

THE *Zaft* WORKSHOPS

DIFFICULT CONVERSATION CURVEBALLS: WHAT WOULD YOU DO?



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RESTORE & STRENGTHEN WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS



IMAGINE A WORKPLACE WHERE
YOU'RE **CONGRATULATED** FOR EVERY
DIFFICULT CONVERSATION YOU HAVE!

**MANY DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS
STRUGGLE BECAUSE LEADERS SOLVE THE
WRONG PROBLEM.**

**The best leaders are not better
conversationalists. They are better
diagnosticians.**

This allows focus on the right problem.

THE *Zaft* GROUP

MENTAL HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE



THE *Zalt* GROUP

BETTER CONVERSATIONS CURVEBALLS

MENTAL HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE



A previously strong-performing team member has become increasingly withdrawn, missing deadlines and reacting defensively in check-ins. Colleagues have raised concerns about well-being as well as carrying the workload for this colleague. You suspect burnout and mental health strain, but the employee has not disclosed anything and deflects when asked how they're going.

How do you balance support and accountability? Be compassionate without avoiding performance? What's your best advice?

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Why do leaders struggle? What are the most common mistakes?

Why is this presenting in contemporary Australian workplaces?

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CURVE BALL: COMPASSION & ACCOUNTABILITY

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

1. Have the conversation.
2. Hold the dual agenda - support & accountability.
3. Don't diagnose. Do share observations and impact.
4. Clarity on what psychological safety means in this conversation. Psychological safety is not the absence of discomfort.
5. Clarity of leader's role - not a psychologist or confessional. Know your limits.
6. Don't lose accountability. Be explicit about expectations.
7. Problem-solve together for appropriate adjustments. Focus on what is controllable. Be creative. Resist rescuing


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WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The employee leaves understanding:

- What has been observed.
- Why the conversation occurred.
- What support is available.
- What is expected of them going forward.
- What the next steps and touch points are.

WHAT GREAT LOOKS LIKE



1. Leader's conversation mindset:
 - a. The conversation is about maintaining connection during difficulty (not just performance and well-being)
 - b. They protect all stakeholders. Balancing 3 outcomes simultaneously:
 - They protect the person - feel respected and supported
 - They protect the team (from consequences)
 - They protect the work and standards - expectations remain clear and credible
2. Supporting people without becoming responsible for carrying them. Empathy & boundaries

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a light green blazer, sits at a conference table with her hands resting on her face, looking thoughtful or concerned. She is surrounded by other business professionals in a meeting room. The scene is framed by red L-shaped corner brackets in the top-left and bottom-right corners.

**INFLUENTIAL TEAM MEMBER
QUIETLY UNDERMINING**

BETTER CONVERSATIONS CURVEBALLS

INFLUENTIAL TEAM MEMBER QUIETLY UNDERMINING



Sam is a respected, strong-performing and influential team member. In meetings, she frequently sighs, rolls her eyes, questions decisions and adopts a sceptical tone, although she remains polite and professional. It's just the way she is. Over time, colleagues have become quieter, confidence in decisions appears lower, and negativity is spreading through the team. No single incident seems serious enough to address, but you, the leader, is increasingly concerned about Sam's impact on culture and psychological safety.

Would you address the behaviour in the moment, later in private or not at all? Why? What conversation/s would you have and what actions would you take?

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WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

1. Addresses it.
2. Leadership challenge is about culture (rather than conduct or incident management).
3. Separate behaviour and content.
4. Articulate attitudinal and behavioural expectations.
5. Consider it a performance issue (as necessary).
6. Options for others in the team.

CURVE BALL: COMPASSION & ACCOUNTABILITY

WHAT GREAT LOOKS LIKE

1. Leader's conversation mindset: The conversation is about influence, not behaviour. Explores the responsibility that comes with influence.
2. The leader examines their own contribution to the dynamic.
3. Genuine support for leaders when behaviour is addressed. How reliable is the system?

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ZERO TRUST



ZERO TRUST



Two employees who work closely together, have reached a point where they openly state they no longer trust one another and cannot work together. There are no allegations of misconduct, bullying or policy breaches, however both describe the relationship as "broken beyond repair". HR and leadership are being asked to intervene, but neither party appears interested in rebuilding the relationship.

What are the issues?

What is your advice?

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What is your advice?

CURVE BALL: TRUST

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

1. Diagnose trust specifically - a repair strategy may become evident
2. Assert employer expectations and clarity of purpose
3. See trust more as an element rather than an absolute that must be restored completely.

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EXPLAINING TRUST

TRUST IS NOT JUST A FEELING. IDENTIFY WHICH ASPECT OF TRUST HAS BROKEN DOWN AND THE IMPACT ON THE WORK.

Dimension of Trust		In Practice
Competence	Are you capable of doing what I need you to do	Can you do what is required?
Reliability	Say = Do	Do I believe you do what you say you will do?
Sincerity	Can I believe what you say.	Do I believe you are honest and authentic?
Care	You care about me, my interests and what matters to me	Do I believe you have my interests in mind?

EXPLAINING TRUST

REPAIRING TRUST

Which trust assessment has been damaged?

Because the repair strategy depends on the answer

- **Low Care** → demonstrate understanding and consideration.
- **Low Sincerity** → increase transparency and honesty.
- **Low Reliability** → make fewer commitments and keep them.
- **Low Competence** → build capability or seek support.

When a conversation becomes difficult, stop focusing on the issue and start asking yourself which element of trust is in doubt.

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CURVE BALL:TRUST

WHAT GREAT LOOKS LIKE

1. Leader's conversation mindset. Trust and working relationships are not the same thing and help the individuals understand that too.
2. Create a pathway where trust can be rebuilt through small commitments and demonstrated behaviours rather than discussion alone
3. Problem solve where trust breakdown has impacted others or affected team identity and culture.

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HOW ARE YOU GOING TO BUILD YOUR
CONVERSATION CABABILITY?

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SCAN MY BUSINESS CARD – LET'S CONNECT!



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