

USE THIS BEFORE A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION — CHAPTER 6

The C.S.B.I.A. Framework

Clarify · Situation · Behaviour · Impact · Agree. Most leaders walk into difficult conversations carrying a conclusion. Great leaders walk in carrying a question.

PERSON / CONVERSATION

DATE

⚠ **The reason leaders skip Clarify:** they've already decided what happened. Resist that. Name the topic, then ask for their perspective before sharing yours. You might discover context you didn't have — or confirm what you suspected, but now they know they were heard first.

C**CLARIFY — NAME THE TOPIC. THEN ASK.**

"I want to talk about [the situation]. Before I share what I've observed, I'd like to understand it from your perspective — can you walk me through what's been happening?"

S**SITUATION — WHAT WAS HAPPENING?**

State what you observed — informed by what they've just told you. An observation, not a verdict.

B**BEHAVIOUR — WHAT SPECIFICALLY HAPPENED?**

The observable action or inaction — not their character. Observations can be discussed. Judgments create defensiveness.

I**IMPACT — WHY DOES IT MATTER?**

On the customer, team, business, or the individual. People change behaviour when they understand real consequences.

A**AGREE — WHAT HAPPENS NEXT, AND BY WHEN?**

Specific actions. Clear timelines. Shared ownership. Good intentions without timelines are just wishes.

REMEMBER

The conversation you're avoiding is usually the one you need to have. Walk in trying to solve a problem, not prove a point.

THE C.S.B.I.A. FRAMEWORK — AT A GLANCE

Most leaders walk into difficult conversations carrying a conclusion.

Great leaders walk in carrying a question.

C**CLARIFY****Name the topic. Then ask.**

"Before I share what I've observed, I'd like to understand it from your perspective first."

Most leaders skip this step because they've already decided what happened. Don't.

S**SITUATION****What was happening?**

State what you observed — informed by what they've just told you.

An observation, not a verdict.

B**BEHAVIOUR****What specifically happened?**

The observable, specific action or inaction — not the person's character.

Observations can be discussed. Judgments create defensiveness.

I**IMPACT****Why does it matter?**

Impact on the customer, team, business, or the individual.

People change behaviour when they understand real consequences — not just that their manager is frustrated.

A**AGREE****What happens next — and by when?**

Specific actions. Clear timelines. Shared ownership.

Good intentions without timelines are just wishes.

THE GOAL

Not to win an argument. To create shared understanding and a clear next step.

THE MINDSET

Walk in trying to solve a problem, not prove a point.

THE REMINDER

The conversation you're avoiding is usually the one you need to have.