



MANAGING YOUR STRESS IN TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

'I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be'. Martin Luther King, US civil rights activist.

BY ANNA WILDMAN

Today's pace of work means that people are under more pressure than ever before. So, when people make mistakes, it can be all too easy for a manager to vent their frustration with a knee jerk reaction, when they wouldn't do this under less pressured circumstances. Raising the emotional temperature will escalate the tension, of course; having a few tips at hand to manage your stress is essential.

FIVE WAYS TO INSTANTLY MANAGE YOUR STRESS

1. **Notice when you are getting frustrated.** Being able to sense physical symptoms, such as when your heart rate is rising or your mouth is becoming dry, or realize when your thoughts are becoming negative, will help you to know when to take action.
2. **Breathe.** A deep (silent) breath both relaxes you physically and crucially creates a critical split second gap between what you might be tempted to say and your actual response.
3. **Ask a question.** This also gives you thinking time, but more importantly it means your first response is not a knee-jerk reaction. It's even more helpful to start that question with 'what' instead of 'why' to open the topic out. For example, instead of asking, 'Why are you having problems with this?' try, 'What are the challenges you are facing?' or, 'Tell me more about what your aim is here'
4. **Acknowledge their positive intentions.** When people make mistakes, it's rarely deliberate. Make it your default setting to assume that your staff will have done their best. Ask questions like, 'This outcome won't have been what you were hoping for, what were your aims here?'
5. **Explain your boundaries.** If someone has been deliberately disruptive, explain any limits calmly and clearly. This will stop you feeling anxious about being maneuvered into making unacceptable concessions.

By focusing on what you really want from the conversation – helping them to perform at their best – you can keep the conversation positive and moving forward.