



Saying What Needs to Be Said in a Way that Brings About Positive Change and Builds Relationships

Have you ever given performance guidance that went poorly? Or have you refrained from giving guidance that you should have given? In both cases, had the guidance been delivered more effectively and/or timely, the results could have been notably better. As you know, the consequences of poor communication or no communication are significant and enduring. They include reduced employee engagement, impaired teamwork, increased employee turnover and reduced productivity, and a decrease in customer satisfaction and net income.

The question then is how can we have more effective and timely challenging conversations with our subordinates, peers and superiors? In her book *Radical Candor*, Kim Scott suggests a framework that answers this question.

Scott's framework consists of four quadrants formed by (i) a horizontal axis assessing the extent to which the speaker is honest and candid (Challenge Directly), and (ii) a vertical axis assessing how much the speaker is sincerely interested in helping the person they are speaking to (Care Personally). The greater the speaker's ability to be honest and candid (Challenge Directly), the further to the right on the horizontal axis the speaker lands. The greater the speaker's desire to have a positive impact on the person they are speaking to (Care Personally), the higher on the vertical axis the speaker lands. Following is the table Kim Scott created to depict her concept.



Radical Candor: The goal is to communicate in the top right quadrant of the above table, which is acting both with a high degree of honesty/candor and a high degree of care for the

other person. This enables the other person to understand the speaker's concern, receive the comments as being constructive, and act on those comments. This also provides psychological safety to all employees, enabling them to be more open, honest and caring toward all stakeholders.

Developing a coach mentality is helpful to operating in the top right quadrant. Like a coach, Radical Candor also requires the speaker to address, rather than ignore, important situations. Fear of speaking up on an important matter, regardless of the reason, while understandable for many reasons, has no place at work. To earn the ability to provide helpful guidance, Radical Candor also requires the speaker to invite fellow employees at all levels, to share their suggestions on how the speaker can improve their performance. See the last section in this article that contains additional suggestions on how to properly Challenge Directly and Care Personally.

Ruinous Empathy: Ruinous Empathy occurs when we care for a person and do not want to hurt their feelings, so we say nothing. It is also possible that part of the reason we choose not to speak is we are not comfortable delivering critical news and we fear what could happen if we say something or say something wrong. This dereliction of responsibility leads to them not improving, and has a detrimental impact on other employees, you and the company. Ruinous Empathy is the most common reason people withhold feedback.

Manipulative Insincerity: Manipulative Insincerity occurs when the speaker does not care for the other person and chooses not to provide guidance. This can include letting the person incorrectly think they are doing a good job or making comments about their performance behind their back. As with Ruinous Empathy, failing to fulfill leadership responsibilities leaves the employee with no ability to improve, and damages them, you, your team and the company.

Obnoxious Aggression: The third problematic category is where we do not show we care for the person and we honestly express our views. We could express our views anywhere from an uncaring tone of voice to outright hostility. This often occurs when we are angry or take on a callous persona so we can have the courage to speak the truth. However, this is poor leadership and exhibits low emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-regulation, other awareness, and relationship building). Our delivery is even worse if we are under pressure for results, are sleep deprived, are hungry, and/

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or have other life issues. Brutal honesty generally demotivates the recipient, as well as other employees, and rarely leads to the desired level of improvement.

Suggestions on How to Challenge Directly and Care Personally:

- Focus every day on building relationships and communicating clearly, which includes ensuring the recipient understands you and you understand them.
- Recognize you have an obligation to share with the recipient important conduct that needs to change (Challenge Directly). Stay focused on important conduct and avoid being a micro manager.
- Approach the situation as a coach who is sincerely trying to help the recipient to succeed for their and the company's benefit (Care Personally). "Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care." Theodore Roosevelt
- Ensure you understand the situation fully before acting (act in haste, repent at leisure). This includes asking the person thoughtful questions and truly listen to understand, rather than listen to reply or to correct. Alan Alda said: "Real listening is a willingness to let the other person change you." Do not interrupt the person, even if you disagree with something they said, unless you need clarification, the person is speaking in an inappropriate manner and/or the person is repeating themselves. To show the recipient you understand them and ensure you, in fact, do understand them, repeat back what you heard, even if you disagree with its substance. Next, share your views, including correcting what you see as their misunderstanding.
- Know your goal.
- Say something specific that is positive about them and their work.
- Stick to the facts you have observed and their impact and stay away from personality traits. For example: It is okay to say the person was late completing a task 6 times causing delays or the boss cancelled a pre-scheduled meeting 6 times harming productivity. It is not okay to say the person does not care or is disorganized, which are conclusory personal attacks.
- Focus on the solution and future conduct. A conversation focused solely on past or present action or inaction is a beat down.
- Ask the person to propose a solution as they may have a better solution, and it helps gain their commitment to change.
- Practice before meeting them.
- When appropriate, solicit guidance and support from Human Resources.

