

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

# Hard Conversations

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Are you dreading a work discussion? In this episode of HBR's advice podcast, *Dear HBR*, cohosts Alison Beard and Dan McGinn answer your questions with the help of [Leslie John](#), a professor at Harvard Business School. They talk through what to do when you need to set your boss straight, meet with a direct report who wanted your new job, or hash things out with a negative team member.

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## From Alison and Dan's reading list for this episode:

**HBR:** [Taking the Stress Out of Stressful Conversations](#) by Holly Weeks — “Stressful conversations are unavoidable in life, and in business they can run the gamut from firing a subordinate to, curiously enough, receiving praise. But whatever the context, stressful conversations differ from other conversations because of the emotional loads they carry.”

**HBR:** [When to Skip a Difficult Conversation](#) by Deborah Grayson Riegel — “In a 2013 Globis survey of more than 200 professionals on the topic of difficult conversations, 97% of respondents said they were concerned about the associated levels of stress for the other person, 94% were worried about damaging the other person's self-esteem, and 92% were fearful of causing upset.”

**HBR:** [How to Have Difficult Conversations When You Don't Like Conflict](#) by Joel Garfinkle — “Lean into the conversation with an open attitude and a genuine desire to learn. Start from a place of curiosity and respect — for both yourself and the other person. Genuine respect and vulnerability typically produce more of the same: mutual respect and shared vulnerability. Even when the subject matter is difficult, conversations can remain mutually supportive.”

**HBR:** [Choose the Right Words in an Argument](#) by Amy Gallo — “Instead of thinking about what you want to say, consider what



you want to learn. This will help you get to the root cause of the conflict and set you up to resolve it. You can ask questions like, 'Why did that upset you?' or 'How are you seeing this situation?' Use phrases that make you appear more receptive to a genuine dialogue."

## **TRANSCRIPT**

*A transcript will be posted here by January 15.*

**This article is about DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS**