

The Conflict Script: Keeping Emotion *Out Of Difficult Conversations*



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WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Emotion can fuel our leadership, but it's a **double-edged sword**



As women, our emotion is too often dismissed as unprofessional. Even when we're **totally in control**, any difficult conversation could become **emotional and unproductive**. So how do you broach a tough topic without **getting anyone upset?**



1. The Conflict Script

Great communicators prepare, and hard conversations demand strong preparation. Before any conflict, prepare this script:

- 1) **When** ____ (issue)____,
- 2) **I** ____ (reaction)____ **because** ____ (frustration)____.
- 3) **If you** ____ (make change)____,
- 4) **I'll** ____ (compromise)____.

TIP: If emotion enters the conflict, it can distract from the original issue. Be careful to stay on topic.



2. When you don't respond to emails / plans change last-minute / you come in late...

- There's no way around this: this is the hard part.
- **State the problem** clearly and succinctly.
- They may try to rebut but it's best to power through.



3. I fall behind / can't make adjustments / find it disrespectful because I have to wait on answers / my time is budgeted elsewhere / I have a full calendar.

- Tell them why – they don't have the perspective you do.
- Give as much information as you possibly can. Default to **transparency**.

TIP: Avoid “I feel” – male listeners may stereotype you as overemotional.



4. **If you** keep me in the loop / commit to strategy / arrive on time...

- Here you propose a reasonable fix.
- It should be attainable, but it doesn't have to be perfect.
- They may bring up their obstacles, but you're not finished.



5. I'll help you move the process along / see the plan through / appreciate it.

- If they were struggling, **there was a reason.**
- The compromise should aim to fix that.
- The person may not have realized they were inconveniencing you.

TIP: Always **assume positive intent!**
No one wants to give you a headache.



6. You were **polite** and **clear** – they shouldn't be upset.

- If they push back, asking probing questions:
“Which part won't work?”
“Why is it so time-consuming? How so?”
- Your goal is to understand them better, not win the argument.
- This is an opportunity for growth.

TIP: Say “I see it differently” instead of “I disagree,” which often triggers defensiveness and hostility.



7. What if they do get emotional?

- Use boundary statements:
“This is important. I want to talk about it. Not this way.”
- Do not react emotionally; respond thoughtfully.
- If they can't calm, **reschedule:**
*“Let's take some time to gather our thoughts.
Let's meet again at 3:00PM”*



Blank Conflict Script

1) **When** _____,

2) **I** _____ **because** _____.

3) **If you** _____,

4) **I'll** _____.



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