the conversation productive.

CONVERSATION FLOW - Quick Reference

1. OPEN "Thank you for meeting. This is about [topic], focused on moving forward."
2. FACTS "What I observed: [specific behavior/outcome on date]"
3. IMPACT "This affected [team/work/client] by [specific result]."
4. LISTEN: "How are you seeing this?"
[Don't interrupt - just listen.]
5. REDIRECT (if needed)
 - Defensive → "Let's focus on impact, not intent."
 - Shame → "This is about the behavior, not you."
 - Disagree → "We still need to align on expectations."
6. EXPECTATION "Going forward, I need [specific, observable action]."
7. SUPPORT "What support would help?" / "Here's what I can offer."
8. CONFIRM "What's your first step?" [Check understanding]
9. CLOSE "We'll follow up on [date]. Raise issues early."

STAY STEADY REMINDERS:

- ✓ Breathe. Pause before responding.
- ✓ Facts only. No assumptions.
- ✓ Lower your voice if tension rises.
- ✓ If stuck, return to #3: Impact

6. State the Expectation Going Forward

Be clear and specific.

"Going forward, I need..."

"The expectation is..."

"Success looks like..."

Observable Measurable Time-bound

7. Offer Support (Without Removing Ownership)

Support is not rescue.

"What support would help you meet this expectation?"

"Here's what I can offer..."

"You own the outcome, and I'll support the process."

Support named Ownership clear

8. Confirm Alignment

Check understanding before closing.

"Can you summarize what you're taking away?"

"What's your first step after this conversation?"

Shared understanding No assumptions

9. Close with Next Steps

End with clarity, not relief.

"We'll check progress on [date]."

"If issues come up, raise them early."

"Thank you for engaging in the conversation."

Follow-up set Accountability reinforced

Steady Leader Reminder

If the conversation becomes emotional or circular, pause, restate the purpose, and return to facts and impact. Progress comes from clarity, not force.

After (documentation + follow-up)

After-the-Conversation Follow-Up Guide, One Page

LEAD WITH CLARITY

Use this guide **after** a tough conversation to reinforce clarity, accountability, and trust. What happens next determines whether the conversation creates change or fades into noise.

1. Capture the Agreement (Same Day)

What was agreed to?

(Document while it's fresh.)

Key expectation(s):

Specific behaviors or outcomes required:

Deadline(s):

Clear Specific Aligned to role

2. Document Neutrally

Record facts, not feelings.

(For your notes or system of record.)

Observed issue(s):

Impact discussed:

Support offered:

Follow-up plan:

Objective language No interpretation

3. Send a Brief Alignment Note

Purpose: confirm shared understanding-not recap the debate.

Example:

"Thanks for the conversation today. To confirm alignment, we agreed on the following expectations and next steps... We'll check in on [date]."

Same day or within 24 hours

4. Observe Early Signals

What should improve quickly?

(Small indicators before full results.)

Early behavior shifts to watch for:

Signals of risk or avoidance:

Watch behavior, not reassurance

5. Hold the Follow-Up

Do not skip this step.

Follow-up is where accountability is established.

Date/time scheduled:

What will be reviewed:

On calendar Expectations unchanged

6. Reinforce or Adjust

Based on what you see, choose one path:

- Reinforce progress (“Here's what I'm seeing improve...”)
- Adjust support (“Here’s what might help further...”)
- Reset expectations (“This still isn't meeting the standard...”)
- Escalate process if patterns continue

7. Reflect as the Leader

What did I learn about the issue, the person, or my approach?

What will I do differently next time?

Final Reminder

Consistency after the conversation builds credibility.

Avoiding follow-up teaches that conversations don't matter.

Calm, predictable follow-through creates accountability and trust.

"The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership." – Harvey S. Firestone