



Belonging and Excellence for All (BE4ALL) is a joint effort by SMART, SMACNA, and the ITI to create an industry-wide culture where everyone is welcome and belongs, including those from historically underrepresented groups, and where we all strive for the highest standards of performance and professionalism, resulting in a thriving unionized sheet metal industry that affirms the dignity and worth of us all. These Toolbox Talks are in support of this mission.

BE4ALL Toolbox Talk Courageous Conversations

Difficult conversations are inevitable, but you can equip yourself with the tools to navigate them successfully. Effective communication is a vital skill to have because it is essential for maintaining safety, productivity, and a positive work environment. Whether addressing performance issues, safety concerns, or interpersonal conflicts, these conversations might be a challenge. However, with the right approach, they can lead to constructive outcomes.

Here are some strategies to ensure your success in turning difficult conversations into courageous conversations:

- **Prepare.** Identify the issue and spend time thinking about its root causes. Reflect on how the issue affects safety, productivity, or morale. Recognize your own perspective but prepare for others to have their own viewpoint.
- **Initiate a welcoming tone.** Be calm, patient, and open with those you intend to speak with. Ensure all parties are prepared to resolve the issue and share a common goal of remaining respectful. Make it known that you are open to acknowledging other perspectives and would like to hear all points of view. Use inviting dialogue and ask questions to encourage an open conversation.
- **Be an active listener.** When it is someone else's turn to speak, focus on understanding rather than rushing to respond. Take in what they have to say and let them know you value their input.
- **Communicate clearly.** Do not try to avoid hurting feelings by beating around the bush or leaving out important points. Oftentimes, in an effort to save someone else from feeling guilt or embarrassment, we can end up creating confusion or setting unclear boundaries. It is possible to be direct while remaining empathetic and kind.
- **Avoid assumptions.** Separate the impact from intent. Someone's actions or behaviors may have had a clear negative impact on you or others, but that does not mean you know for certain what their intentions were. Give them the benefit of the doubt and be open to the possibility that they did not mean to cause harm.
- **Collaborate.** Work together to come up with an action plan and clearly outlined solutions to the problem at hand. Acknowledge the fact that both/all parties may have played a role in creating the issue, and that everyone must work together to solve it. Agree to check in on the topic again to ensure it is being resolved.
- **Express gratitude.** End the conversation by stating that you are grateful to have engaged in a productive conversation. Thank others for their willingness to take part and appreciate their input.
- **Know when to end a conversation.** Sometimes you may not leave a conversation feeling that you're on the same page. There will be scenarios in which you have to agree to disagree, because continuing the conversation will only cause harm to the relationship you are ultimately trying to improve.

Although it can be challenging, having courageous conversations is a crucial part of maintaining a safe and welcoming work environment. By following the steps above, you can have conversations that lead to positive change and strengthened relationships. Remember, the goal is not only to address the immediate issue but also to foster a culture of open, respectful communication that supports long-term success and safety in the workplace.



Speak with courage. Resolve with respect.

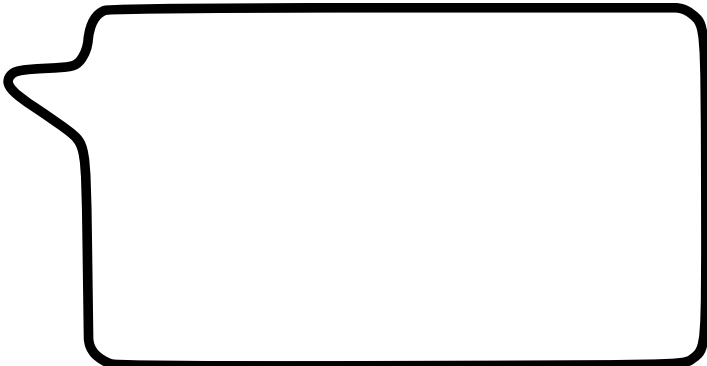
Having difficult talks is never easy, but you can make things go smoother with the right tools. Check out our Toolkit below for examples of questions and phrases you can use to improve your next conversation.

Conversation Toolkit

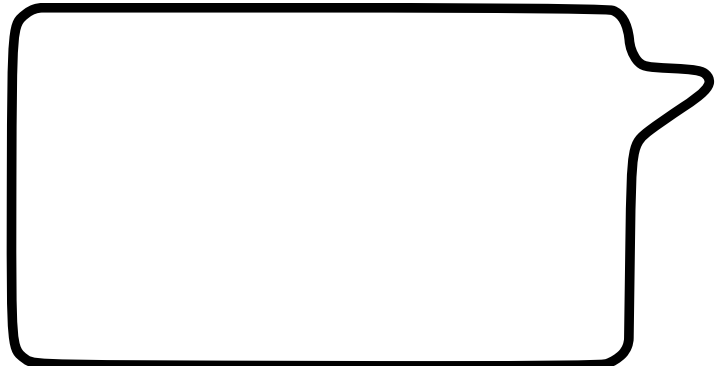
- I've noticed [specific behavior/issue] and I'm concerned about its impact on our work. Can we discuss this?
- What do you think can be done to improve the situation, and is there anything I can do to support you?
- I would like to discuss [specific behavior/issue] that's been on my mind. Can we find a time to talk?
- I want to ensure we are on the same page and find a way forward that works for both of us.
- I hope we can continue to have open and honest conversations like this one.
- Thank you for sharing your thoughts with me. I appreciate your openness.

Staff Conversation & Notes:

Share an example of a difficult conversation you've had at work and what could have made it more productive/positive:



List two ways in which you can improve your own communication skills (for example, interrupting less, being more direct, or using a nicer tone):



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