SPEAK FRANKLY
A STRAIGHTFORWARD APPROACH TO TACKLE TOUGH ISSUES

LET’S FACE IT. TENSION AND CONFLICT AT WORK ARE BOUND TO HAPPEN SOMETIMES.

THE CHALLENGE ▶ Conflict is rarely pleasant, but is normal and inevitable. Getting angry and attacking the other person only makes things worse. Hoping the problem goes away rarely works either.

THE REWARD ▶ Conflict can bring an opportunity to learn, improve communications, strengthen relationships, generate new ideas and even spur innovation.

We need to speak frankly and have challenging conversations to address conflict. Here is a straightforward approach for tackling tough issues with courage and collaboration.

STEP 1: INITIATE A MEETING
Approach the other person to request a private meeting. State the purpose of the conversation. Be professional and approachable.

“Do you have some time this afternoon to talk about what happened this morning?” or “Are you free tomorrow morning? I’d like to talk about the text message / email you sent yesterday.”

STEP 2: OPEN THE DISCUSSION
Re-state the purpose of the conversation. Get to the heart of the matter in one or two sentences.

“I want to talk to you about…”

Describe the behavior or situation impacting you. Provide specific and objective examples of what happened. Check yourself. Are you making assumptions? Are you judging the other person?

“During my presentation, you said my data was not accurate…” or “During the meeting this morning, you said aloud in front of the whole group that my ideas were off-base.”

STEP 3: CLARIFY WHAT IS AT STAKE
Clarify what is important. Explain how the situation is impacting people, resources or projects.

“The tension between us is uncomfortable. I am concerned our mixed messages may be confusing the team… or derailing our efforts… or halting our productivity.”

Use “I” language. Let the other person know what you are thinking and feeling so he can better understand your perspective.

“I was caught off guard by your comments yesterday; it seems as though my ideas were not considered. I want to be sure that all our ideas are considered before we come to a conclusion.”

Be accountable for your part in the situation.

“I realize I haven’t kept you fully informed. I apologize for that.” or “I am open to hearing what I can do better from my side of things…”

MORE ▶
STEP 4: EXCHANGE PERSPECTIVES

Invite the person to respond. Inquire about the other person’s point of view. Listen actively to gain a better understanding of the other person.

“What was going on for you when…?” or “How is the situation affecting you?”

What actions are you hoping will stop or change? What would you like to see improved?

“Rather than discussing these things in front of the whole group, I prefer we talk one-on-one.”

What is the future impact if the issue is not resolved?

“If we can’t figure out a way to work on this project more cooperatively, I am concerned we may lose focus or productivity and the project itself may suffer.”

Review what happened and ask for feedback. You may gain a better understanding of things.

“While you were on vacation last week, someone asked about the status of our joint project. I provided an update, which missed a few items I didn’t know about. What can we do differently?”

STEP 5: FIND SOLUTIONS

Try to solve the problem together. Determine what is needed to resolve things, based on your new shared understanding.

“What would help us avoid doing this again?” or “Given what we know now, what can we do to improve this situation?”

STEP 6: CHECK IN

Follow up with each other to ensure things are still working. Adjust when necessary.

When you use these “speak frankly” strategies, you show your willingness to work to jointly solve confusion and misunderstanding. Speaking frankly can lead to open communication, improved relationships, new ideas and a better work climate. Be prepared and accountable. Your good effort can really make a difference.

If you’re uncomfortable speaking frankly, lean on your resources. Get support if:

• You feel too upset or angry to be objective and you need to vent first.
• You have tried to talk before, but the situation hasn’t improved.
• The situation leaves you feeling intimidated, overwhelmed or underprepared.
• You feel unsafe.

FOR SUPPORT

• Call your manager or Human Resources representative.
• Call the BCM Ombuds Office at 713.798.5039 for a confidential conversation with an ombuds.