

How to have Confident Conversations

What stops us from communicating with confidence?
Top tips and tools to structure challenging conversations



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CHANGE

Confident Conversations

Some conversations are challenging for us to have. Sometimes just thinking about them can be overwhelming and our response can be avoidance or delay. If we do brave them, we might find ourselves on the back foot, lacking the confidence to make the impact we want.

Confidence is the magic ingredient here because it helps us face what is difficult and find the courage to take it on. Confidence is life's natural enabler. It helps us own our abilities, brave new situations and flourish in the moment. It's the magic that supports us to speak up, the oil that greases our performance, and the belief in our value that enables us to negotiate what's important to us.

Let's be honest – we all come across situations when we know we should be speaking up, initiating a difficult or challenging conversation or tackling a sensitive issue and we don't do it.

WHY IS THAT?

- Because we're busy?
- Because we overthink it and get stuck in our heads?
- Because we tell ourselves we don't know how to or we can't do it?
- Because it's hard?

All of the above?

And some conversations are harder to have than others because of who is involved and the most obvious reason for that is how *confident* we are that the person will respond well to our challenge. Confidence also wanes and swells depending on what's happening for us and how *confident* we're feeling on a particular day.

It's confidence that acts as the bridge between the emotion we all naturally feel in a challenging or 'high stakes' situation and our ability to take action anyway.

Confidence doesn't neutralise the fear or discomfort in speaking up – but it does enable us to be brave, to find the courage to do something that feels scary.

If we want to brave those difficult conversations and speak up, first of all we need to work on our confidence.

The GOOD NEWS is Confidence is a muscle that can be built - you can work on yours using our tips in this workbook. and you can below and by preparing well which we talk about at the end of this workbook.

Here are our top tips for building your Confidence

1. Celebrate Successes

If you want to build your confidence in the long term, pausing to celebrate is a great investment of time. We recommend that at the end of each week you pause for 15 mins to reflect on what has gone well and capture your wins for the week. This doesn't need to be super structured or sophisticated to be impactful, a simple list helps reinforce what is going well and this in turn will build your confidence. Another tiny but life-changing habit for celebrating success is the 'three wins' exercise: At the end of each day, note down 3 wins. We're not looking for lives saved or industry awards won - just the tiny, micro successes that remind you that you are moving in the right direction.

And if you want to increase the confidence and resilience of your whole team, do this collectively. Spending just 10 minutes at the start of a meeting celebrating wins can have a profound impact on everyone's confidence and energy levels.

2. Know your Strengths

It's normal to take your strengths for granted, so it can have a powerful impact to properly identify and capture them. Remember the Teflon and Velcro analogy we talked about in our webinar on Strengths? Dig out your 16PF personality profile and really connect with your strengths using the technique "I know I am good at xx so that we can xx" and hang on to those statements with velcro.

3. Turn 'Me' into 'We'

Turning the 'me' into 'we' can unleash courage and take the spotlight off your feelings of doubt. We can all be fearless warriors when acting on behalf of others, or in service of a cause. What are the deep-rooted values and convictions you are serving? For example, are you promoting the work of your team? Are you asking for a pay rise so you can better provide for your family?

4. Tame your Inner Critic

We all have an *Inner Critic*. It's that voice inside your head which springs to life with little warning and always with a critical, negative point of view. It's incredibly useful to grow your awareness of, and your ability to combat and respond positively to your inner critic.

Below is a link to our guide to Taming your Inner Critic which contains a four step process to use to Recognise and Record what your inner critic is saying to you and then to Reframe and Respond in a more positive and empowering way. Use this to Tame your Inner Critic.

[Taming Your Inner Critic - Nkuzi Change Coaching Exercise.pdf](#)

Having confident conversations requires Preparation

There is an old adage that says “To Fail to Prepare is to Prepare to Fail” and because these conversations can be challenging, it’s tempting to rush them and not spend any more time on them than we absolutely need to. But this is a false economy.

Taking time to prepare for the conversation is really important but where to start?

We have a simple approach that we call the 3 Ps:

1. Personalise

It’s tempting to focus our thoughts and preparation on how we will feel in the conversation but start with thinking about the person that you are speaking up to – how can you connect with them by using what you know about them, what they care about and connecting with them as a person?

At times we all lack confidence – the person you are scared of speaking to will also have their own confidence gremlins which may lead them to react in a certain way.

If this conversation is about feedback then it’s really important to make it *specific and individual*. Use what you know about the person to ensure you have a constructive conversation and to choose the most appropriate approach for them. Knowing our colleagues well, helps us make the right choices about the timing, the context and *how* we have the conversation.

2. Prepare

Preparation is key and we’d like to offer you our [Nkuzi Change Powerful Feedback Guide.pdf](#) which includes tools and techniques for you to try. There are many frameworks available to help develop the habit of providing feedback and we’ve included two of our favourites here.

As you create more feedback you will develop your own natural style.

Useful Frameworks to power up your Feedback

I like, I wish, I wonder

The concept of this is simple. You generate your feedback by reflecting on 3 thoughts:

- I like - the positive aspect you want to highlight, focus on specifics, give examples and relate this back to the person’s strengths and behaviours.
- I wish - what you want to see more of, explore how that could happen.
- I wonder - what are they prepared to try and what support do they need?

Stop, Start, Continue

This is a great framework to ask for or deliver feedback in 3 action oriented steps:

- Stop - Explore what needs to stop.
- Start - Explore what you would like to see start.
- Continue - Confirm what is working well and what you’d like to see more of.

3. Practice

Building sustainable confidence is a long game. Like preparing for a marathon, you need a programme that builds stamina, fitness and skill and you need to practice, practice, practice. It's about taking repeated action, doing things outside of your comfort zone so take every opportunity you have to speak up and use your time with your coach to practice having difficult conversations – you can take examples from your day to day and practice how you would approach them during your coaching time.

The most important thing you can do to improve your feedback skills is to start giving (more) of it and start asking for (more) of it. Like most leadership skill, feedback is best learnt through doing, rather than studying.

Are you Curious to dig deeper?

Here are some resources for you to explore:

[Coaching for Leaders – A great podcast on how to prepare for conflict](#)

[Squiggly Careers – Podcast on how to have courageous conversations](#)

[Lead to Win – Anatomy of a tough talk](#) - A great podcast on how to have a game plan for those high stakes conversations we know we need to have

[Kim Scott's Ted Talk on her work on Radical \(or Kind\) Candour](#) which is incredibly helpful when we are thinking about speaking up to others

And a reminder of our Nkuzi Change Guides already mentioned:

[Nkuzi Change Powerful Feedback Guide.pdf](#)

[Taming Your Inner Critic - Nkuzi Change Coaching Exercise.pdf](#)

At Nkuzi Change we help leaders in large organisations to unlock the full potential in their Middle Leaders, so they and their teams can thrive. Learn more at www.nkuzichange.com

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