

Sample Difficult Conversation with Employee

In a Nutshell: The Difficult Conversation

If you've already reviewed our tips for preparing for difficult conversations with employees, following up and handling less than favorable outcomes, you may be wondering what the conversation itself might sound like. Here's a difficult conversation about employee body odor to help you get a feel for what to expect.

Lead into the conversation with an empathetic statement.

"Hi John, I have something I'd like to address with you because I care about you and our working relationship. This may be a difficult conversation for us to have, but I want you to know I care and want things to improve for us."

Start the factual statement with what seems to be happening.

"I've noticed you have an unusual odor about you."

Describe the impact to the team/organization.

"We work in small quarters here, and I never want someone to not want to work with you due to a body odor issue. Overall, I don't want this to negatively impact you or your working relationships."

Ask the employee for their perception of the situation.

This allows the employee to disclose additional information/feelings surrounding the situation that may be pertinent to the goals for improvement.

If an employee indicates a medical condition that may be the root of the issue, it is pertinent to discuss the possibility of following the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) process and exploring reasonable accommodations for the employee at work.

State the goals for improvement.

"Here are some good hygiene related tips; take a shower every morning, wash your clothes every day, don't wear anything twice."

Say, "Thank you."

Thank the employee for their time and willingness to have this difficult conversation with you. Ask them if they have any questions/concerns/needs in relation to solving the issue and next steps.