

Difficult workplace conversations can be tough, but with the right approach, they can lead to positive outcomes and stronger relationships. This checklist outlines key steps to help ensure these conversations are **productive**, **respectful**, and **solution-focused**.

Checklist for Setting Up First Productive Conversations

1. Choose the Right Time and Place

- Neutral Location:** Hold the conversation outside the office or away from the problem area to reduce tension.
- Private Setting:** Ensure sensitive issues are discussed in a private space where the employee feels safe.
- Consider Timing:** Schedule the conversation when neither of you is rushed or under pressure.

2. Create a Comfortable Atmosphere

- Friendly Opening:** Begin with positive feedback or acknowledgement of strengths to set a balanced tone.
- Body Language & Tone:** Use open, non-confrontational body language and a calm tone to foster a dialogue.
- Invite Participation:** Make it clear the conversation is a two-way exchange, encouraging input.

3. Be Clear About the Purpose

- State the Objective:** Clearly explain the reason for the conversation to avoid confusion.
- Emphasise Problem-Solving:** Frame the conversation as finding solutions, not placing blame.

4. Ask Open-Ended Questions

- Encourage Dialogue:** Use open-ended questions to invite the employee to share their thoughts and challenges.
- Listen Actively:** Show that you value their input by nodding, paraphrasing, and asking follow-up questions.

5. Focus on Behaviour, Not the Person

- Avoid Personal Attacks:** Focus on specific behaviours or actions rather than criticising the individual's character.
- Use "I" Statements:** Express your concerns using "I" statements to avoid sounding accusatory.

6. Offer Support and Solutions

- Collaborate on Solutions:** Ask the employee for ideas on addressing the issue, showing that you value their input.
- Provide Resources or Coaching:** Offer guidance, resources, or training if needed to help them improve.
- Confirm agreed actions:** Clearly outline agreed changes in behaviour and timeframes.

7. Stay Open to Feedback

- Encourage Feedback:** Ask if they have suggestions or concerns.

8. Follow-Up After the Conversation

- Recap Key Points:** Immediately following the conversation, send an email summarising the main takeaways and agreed-upon actions to ensure clarity moving forward.
- Check-In:** Follow up regularly over the next couple of weeks with the employee to monitor progress and keep communication open.