

Courageous Conversations: A Dental Professionals Most Powerful Skill

By Katherine Eitel Belt



We've all done it... Avoiding conversations we *need* to have because we're afraid. Afraid of hurting someone's feelings. Afraid we might make things worse. Stuffing down the words we want to say. Feeling like a victim when we just aren't willing to have those crucial conversations.

We may have spoken to someone in the past with the best of intentions and when those conversations did not go well, we learned to avoid them. The problem with avoiding, of course, is that situations rarely resolve themselves and typically get worse over time which only strengthens our irritation, confusion, or negative feelings, and erodes openness, creativity, and weakens relationships.

You can engage in these conversations with predictably better outcomes by recognizing and shifting limiting beliefs and adding a few of these tools:

1. **I never lose. I either win or I learn.** When you believe you cannot lose no matter how the conversation goes, and the only reality is that you will either have a good outcome for both parties or learn something powerful about what works or what doesn't... you have more courage.
2. **Crucial information may be missing.** Listen first, talk second. "Sara, I want to talk to you about how we are handling our end-of-day closing process. I have some concerns about it but first, I'm wondering how you think we're doing?" It's amazing the enlightening information you learn which can shift your perspective, heighten empathy, or causes you to change your mind completely.
3. **Agreement is a good place to start.** Where you agree is a much stronger platform from which to launch the conversation. Would it be fair to say, Sara, that we both want to get out of here as close to 5:00 as possible to get home to our families?" Most reasonable people will agree. The rest of the conversation will be easier because it now seems in service to the foundational place of agreement.

4. **Judgement is a relationship killer.** Very few things are actually good or bad, or right or wrong. Most either work or don't work. Instead of speaking about things being wrong or bad, switch to "This doesn't work for maintaining our value of excellent service." Or "This works better for supporting the team in accomplishing our goals."
5. **Nobody HAS to do anything.** We really can't make people do anything. It's much better to speak about *choice* and show confidence in the fact that most people will make the choice that is best for them. We speak in a much less threatening way when we highlight the person's choice to align with our values, company vision, team objectives, or even what I call my "non-negotiables." For example, "Sara, one of my non-negotiables is that we are all here at 7:45 ready to go for the day. I completely understand that it may not be possible for you to be the kind of mother you want to be for your children every morning and get here by that time for work. I respect that very much. Only you will know the options available to you and whether you can do both. I'll fully respect whatever decision you make. If you decide to continue to work here, you would need to commit to our team agreement of a daily start time of 7:45." In other words, you don't have to do anything you don't want to and certainly not anything that goes against a core value for you... *and* to work here you would need to be here at 7:45 am. I'll always be your champion in being "at choice" and in making the decision that is best for you.
6. **No two people will see the past the same.** Every time they go *back*, I go *forward*. When they say, "That's not what I do!" (even if I don't agree) I say, "Okay... and looking forward, how can we create a way to ensure that it's always done according to our agreement?"
7. **"And" is almost always a better word choice than "But."** "And" builds on the previous statement and "but" cancels it out.
8. **Creative solutions can surprise you.** If you're open and not married to being right, it's amazing what two reasonable and thoughtful people can create. Go in with ideas and be open to the delightful surprise of an even better solution.

The world needs more non-judgmental, thoughtful, and courageous conversations. Our own professional and personal worlds need them too... and leaders go first. So, step up. Be courageous. Open your mind and your heart. Step out of anger and take responsibility for not speaking about these things sooner. Go into the experience ready to learn and grow yourself. Be sincerely curious and creative about what's possible. Be a champion for the other person, no matter the outcome.

For a free copy of our LionSpeak **Courageous Conversations Support Sheet** for your team, email us at info@LionSpeak.net with *CC Support Sheet* in the subject line.



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