

THE BUZZ

Difficult conversations with employees are hard for any leader to navigate. But if you find ambiguity, emotional intensity, or rapidly shifting interpersonal dynamics especially draining, these moments can feel like a minefield.

The goal isn't to coach yourself into becoming a different kind of leader. It's to build structures that make difficult conversations more predictable, less overwhelming, and easier to walk into with confidence.

Solid preparation for the conversation can make all the difference.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

SEPARATE FACTS FROM EMOTIONS

Most employee issues arrive wrapped in emotion. Before any conversation, ground yourself in **four questions**:

-  What are the observable behaviors?
-  What policy or expectation applies?
-  What impact is the behavior having?
-  What change do I need to see?

This keeps the conversation grounded in performance, not personality. Instead of “Chris has a bad attitude,” try: “Chris has interrupted coworkers in three team meetings this month and twice refused assigned work without discussing concerns first.” That level of specificity is what HR departments need — and it's what makes corrective action possible if it comes to that.

SAMPLE SCRIPTS

Role-play these until the language feels natural. Practicing builds comfort & confidence.

“I want to talk about something I've observed. Over the past month, you've arrived late six times. That affects coverage for the rest of the team. Help me understand what's going on.”

“I appreciate your expertise. At the same time, when disagreements happen in front of staff, it undermines our ability to lead consistently.”

MAKE IT HAPPEN - A SIX STEP FRAMEWORK

One reason difficult conversations feel overwhelming is that they seem unpredictable. Use the same sequence every time, so you can focus on listening instead of figuring out what comes next.

1: DESCRIBE  Share what you've observed, using specific facts.	2: IMPACT  Explain the effect the behavior is having.	3: LISTEN  Pause to hear their perspective. Don't fill silence.
4: CLARIFY  Restate the expectations clearly.	5: AGREE  Land on next steps together.	6: DOCUMENT  Write down what was said and agreed to. Share a copy or send an email after.

KNOW WHICH CONVERSATION YOU ARE HAVING

COACHING	CORRECTIVE ACTION	HR INVOLVEMENT*
• First occurrence • Skill gaps • Minor performance concern	• Repeated behavior • Clear expectation not met • Required training	• Harassment • Discrimination • Threats or Safety issues <i>*Potential discipline</i>

ESSENTIAL PREP WORK FOR LEADERS

Five minutes of preparation often prevents a conversation from going off track. For some people - actually writing (or typing) out these answers helps with setting the stage properly.

-  What outcome do I want?
-  What evidence do I have?
-  What am I assuming?
-  What might they say?
-  How will I respond?

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Tolerate the silence.** Ask one clear question, stop talking, and wait. Employees often fill the silence with useful information.
- **Separate empathy from agreement.** "I can understand why you feel that way, and my expectation is still..." Understanding someone's perspective doesn't require changing it.
- **Resist the urge to over-explain.** "I've made the decision." "The expectation remains..." "We're moving forward with this approach." Over-explaining invites unnecessary debate.
- **Debrief afterward.** What went well? What surprised you? What did you notice about your own reactions? What will you do differently next time? (Write this down with your prep work notes.)



Think of yourself less as a problem-solver and more as a steady, fair systems manager. Consistency matters more than the perfect conversation. Employees may not like every decision, but they tend to respect leaders who are predictable, clear, and even-handed.

WHAT IF YOU ARE STILL WORRIED OR ANXIOUS? ANSWER THIS:

"When you're anticipating a difficult conversation, what are you most worried will happen?"

Your answer often points to exactly where to focus your preparation:

- "I'll forget what I wanted to say" → build a written outline or notes.
- "They'll get angry" → practice de-escalation language.
- "I'll lose my train of thought" → lean harder on the six-step framework.
- "I'll come across as harsh" → refine language that is direct and respectful.

Successful mission-driven managers aren't the ones who never have difficult conversations – they're the ones who approach them consistently, document them well, and keep the focus on a healthy, accountable workplace.

WELCOME TO THE HIVE

Free tools for leaders who want to facilitate with confidence.



Right Tool. Right Time. Right Results.

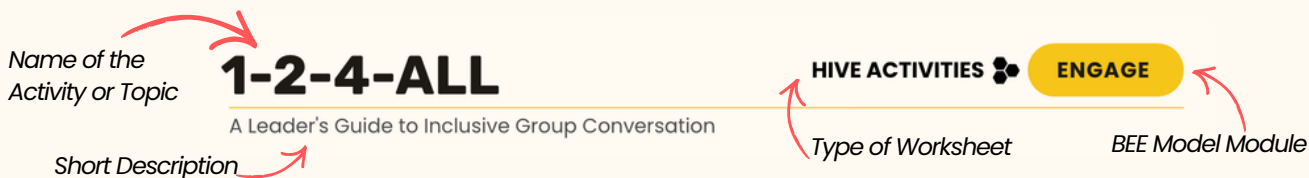
Most people don't hate activities. They hate activities that go nowhere or seem forced.

You've been in that room — the one where someone announces a quick icebreaker and half the group quietly checks out. It's not the activity's fault. It's that nobody stopped to ask the most important question first: *what are we actually trying to accomplish here?*

Every worksheet in this library is built around that question. You'll find a clear purpose, honest guidance on when to use the tool, and when to skip it entirely. Because the right activity, used at the wrong moment, with no clear intention, isn't team building. It's just noise.

HOW TO USE THESE WORKSHEETS

Each worksheet is tagged two ways — by category and by BEE Model module — so you always know what kind of tool you're using and where it fits in your leadership work.



TYPE OF WORKSHEET



HIVE ACTIVITIES

Facilitation guides for structured group activities — Liberating Structures, icebreakers, and team exercises.

HIVE PRACTICES

Instructional how-to guides for everyday leadership moments — agendas & meetings, 1:1s, feedback, and more.

HIVE WISDOM

Leadership lessons and reflection tools — concepts, mindset shifts, and skills for leaders to keep growing.

BEE MODEL MODULE

BUILD

Foundational skills and self-awareness — developing yourself and the people around you from the ground up.

ENGAGE

Connection, culture, and communication — how you show up with and for the people you lead.

EXECUTE

Getting things done with intention — planning, accountability, and running effective operations.

These worksheets are a taste of what's possible when facilitation is done with intention. If you're ready to build a leadership culture where every voice is heard and every meeting has a purpose — let's talk.



BUILD | ENGAGE | EXECUTE

Deb Mohlenhoff
Founder & Leadership Strategist

website | www.beestrategiesconsulting.com
email | deb@beestrategiesconsulting.com