



Tip Sheet

EFFECTIVE CONVERSATION PRACTICES

The Title and Total Compensation (TTC) Project is a campus-wide project to modernize the university's job framework and salary structure. Employees may have a variety of responses to the changes brought about by the TTC Project. For some, the changes may feel drastic and difficult. This tip sheet offers practices for human resource (HR) professionals and supervisors to effectively engage employees in critical conversations.

BEFORE THE CONVERSATION



- **Take time to notice and name your feelings.** How might these emotions affect the conversation?
- **Affirm your intentions.** What do you want for yourself in this situation? What do you want for the employee? What do you want for the relationship?
- **Gather information and resources.** Review information. Write down key points you want to share.
- **Consider individual needs.** What is the employee's preferred communication style? What do they need during a change? How can you support these needs?
- **Set expectations.** Let the employee know what they can expect during the conversation and give time for them to prepare.

DURING THE CONVERSATION – CREATE SPACE FOR LISTENING



- **Be present.** Put away distractions like email, phone, and instant messaging.
- **Get curious.** Ask the employee what they saw, heard, experienced. Seek to understand their feelings and why they are feeling the way they do.
- **Ask for the employee's perspective.** Don't assume you know.
- **Listen actively.** Reflect, restate, and summarize what you hear. Ask clarifying questions to ensure you understand.
- **Listen for underlying concerns.** Pay attention to what is said as well as what is not said. What might the employee's emotions and needs be?
- **Where possible, give choices.** Consider where you can give the employee control. It is easier to accept changes when you have a voice in the process.

DURING THE CONVERSATION – EXPRESS POSITIVE INTENTIONS



- **Affirm the employee's value and contributions.** State your positive intent and appreciation. Don't leave it to the employee to infer.
- **Connect the change to the greater purpose and organizational mission.** Explain the purpose of the TTC Project and the reasons for the change.

DURING THE CONVERSATION – SHARE THE FACTS



- **Share how you arrived at the decision.** What was the process? What factors did you consider? What facts did you rely on to make the determination?
- **Affirm what you know.** Acknowledge the unknowns and share what you do know.
- **Explain the impact of the change.** Explain what stays the same as well as what changes.

AFTER THE CONVERSATION



- **Invite follow up.** Give the employee time to process. Open the door for them to come back with questions and comments. Set a timeframe so they are aware when decisions must be finalized.
- **Defer.** If you don't know the answer to a question, let the employee know you will look into it and get back to them. Give yourself time to gather information and think through the response instead of reacting in the moment.
- **Follow through with commitments.** If you commit to something during the conversation, follow through and share the outcome. Even if the outcome is not exactly what the employee wanted, letting them know you followed through builds trust.
- **Summarize the conversation in an email to ensure shared understanding.** Document key decisions, open questions, and follow up items.
- **Share resources.** Help employee learn more about the change. Let them know about employee support services like Employee Assistance Office at hr.wisc.edu/employee-assistance-office and Ombuds Office at ombuds.wisc.edu.