**A simple framework for having a Difficult Conversation**

**Step One - Say what you want to say clearly, cleanly, succinctly and calmly.**

* Get right to the point. Name the issue.
* Say what you have to say in around 60 seconds (this is your ‘opening statement’)
* Immediately extend an invitation to your colleague to join the conversation.

Preparation for the “Opening Statement” is essential. Do your homework. Write it down and practise saying it. Out loud. If you just rehearse it in your head, when the curtain goes up, you may be appalled at the words that actually come out of your mouth.

The key components of an Opening Statement are:

* Name the issue.
* Briefly describe the issue, illustrating it with an example.
* Describe your emotions about the issue \*
* Say why the issue is important
* Indicate your wish to resolve the issue
* Invite your colleague to respond

\*Contrary to popular opinion, it has quite an impact to say things like “I am angry”, “I am disappointed”, “I feel frustrated and confused that x happened”. It is however important to impart such messages in a **quiet, unemotional** manner.

**Step Two - Inquire into your colleague’s view on the matter and actively explore their thinking.**

If your colleague says something with which you violently disagree, resist the temptation to build a stronger case. Simply listen so that your own learning can be provoked. Ask questions. Dig for full understanding. Use paraphrasing. In other words, do not be satisfied with what is on the surface. Examples are:

* “Please say more about this. I see it differently, so I’d like to understand your thinking and how you came to this conclusion”.
* May I tell you what I am hearing? I want to make sure I’ve understood you”.

**Step Three - Either move your position (if you have been influenced by what you have heard) or stick by, and reiterate, your original position.**

If the latter, seek agreement on how to avoid a recurrence of the situation.

Acknowledgement: ‘Fierce Conversations’ Susan Scott 2004