

This is the 1st article of 4 in the Courageous Conversations Toolkit series. You can download the articles in this series, and other tools, at: http://stproject.org/toolkit_tool/courageous-conversation-toolkit

“Difficult to manage relationships sabotage more business than anything else – it is not a question of strategy that gets us into trouble; it is a question of emotions.”

– John Kotter, Harvard Business School, expert on organizational development

A leader's life is filled with challenging conversations:

- Confronting staff about problems with their performance
- Misalignment or competition with allies
- Struggles with the board
- Dealing with misbehavior by colleagues
- Negotiations with funders
- Negotiations with adversaries
- Conversations around power and privilege

Many of us feel varying degrees of reluctance to engage in these kinds of conversations. We often put off having them – perhaps in some vague hope that the problems will go away on their own.

They don't! There's a price we pay for avoidance. Emotions fester and grow. We build up our cases against each other. Misunderstandings pile on. We are distracted and weighed down by the unresolved issue. We 'forget' that *not* dealing with a situation is a choice – and it's a choice that almost always makes things worse.

When we finally get around to dealing with the situation, the problems are greater as a result of having procrastinated and our success rate goes down. If the conversation goes poorly, we “prove” to ourselves that these kinds of conversations are difficult, which leads to more avoidance, which leads to...

In a Courageous Conversation, we take the risk of dealing with people in a direct and authentic way. We share our concerns honestly and invite the other(s) to do so as well. We enter into dialogue with the hope of a positive outcome that addresses our concerns and furthers our interests.

The pages that follow contain articles and tools to help you have successful Courageous Conversations.

Beyond learning some techniques, you're being invited to a paradigm shift.

A SHIFT FROM:

These messy conversations are necessary evils or distractions from the important work.

TO:

These Courageous Conversations are critical opportunities to advance the work and the mission.

AND A SHIFT FROM:

I avoid these difficult conversations when possible.

TO:

Every morning I scan my world and look for potential opportunities for Courageous Conversations that build partnership, deal proactively with potential disturbances and breakdowns, and further the mission.

Read the following articles in this series. Use the tools and try out the best practices:

Courageous Conversations #2: *Do You Need One?*

Courageous Conversations #3: *How To Prepare*

Courageous Conversations #4: *Best Practices*

Practicing more frequent and more effective Courageous Conversations is one of the most profound ways to empower your leadership.