

*Make it happen,
make it matter*

Leadership Development Series



Kia ora koutou!

Challenging Conversations

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Agenda



1. Reducing the triggers
2. What makes a conversation challenging?
3. Assessing the need to tackle a conversation
4. Preparing for and conducting the conversation
5. Breakout sessions
6. A simple feedback model
7. Summary

Having difficult discussions with people is something we must be prepared to do as leaders. Of course it's not always something we like to do, but it goes with the territory when it comes to managing the diverse views, personalities and opinions of a diverse group such as the members of a chorus.

First today we will look at some of the activities, issues or events that might trigger the need for an challenging conversation, and what we can do as leaders to help minimise those risks.

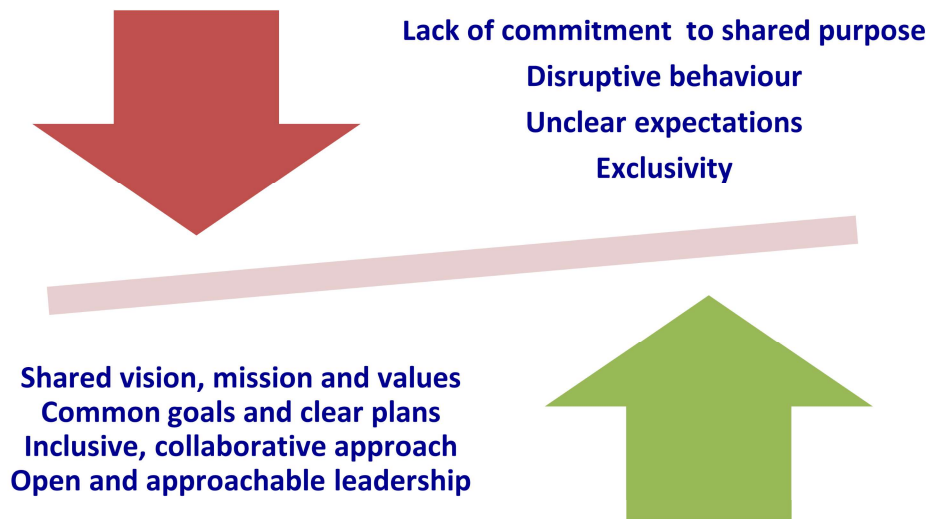
These conversations cannot and indeed should not be avoided under all circumstances, and so then we delve into the factors that can contribute to making a conversation challenging.

We will then talk about the factors you need to take into account when preparing to conduct a challenging conversation – looking at things such as timing, location and participants and most importantly of all preparing yourself to be as effective as possible to undertake the communication activity.

We will then look at some real life examples drawn from chorus experiences in our breakout sessions.

Finally we will review a simple model for giving feedback that works in most situations.

Reduce the triggers



It is a key job of chorus leaders to be ready to have conversations that might be awkward, uncomfortable and possibly even confrontational

Managing and leading your chorus with purpose, clarity and inclusivity will reduce the likely trigger for conflict and is the best approach to ensuring a happy team with minimal conflict.

How do we do that ?

By diligently applying the leadership lessons and approaches we have discussed over the previous 6 webinars !

- * Vision and Strategy

Maintain a strong shared vision , goals and values so the team remains united by that common purpose, and has a clear view of the actions and tasks needed to get there

- * Delegation

Set clear expectations for members from the start, and give clarity to tasks and roles, so there is no confusion

- * Nurturing Members

Know your members, treating members as individuals with unique needs, united by our love of singing, but different in so many ways – life stages, beliefs, etc

This requires a flexible and caring approach

- * Collaborative Leadership

Making sure chorus leaders behave in ways that are congruent with values - walk that talk

Manage group dynamics, be on the look out for conflicts and disharmony

Be approachable to deal with issues early, by showing your own humility / vulnerability

A quiz about conflict



Conflict can be an issue –how much has it been an issue that you have seen in your chorus?

Never 0%

Very Occassionally 83%

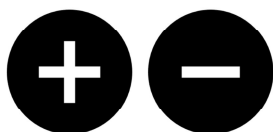
Quite Often 8%

Constantly 8%

Challenging doesn't always imply "negativity"



Feedback



Performance



Development



Task Check Ins



Emotionally
Charged



Mediation

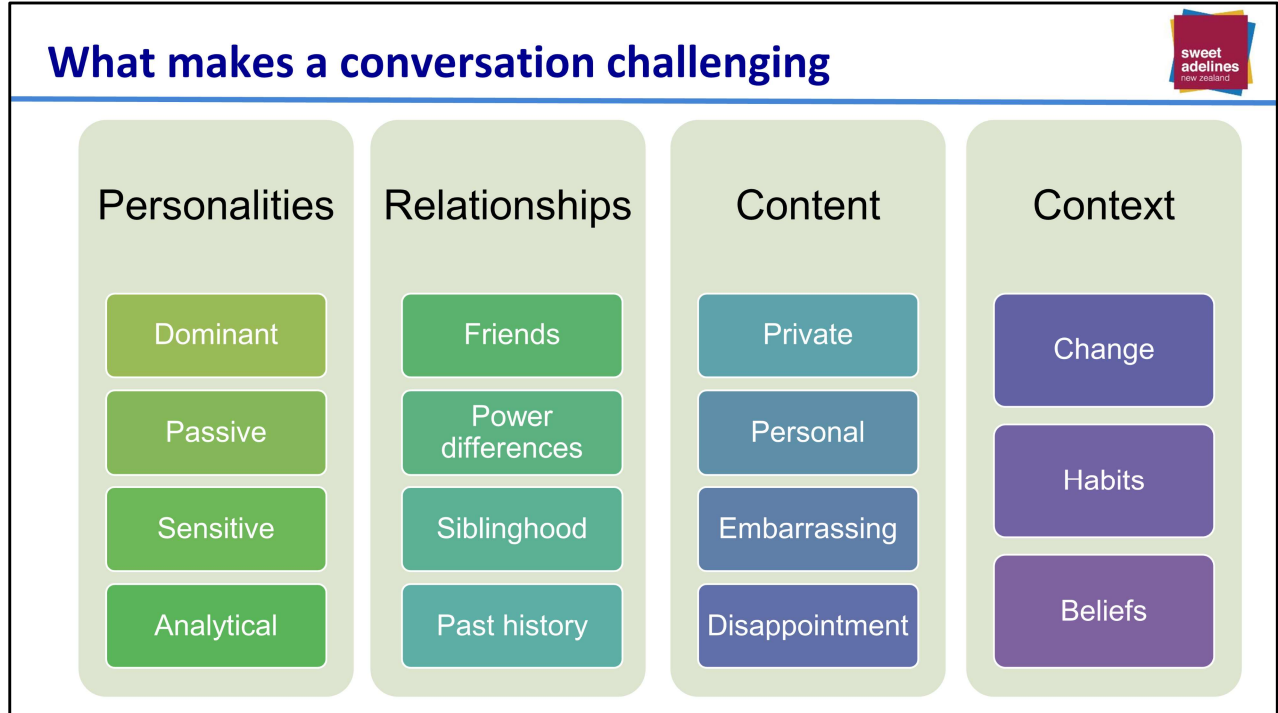


Although we have just been talking about conflict, challenging doesn't always mean negative or confrontational, it's not just about correcting some poor behavior or performance or attitude – but they can be some of the toughest conversations.

Some examples of scenarios :

- Giving feedback both positive and negative – remembering that some people take praise as awkwardly as they take criticism
- Managing conflict between individuals – conflict can be constructive
- Exploring development and growth opportunities – challenging people to step outside their comfort zones
- Following up on delegated tasks and activities to completion - balancing the need to check in , with the need to give people freedom and autonomy
- Disappointment – perhaps when you miss your shared goals, and managing expectations
- Emotionally charged situations – either for yourself or another participant in the conversation

What makes a conversation challenging



Why might a conversation be challenging?

The types of personalities involved :

DOMINANT – doesn't allow others to express themselves, talks over others, dismisses others views as unimportant

PASSIVE – unwilling or unable to express their opinion, avoids conflict by subjugating needs to others

ANALYTICAL – sticks to the facts but may not be aware of human or emotional factors in interactions

Types of **RELATIONSHIPS** between participants :

FRIENDS – can be tricky when you need to counsel a friend over an issues, it can be seen as personal, even when it is not

POWER DIFFERENCES - can be real where the individual is in a position with real authority in the group or perceived because of experience, longevity or a powerful personal style within the group , someone to whom others generally defer

SIBLINGHOOD – choruses are diverse groups of people with vastly different experiences, personal values and beliefs, united by a common passion for singing. We are siblings in our chorus families, but under pressure , stress or anxiety those differences can be arise as

sources of tension

PAST HISTORY – unsatisfactory past communications and conversations in a relationship can make tackling a tricky conversation more problematic now – grudges and biases exist

The CONTENT of the conversation :

PRIVATE OR PERSONAL – some people are open books and some are not

EMBARRASSING - some topic trigger some people – financial , health, are two that come to mind here

DISAPPOINTING – delivering bad news, poor results

The CONTEXT of the conversation :

CHANGE – asking people to change they way they are used to doing something is usually challenging and often resisted

HABITS – we all know how hard it can be to break the habits of a lifetime and we can be completely unaware of our habits as well

BELIEFS – a belief is deeply held truth that is core to an individual, if a situation is challenging a core belief it can

Circumstances where action has been needed



Type your examples in chat box

Critical skill of leadership is deciding when and what to communicate when the going gets tough

What are some example of situations where you might need to step in and initiate a difficult discussion?

From the chat examples were :

It is particularly difficult for newer management team members to deal with conflicts where there is past history that is so long ago that very few people remember it but the issue persists

One person who decided covid was a hoax

Fee increases

Telling a member she no longer could be a member of the chorus

Overdue chorus fees

The 'personal freshness' conversation

Not meeting competition performance requirements

Cost of outfits

Style of outfits

Members losing outfits

Size of the outfit

Some different types of triggers



INTERPERSONAL
CONFLICTS

UNDERMINING
LEADERS

NOT MAINTAINING
STANDARDS

LACK OF
INCLUSION

POOR TASK
PERFORMANCE

Interpersonal conflicts – communication styles, beliefs, habits

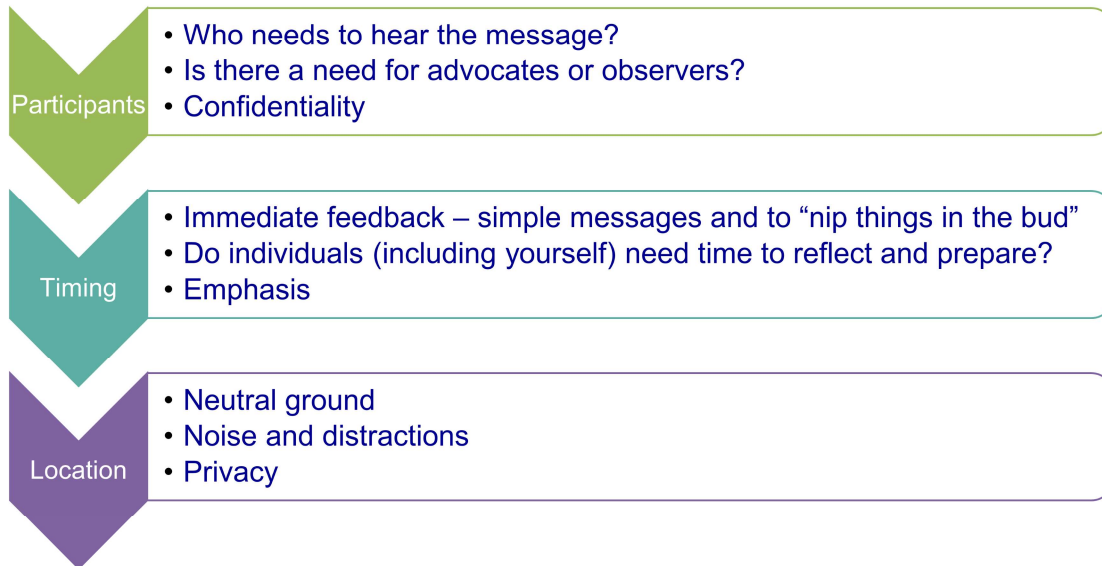
Standards – behaviour – language, attendance preparation, musical performance, financial

Undermining – not supporting leaders, chat on risers, not supporting group goals or activities, spreading fear

Inclusion - cliques and tribes within tribes – intentional or unintentional

Task – not doing assigned jobs, doing them poorly or not working collaboratively with others

Considerations in preparing for a conversation



Participants

Who else needs to know/be involved/be aligned to the message ? Is it a general discussion to which all the chorus needs to be involved, a simple message that doesn't single anyone out but address a behaviour – eg talking on the risers.

Does any one involved need someone there to support them or to provide corroboration or validation of information? Do you need an independent observer?

Is it essential that the subject matter be tackled confidentially? Could it cause embarrassment or offence?

Timing

Allowing time to de-escalate emotions if an issue is fraught – can't converse logically and calmly to people if they are in that fright or flight state

Emphasis – setting a special meeting time adds emphasis or gravity or seriousness of the discussion, be sure that you check the message that this might send

Location

Privacy if emotions are likely to be triggered.

Avoid distractions so full attention can be given by you to listen and the participants to engage

Neutral ground in a place that is unlikely to trigger emotions or discomfort for any party

Questions for your personal preparation



1. What is your purpose for having the conversation? What do you hope to accomplish? What would be an ideal outcome?
2. What assumptions are you making about the situation and those involved ?
3. What “buttons” of yours might be being pushed?
4. How is your attitude toward the conversation influencing your perception of it?
5. What might the other participants be thinking about this situation? Are they even aware of a problem?
6. What are your needs and fears?
7. How have you contributed to the situation? How have others contributed?



CONSIDERING THESE QUESTIONS WILL ALLOW YOU TO TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR ENERGY AND REMAIN IN A CALM AND CENTERED STATE FOR THE CONVERSATION

Personal preparation and reflection is important before tackling a difficult discussion :

1. What is your purpose for having the conversation? What do you hope to accomplish? What would be an ideal outcome?

Watch for hidden purposes. You may think you have honorable goals, like educating an employee or increasing connection with your teen, only to notice that your language is excessively critical or condescending. You think you want to support, but you end up punishing. Some purposes are more useful than others. Work on yourself so that you enter the conversation with a supportive purpose.

2. What assumptions are you making about this person's intentions? You may feel intimidated, belittled, ignored, disrespected, or marginalized, but be cautious about assuming that this was the speaker's intention. Impact does not necessarily equal intent.

3. What “buttons” of yours are being pushed? Are you more emotional than the situation warrants? Take a look at your “backstory,” as they say in the movies. What personal history is being triggered? You may still have the conversation, but you'll go into it knowing that some of the heightened emotional state has to do with you.

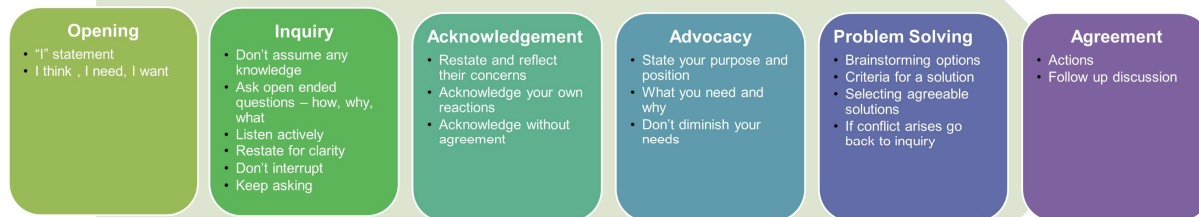
4. How is your attitude toward the conversation influencing your perception of it? If you think this is going to be horribly difficult, it probably will be. If you truly believe that whatever happens, some good will come of it, that will likely be the case. Try to adjust your attitude for maximum effectiveness.

5. Who is the opponent? What might he be thinking about this situation? Is he aware of the problem? If so, how do you think he perceives it? What are his needs and fears? What solution do you think he would suggest? Begin to reframe the opponent as partner.

6. What are your needs and fears? Are there any common concerns? Could there be?

7. How have you contributed to the problem? How has the other person?

Conducting the difficult conversation – 6 step



Opening – set context, take ownership with I statements, restate as needed

Inquiry – Assume nothing, feign ignorance to seek complete exposure of the issue, seek all input. Keep asking questions till they have nothing more to give, restate for clarification and confirmation

Acknowledgement – reassures them that they have been heard and you acknowledge your own reactions as well as theirs

Advocate – After exhausting exploration of the issues only then should you state clearly your purpose or position, and start advocating for your preferred solutions. If and when objections are raised or issue deflected go back to inquiry stage if needed.

Brainstorm options – look for points of agreement on possible solutions that are acceptable, negotiate reasonable trade-offs

Agree on next steps – when and how to follow up, who is doing what and when

Tips for success:



- **How you are (centered, supportive, curious, problem-solving) will greatly influence what you say**
- **Acknowledge emotions and direct emotional energy towards a useful purpose**
- **Know and return to your purpose/needs at difficult moments**
- **Don't take verbal attacks personally**
- **Don't assume the other person can see things from your point of view**
- **Mentally practice the conversation**

Passion needs a purpose – redirect it constructively

Know your bottom line and keep restating it if deflection or objections resurface

Keep discussion focused on issues rather than people

4 Quest Feedback model



**A simple tool for
structuring performance
feedback and
improvement
conversations**

This is an excellent model that requires little practice or preparation for giving feedback. It is particularly useful for task performance feedback. These questions work well for PVI feedback.

It is similar to the 6 step model, but requires less preparation. It is best used in uncomplicated scenarios. Like the 6 step model, it requires you to also delay your desire to state your opinions or give solutions until you allow the other party to fully explore their performance and options to improve by asking questions in a structured sequence. Only after ask the sequence of questions, should you offer your solutions.

Group Activity

Tackling a Challenging Conversations



- Let's head into breakout rooms.
- Once you get into your breakout rooms introduce yourselves to each other.
- Select someone to act as scribe, and a spokesperson for the group.
- Then **look at the scenario assigned to you to discuss, which depicts an awkward situation where a difficult topic might need to be tackled**
 - Considering the model discussed in today's session, how would you prepare and conduct a conversation around this scenario?
 - You will have 15 minutes for a discussion then be returned to the main group.
- You can call for assistance from the breakout room if you need us.
- Your group spokesperson will share thoughts from your discussion with everyone upon return to the main group.

Group 1

Your chorus has appointed a new Assistant Director, Julie, who is just learning the job. There has been some repeated subtle chat on risers and in small groups about how a new AD is conducting the group and their perceived shortcomings compared to your Musical Director.

Group 2

You have a long standing member, Betty, who occasionally uses inappropriate language in mixed groups including with youth members. You have had a quiet word or two with her about this in the past, but the behaviour is continuing.

Group 3

Chorus has formed a team to design and procure a new costume. The team have been briefed and have a budget, and timeline to work with. Mary the team leader hasn't reported back to the management team as planned for 6 weeks, and you are starting to worry about what is going on inside the team. In the past you have had difficulties getting Mary to collaborate with others on tasks.

Group 4

You've had some complaints from a few members that a new member, Joan, that they are standing near on the risers has unpleasant body odour. Its not just a one off thing.

Group 5

Susie is a younger member with really artistic and creative flair. You'd like her to step onto the management team to work in the marketing role, but she lacks confidence, so you need to convince her, and you want to try and talk her around.

Group 6

Debbie is a relatively new member. You are her section leader. After listening to her riser tapes, you have

to give her feedback and advise her that she will be excluded from competition performance as she can't meet the standard in the time frame required.

Group 7

There are grumblings right across the chorus about the Musical Director's focus on barbershop repertoire ALL the time. Many members would love to try some contemporary acapella repertoire.

Group 8

Lucy is going through a tough time. She is in the middle of a relationship breakdown and is suffering financial difficulties. She has fallen 2 months behind in member dues, but she isn't putting her hand up to access the Angel fund, although she knows it's available.

Summary of today's session



- Minimise the need for awkward and challenging conversations by creating a vision, culture and values that unite the team and give clarity to plans, goals and expectations
- Consider the factors (personality, content, context and relationships) that add complexity
- Leaders must step up for challenging discussions
- Prepare – participants, time, location, and most importantly yourself
- Use a structured approach - 6 step model
- For simple performance feedback – try 4 quest model