

Think of one stakeholder conversation you know you need to have – but, for whatever reason, haven't had yet.

You may not control the stakeholder, their priorities or the wider pressure. But you can choose how you show up in the conversation.

When authority is limited, how you relate becomes part of how you deliver. Use this page to prepare before you have it.

1. WHAT IS THE OUTCOME I ACTUALLY NEED?

Go beyond "I need them to agree." What do I genuinely need this conversation to make possible?

2. WHERE IS MY CHOICE POINT?

Under pressure, our instinct can be to push harder, defend, correct, assume, withdraw or escalate.

What is likely to trigger me in this conversation?

What might I instinctively do?

What do I want to choose instead?

In the moment, try: H.A.L.T. (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired) · Breathe · Find your mantra, 'This too will pass' · Stay focused on the goal · Talk it out, don't act it out · Take a break if necessary.

"The relational dip may be inevitable. The damage isn't."

3. WHAT DO I NEED TO UNDERSTAND BEFORE I PERSUADE?

Before trying to shift their position, understand it.

What don't I understand yet?

What one genuine question could I ask?

Need a prompt? What's concerning you most? What am I missing? What would make this workable from your perspective? Help me understand what has changed.

Underneath it: there may be more than one conversation running, what happened, how it feels, and what it means about you. Which one is actually running here?

(Adapted from Difficult Conversations, Stone, Patton & Heen.)

4. WHAT WILL MY OPENING LINE BE?

Write the words you will actually use to start the conversation.

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Clarity without unnecessary relational damage.

COURAGE + CARE

5. WHEN WILL I HAVE IT?

Don't leave with an interesting idea. Leave with a conversation you're actually going to have.

Date:

Time:

My next move: