

Resource 1:

Empathetic Confrontation: Steps toward Success

This guide contains the practical steps to help you set up the calm, detached approach that fosters empathy and productive confrontation.

- **Determine a common goal for the meeting.** Make sure the meeting is only about this goal. Confrontation is about helping the other person and resolving a specific issue. Keep your mind on resolving the issue—not berating the other person or making them feel bad. The less emotion brought to the discussion, the better.
- **Do not make a play for the other person's emotions.** Most people do not care what you feel, think, or believe—especially when they feel uneasy and stressed themselves. Focus the discussion on the issue. Do not bring in your anger, fear, or ego. This is about the other person and not about you. This is not the time to try to get sympathy (i.e., “your performance is making me look bad”); to vent your anger to make yourself feel better; or to be arrogant and state how much better you could do their work.
- **Make sure you understand your own reactions.** What are you invested in? What are you reacting to? Why are you angry? What are your motivators? Being right? Doing things your way? Making everyone on the team happy? Remember that in the vast majority of cases, even when it seems that someone is attacking you, they're usually only protecting themselves from a perceived threat.
- **Find a way to help the other person save face.** Saving face means preserving “self-esteem, self-worth, identity, reputation, status, pride, and dignity.”¹ This means respecting the individual and being willing to give the other person a way to renegotiate

their position to preserve their dignity. It is detrimental during confrontation to cause shame, fear, and anger in others. This breaks down trust and creates a fear-based environment.

- **Tackle the underlying issues and not the behavior.** Figure out why are they acting the way they do by asking questions, listening to them, and figuring out the root cause.
- **Do not presume to know what they think.** Avoid asserting that you understand the other person or their position on the issue. The reality is that you almost never have the whole picture—especially from another person’s perspective—only what they choose to share with you.
- **Present constructive options to the individual you are confronting.** Creating a respectful way out of confrontation is an act of great maturity and enlightened, empathetic leadership. Be careful, however, to avoid providing choices you do not have the ability to follow through on, that you do not really agree with, or that you know the other person would not agree to.