



10

TIPS FOR HAVING  
“HARD TO HAVE”  
CONVERSATIONS

# COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS **YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE**

by **Linda Murray**

athena  
LEADERSHIP  
ACADEMY

## ABOUT LINDA MURRAY

I am a Keynote Speaker, Trainer and Executive Coach who motivates, inspires and provides professional women with the tools and skills they need to become great leaders.

I was 22 when I started my first business. I successfully grew that business to a team of 25 staff, but was aware that my business acumen at the time was limited. After experiencing business coaching at an early stage in my career, over 7 years, I grew the business significantly and became known as the leader in the bookkeeping industry. I also challenged the traditional models of client management and service delivery which modernised the bookkeeping industry dramatically. With a burning desire for helping others, I sold my business at the age of 29 and started Athena Coaching.

I am best known for taking complex situations and explaining them in a way which is easy to navigate and implement. I draw on nearly 2 decades of experience in business, a passion for human behaviour and Positive Psychology, as well as my academic background (Bach. Arts Psychology/Philosophy and Masters of Business Coaching) to show professionals how to enjoy greater commercial outcomes and accelerated individual success. I live and breathe my core values of Authenticity, Fun, Success's and Courage. I coach clients to design careers to align to their values, making every day satisfying and fulfilling for them.

As a keynote speaker, trainer and leadership development coach, clients say I am an "injection of motivation".

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MY GREATEST  
FRUSTRATION IN LIFE  
IS SEEING JUST HOW  
MUCH UNTAPPED  
POTENTIAL SITS WITHIN  
EACH PERSON.  
I AM DRIVEN EVERY DAY  
TO SUPPORT PEOPLE  
IN IDENTIFYING THEIR  
UNIQUE QUALITIES AND  
TALENTS AND HELPING  
THEM CREATE A LIFE  
AND CAREER THEY  
ADORE.

LINDA MURRAY

*Athena Coaching and Athena Leadership Academy*



# WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

By definition, communication is a two-way information sharing process where one person delivers a message which is then heard and understood by another person or group of people. In order to truly connect with another individual, transform your relationships and communicate on a deeper level, you need to focus on not just communicating, but having what is often referred to as a courageous conversation. It instantly cuts through the small talk, clears up any misunderstandings and lets others know where you stand or how you feel on a subject in a mutually beneficial way.





# 10 TIPS TO HAVE “HARD TO HAVE” CONVERSATIONS

In this eBook I will cover the ten practical tips, which you can implement immediately to improve the quality of the conversations you are having.

The result:

Better relationships

- Deeper connections
- More meaningful interactions
- Better COMMUNICATION



# #1

BE CLEAR AND  
DIRECT WITH YOUR  
COMMUNICATION

The quality of your words can make a huge difference in how effective your communication can be. Are you inadvertently using misdirection, apology or accusation without even realising? Think about the actual purpose of the conversation. What is it that you really need to say?

Try to avoid jumping around from subject to subject to minimise confusion during the exchange. Repetition can be helpful if the subject is more complicated than usual. Think about how you can express the same point in different ways. For example, explain the point, support it with a short story and perhaps offer a metaphor (“It’s like ...”) If the topic is complicated:

- Ask yourself whether you are making sense.
- Ask your listeners to share their understanding of what you are saying.

If you are clear and direct, then your listeners won’t have to guess what you are saying, or have to resort to reading between the lines.

Being empathetic to the situation can go a long way. Are you good at perceiving emotion? Some people are naturally better at empathy than others. If it is not your strong point, then, quite simply, you may need to work on it. Thankfully, empathy is a soft skill that can be learnt and honed. Anyone, with practice, can better understand the feelings and moods of others.

Metaphorically, stand in their shoes for a moment and try to see things from their perspective. How do you think they are feeling right now? Consider why they may be reacting the way they are. There is

always reason behind human behaviour. Take a moment to consider what might be driving the other persons behaviour, as well as your own.

If someone seems particularly overwhelmed by the situation, pause, and then reconvene at a suitable point. Watch their body language intently and pay attention to their tone and delivery. Be respectful of those you are communicating with. Courageous conversations may elicit uncomfortable feelings. If this is the case, be patient and approach the conversation with compassion.

## #2

BE SENSITIVE TO  
FEELINGS AND  
MOOD

## #3

BE OPEN AND  
BUILD TRUST

Trust plays a big part in having courageous conversations. By demonstrating that you are open to entering such a discussion, you can encourage others to do the same. Creating a safe atmosphere of openness and trust ensures that everyone is on the same page. Quality communication can enhance your relationships in all aspects of your life and even improve the quality of your life.

Listen for understanding rather than focusing on whether you agree with their words or point of view. Courageous conversations enable people to speak their minds and emphasise positive two-way communication. Trust builds loyalty and is ultimately at the heart of any courageous conversation. Align your actions fully with the words and speak with authenticity and transparency. Remove the distrust and show others that you are 100% there for them, whenever they need it. There is no need for hidden agendas or motives when you speak from the heart.

## #4

## BE HONEST

Honesty, like openness, can build instant credibility. You are leaving yourself slightly vulnerable in the hope that the other party will reciprocate with the same level of honesty. Speak truthfully from your heart to build on your relationship. If your words are not honest, others sense that. Breaking down the communication walls that stand between you then becomes very difficult once trust is broken.

So how can you build an atmosphere of honesty?

- Show them you are sincere.
- Ensure your words and your body language are congruent.
- Stop misleading intentionally.
- Welcome and accept feedback openly.

Honesty and integrity should be high on your priority list for all communications. Without honesty, other aspects such as trust and respect cannot be supported. Lies can damage a relationship irrevocably beyond repair. While you may think that avoiding a particular subject or bending the truth slightly is in their best interests, it isn't.



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RATHER THAN FOCUSING ON  
WHETHER YOU AGREE WITH THEIR  
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## #5

### PLAN YOUR MESSAGE AND FOCUS ON YOUR DELIVERY

Even though you can plan your message, there is no guarantee what the response will be. It is essential that you focus on how you deliver your message to ensure your recipient understands you. Know your intention and make sure you have a realistic idea about the message you are trying to get across. Your content is just as valuable as your delivery. Show your passion and your authenticity through your words, your tone and body language.

You don't want your words to come across as a rehearsed speech without feeling or

emotion. There is no requirement to be a professional speaker to speak clearly, although there are a few things you can do to improve your actual delivery.

- Don't talk too fast.
- Invite questions.
- Stop talking so you can hear the viewpoint of others.
- Pause to make sure you are understood and allow the other person time to process.

Communicating effectively can be difficult due to any number of roadblocks that get in the way. Miscommunication can cause all kinds of unwanted problems and even complicate the situation even further. Ask yourself these questions to avoid as many roadblocks as possible.

- Are your expectations realistic?
- Is the language overly complicated or are you using too many technical terms?
- Are there cultural barriers which are causing issues?
- Are you giving solutions without offering alternative options?
- Are the parties too emotional to participate in an effective conversation?
- Are there distractions which are hindering the flow of communication?
- Is there too much information being communicated in the one conversation?
- Is everyone coming from the same viewpoint?
- Is the person overly stressed, and how might that adversely impact this interaction?

## #6

BE AWARE OF  
ROADBLOCKS  
TO EFFECTIVE  
COMMUNICATION -  
AND TAKE  
ACTION TO



## #7

POLISH UP ON  
YOUR LISTENING  
SKILLS

During the discussion, it is crucial that you can ask questions and listen without judgement to what is being said. A conversation is a two-way street which involves just as much listening (if not more) as it does talking. Ask the questions and then watch and listen. Absorb what is being said, and take in the body language. Now formulate a response based on what was said and what wasn't.

Here are some tips to improve your listening skills.

- Physically show that you are listening.
- Give the speaker your undivided attention.
- Don't interrupt.
- Let them finish expressing their thoughts to the end.
- Think about what they have said before you speak.

Non-verbal skills play as much a part of the conversation as the words, and it can be a huge eye-opener. Really acknowledge what is being suggested and ensure you fully understand before you respond. If not, ask a clarifying question and then formulate your response.

## #8

STOP BEING YOUR  
OWN WORST  
ENEMY

Your perceptions and even your beliefs can stop you from performing at your best, and you can sabotage your hard work and efforts before you even begin. Leave any and all preconceptions at the door. Minimise your negativity and try to keep an open and positive mind. Focus on your efforts rather than failures – remember that you cannot control the outcome, and be content with that.

It is true that we are often our own worst enemy. We are tougher on ourselves than most, often without rhyme or reason. This negativity can pounce on you unexpectedly, and it can be hard to rationalise. You may think you are not worthy of something and prefer to err on the side of caution rather than change. But this will not improve your relationships or your situation in the long-term. Stop waiting for others to take the first step. It is up to you to change your positioning and not give up on yourself.



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WITHOUT PROPER  
COMMUNICATION PEOPLE WILL  
WONDER WHY THEY'RE LEFT  
IN THE DARK AND ASSUME THE  
WORST.

JAROD TUFTS







#9

MAKE PEOPLE  
FEEL VALUED

Every human being wants to be heard, respected and valued. The first step to appreciating the person you are communicating with is by listening for understanding, rather than agreement. Stop focusing on whether or not you agree with them. Instead turn your attention to your knowledge of the situation. Answer when it is your turn to speak in a way that makes them feel accepted, acknowledged and worthy.

I guarantee if you think back to every disagreement you have ever had, one or both parties have not felt one or more of these feelings during that conversation. To efficiently connect with the people around you, it is essential that you enable everyone to feel genuinely valued from start to finish. Speak with direct intention and show them that they are indeed an individual worthy of all the respect you have to give.



Ensuring that the other person has correctly understood your message is your responsibility, not theirs. To do this, you need to make sure that they heard you accurately. This can be as simple as asking them to clarify their understanding in their own words.

I'd like to know if what I said was clear. Could you please tell me what you heard in your own words?

OR - I would like to check that you understood what I said. What did you hear me say?

Or if you are delegating a particular task, you could ask them how they intend to approach it. By listening to the process they plan to undertake, you will be able to determine if they have correctly understood your request.

On the same token, when the other person is speaking, ask questions to gauge your understanding.

I hear you saying ..... Is that correct?

OR - Please correct me if I am wrong. I understood that ..... Is that right?

There is no need for confront or animosity. Speak in a calm voice and choose your words carefully. If not worded correctly, sometimes it can come off as overly aggressive. Try to soften the tone of your voice and your accompanying body language, so you appear non-threatening.



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