

Critical Conversation Starter

Step 1/ **What** is the main topic you want to talk about?

Say it succinctly, clearly and use specific examples rather than broad sweeping statements, where possible. People want to deal with facts and need to know exactly what you are referring to so you are on the same page right from the start.

Step 2/ Share how you are **personally feeling** about this situation.

This is usually the key point for people who are good at instigating the conversation, but perhaps not so good at having it tactfully. This adds a softening, humanistic aspect to the conversation that can serve well to deepen the channels of communication.

Its important to be as open as is appropriate about what you are feeling. When you extend a piece of yourself to someone it says that you are being real, that this is important, and that you are not playing games. So even if it feels uncomfortable or like you are putting yourself on the line, persevere because this is the piece that encourages an authentic exchange and is really the heart and soul of a critical conversation.

Step 3/ Why is it **important** to have this discussion?

E.g. what impacts or consequences are you facing? What is the risk of not addressing this?

Step 4/ What **part have you played** in this so far?

E.g. how have you contributed to this issue? What have you done already to try to resolve this issue? There is no need to accept all the blame, but make a sincere effort to acknowledge the part you have played on some level.

Step 5/ What do you **want from them**? What are you **inviting** them to do?

E.g. Share their thoughts, explore alternatives, comment or critique?

EXAMPLE of a scripted Critical Conversation Starter

(1) Hi Jo, I'd like to talk with you about the account presentation you did on Thursday. I noticed that client wasn't happy with your proposal and that instead of trying to understand where they were coming from, you got into a heated argument with them instead.

(2) This behaviour concerns me deeply.

(3) We have an impeccable reputation for our client focus and we can't afford to be engaging in this kind of behaviour. It is not the way we do business.

(4) I should have said something to you immediately after the meeting and I am sorry that I left it this long.

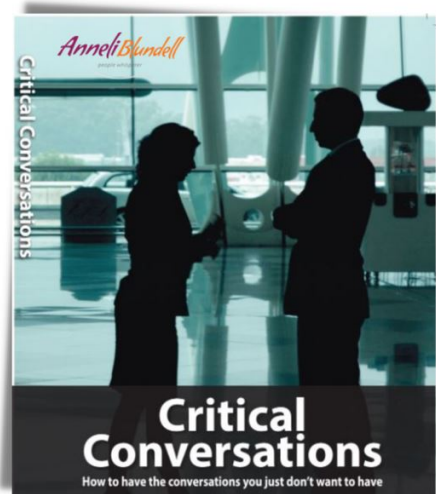
(5) Please help me understand what was going on.

The key thing to remember in this opening is that you are **extending an invitation for them to join you in this conversation**. The way you do this, with your body language, your words and your intentions, will play a crucial role in how they respond and ultimately accept your invitation into the conversation.

*This is the part where you need to be the change you want to see in the world and have the strength to be vulnerable. Be open so they can see you are being real, be transparent so they can see you are truly present, be kind so they can see there is nothing to defend. But most importantly **be you**.*

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