

How to Increase your Influence in High Stakes Conversations

High stakes conversations happen all the time. Even though we may recognise the importance of those conversations, we often go into them unprepared, which dramatically reduces the likelihood of getting a good result from those conversations.

Whether it is a difficult conversation with an employee, manager, colleague, partner, friend, child, parent or sibling, being prepared can dramatically enhance the quality of the outcomes of those tricky conversations.

Here are some simple strategies you can implement to help you approach those conversations with confidence, clarity and a sense of complete calm. I hope you find them helpful.

Step 1. Set a clear goal	
DO	Make sure it is a positive outcome, rather than something you want to avoid.
	Consider the time frame for the conversation – make sure the goal is achievable in that time.
DON'T	“Wing it” – go in with a vague idea of what you hope might happen.
	Set a goal that is only likely to benefit you – keep all perspectives in mind when establishing the goal.
Step 2. Assess the situation	
DO	Consider the factors influencing you and your conversational partner.
	Reflect on their likely motivations – see if you can identify a common intention.
DON'T	Focus only on why you are right/what you want.
	Ignore key details because they don't serve your agenda.
Step 3. Choose the right approach	
DO	Consider the other person's communication style.
	Identify what type of information is likely to be influential to them.
DON'T	Limit your communication to one particular style.
	Assume that your preferred way of presenting information is necessarily the way your conversational partner prefers to receive information.

Step 4. Structure the approach.	
DO	Plan your opening to ensure the conversations starts in the spirit of your intended outcomes.
	Consider their possible objections and be prepared to discuss them thoughtfully.
DON'T	Assume you will do all the talking – consider what your conversational partner may bring to the table.
	Dismiss possible objections without considering their potential merit.
Step 5. Have an exit strategy.	
DO	Agree on some rules of engagement, including when to discontinue the conversation if it becomes uncomfortable or unproductive.
	Identify a strategy to disengage that you feel able to use, if necessary.
DON'T	Persist with a conversation that has become volatile, unsafe or unproductive.
	Allow the conversation to deteriorate to a point where participants have lost, or are likely to lose, trust.
Step 6. Rehearse	
DO	Practise what you want to say.
	Ask someone to role play with you, and even play “Devil’s advocate”.
DON'T	Assume you will know what to say in the moment.
	Leave high stakes conversations to chance!

If you would like to learn more about increasing your influence in conversations, please contact me via email: kate@astuteecs.com.au or visit my website: www.astuteecs.com.au.