



## Courageous Conversations - Part 1

based on 1 rating

[Lance Witt](#) (website: [Replenish Ministries](#))

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**Scripture:** none

[\(Suggest Scripture\)](#)

**Tags:** [Communication](#) [Confrontation](#) [Courage](#) [Pastoral Leadership](#)

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It seems like one of the places you find the most dysfunction in churches is around the topic of “hard conversations”. If you have the heart of a shepherd, you don’t enjoy difficult conversations. In fact, we dread them. They keep us up at night. They put knots in our stomach. As church leaders we like blessing people and encouraging them. We like to cast vision and lead. We are diplomatic and kind. We excel at extending God’s grace and forgiveness. We love to help people discover their God-given potential.

But when it comes to correction, rebuke, or confrontation, to say it’s uncomfortable is a massive understatement. The truth is, we avoid it at all costs. That has certainly been true of me.

I remember a time when there were significant difficulties with a member of my team. Priding myself on my diplomatic skills, I thought I could correct these issues without making this a big ordeal. I was wrong. It did become a big ordeal and my unwillingness to confront the issues directly ended up causing a lot of confusion and hurt. I’m not sure the situation could have been salvaged, but my team member deserved better from me.

Here is the irony, in trying to not upset people and make waves, just the opposite happens. In our attempt to avoid conflict we actually end up creating conflict. There is no easy button when it comes to handling these situations. Having courageous conversations is messy but not having them ends up making things even more messy.

Susan Scott talks about one of the errors we often make when attempting to have a courageous conversation. She says we use “too many pillows”. We soften the message to lessen the impact and avoid hurting people’s feelings.

“The trouble is, sometimes we put so many pillows around a message that the message gets lost altogether.”

This isn't a free pass to be harsh or unkind, but it is a call to be clear. Clarity is always a friend to a leader.

Let me share with you the 7 top reasons for learning the skill of hard conversations. Then, in the next blog I am going to share a technique I use that has helped me be both kind and clear.

**1. It is right and best for the other person.**

If the people you lead are failing in some way, they deserve to know. Until you let them know the score, they are likely operating on the assumption that they are winning.

**2. You will deal with problems before they are a full-blown crisis.**

So often in the church, problems are ignored until we just can't take it anymore or it has become a crisis. I wonder how many times the situation and the person could have been salvaged if we had just had the honest conversation earlier.

**3. It is a release valve for your own frustrations.**

If we refuse to address problems, it will end up affecting our attitude toward the person.

**4. People will respect you.**

People who have mastered the skill of modeling truth and grace will always be respected. This makes me think of Proverbs 28:23 (NLT) where Solomon says *In the end, people appreciate honest criticism far more than flattery.*

**5. You will create a culture of honesty.**

I will never forget what Admiral Abrashov said in his book *It's Your Ship*. “Your people always know the score even when you don't want them to.” When you have the courage to have hard conversations, your people get the message that “we deal with problems, we don't ignore them.”

**6. You will model how to deal with problems like adults.**

If anyplace ought to model doing this well, it is the church. Hard conversations will always surface our insecurities, so how we do this matters greatly. But we should model for our congregation that mature Christ followers can actually sit down and work through a conflict. And, we can handle problems with both truth and grace.

**7. It is imperative for having a healthy culture.**

Patrick Lencioni says teams who don't engage conflict “resort to veiled discussions and guarded comments.”

So, decide today. Decide to learn the skill of hard conversations. Stop making excuses. Own it. Put a stake in the ground. The strength of your leadership and the health of your team depends on it.



## Courageous Conversations - Part 2

based on 6 ratings

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**Scripture:** [James 1:5](#)

[\(Suggest Scripture\)](#)

**Tags:** [Church Conflict](#) [Conflict](#) [Courageous](#) [Speaking Truth](#)

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Courageous conversations is a battle of prepositions. Half of the battle is making a commitment to talk “to” not talk “about” people.

Here is my track record. Hundreds of times I have talked myself out of having a courageous conversation. EVERY time I have finally had the courageous conversation, I walked away wishing I had done it sooner.

Actually, before you ever have a courageous conversation with someone on your team, you have to have a courageous conversation with yourself. You must stare in the face...

- what is at stake in the individual’s life
- what is at stake in the life of the organization
- that how you handle these situations either reinforces or undermines a culture of honesty
- that how the person responds or what the person thinks of you is secondary to doing what is right

And, you must learn to trust your leadership instincts. In fact, I would go a step further and say “don’t just trust your instincts, obey them.”

A good axiom to remember is “the truth is never the problem.” The reality (truth) of a situation is not the problem. The problem could be misunderstanding, incompetence, pride, sin, or a thousand other issues. But in order to address the real problem, we must be willing to get the truth out on the table.

When you tend to be a conflict avoider, you will look for a “work around” to a courageous conversation. One of the most common “work arounds” I see involves the use of e-mail. E-mail is a

terrible way to deal with a problem. I have developed a personal rule to NEVER deliver bad news over e-mail. When it comes to courageous conversations, having it “in person” is a must. Choose face to face instead of screen to screen.

So, let’s assume you have had a courageous conversation with yourself and now you know that you must have a courageous conversation with another person. How do you do it? What do you say? How do you get into the conversation?

The first step is to pray James 1:5. *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

I can almost hear you saying “Yeah, I know you have to say that, but let’s get to the ‘practical’ steps.” But I want to challenge you to not gloss over James 1:5. It is a direct promise from God. He is offering his help. Most often, when it comes to resolving problems, I have relied on my own experience and gifts. But these moments of conflict present an opportunity for me to declare my need for God and my dependence upon Him. So, don’t be guilty of walking into a courageous conversation without asking God for wisdom and help.

Also, I have found that when I pray ahead of the meeting, I am reminded of how God sees this person. They are created in the image of God. They matter to God. And they deserve to be treated with care and respect.

The second step is to look for an appropriate time and place. Obviously, you want to select a place that affords privacy and where you can be uninterrupted. You will also want to give this meeting plenty of time. It has been my experience that these meetings almost always run longer than I thought they would. So, give the meeting plenty of time and don’t schedule a courageous conversation where it bumps up to another meeting that you can’t miss or reschedule.

The third step is to have thought through how you will get into the topic. I believe the first 60 seconds is the most important minute of any courageous conversation. The first minute will set both the direction and tone of the meeting. In my opinion, it is best to come straight at the issue. Don’t spend a lot of time on small talk or tap dancing around the issue. Get to the point of the conversation quickly. People can smell a hidden agenda a mile away.

If you are new to courageous conversations or you find them especially challenging, let me encourage you to write out ahead of time your opening sentence or two. You want to be clear, compassionate, and concise. Especially in a hard conversation, your words are pregnant with meaning. The choice of your words matter. For a leader (especially in a courageous conversation), there is no insignificant comment.

So, in the first minute I want to let them know that this is not a normal meeting. This is not to discuss a project or an event or an upcoming worship service. The purpose of this meeting is to address a problem.

Once I have shared the nature and purpose of our meeting, I then want to share from my perspective how I see this problem.

I will typically use one or two phrases to lead into this. I don’t want the tone to feel accusatory or condemning but I do want to clearly share my perspective. So, I have found it helpful to lead with “here are my observations about this issue” or “I have noticed”. Both of these statements simply communicate my perspective. It is a nuance difference, but there is an important distinction between sharing my perspective and making statements as though they are absolute fact. The first approach invites conversation. The second approach shuts people down and gives people the sense that the verdict is already in.

Obviously, these kinds of conversations are not linear, but it is helpful for me to have a general framework that will help guide the discussion. I think of this framework as a kind of track for our conversation to run on.

After I have shared my perspective, I will often say “So, here’s my concern”. In the first part of the discussion I have simply been sharing my observations or what I have experienced with this person. Now I am beginning to share how this issue might be impacting...

- their performance and productivity
- their relationship with team members
- those we are called to serve
- them personally

I am now connecting the dots between their actions and behaviors and the negative outcomes that have resulted.

The ultimate goal of every courageous conversation is to model both truth and grace. We must be honest and address the issue clearly. But we must also do it in a way that is grace-filled and redemptive.

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Lance is the founder of Replenish ministries and is often referred to as a Pastor’s Pastor. He is also the author of the book Replenish, which is dedicated to helping leaders live and lead from a healthy soul. Before launching Replenish, Lance served 20 years as a senior pastor and 6 years as an Executive/Teaching pastor at Saddleback Church.