the **101** suite

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS:

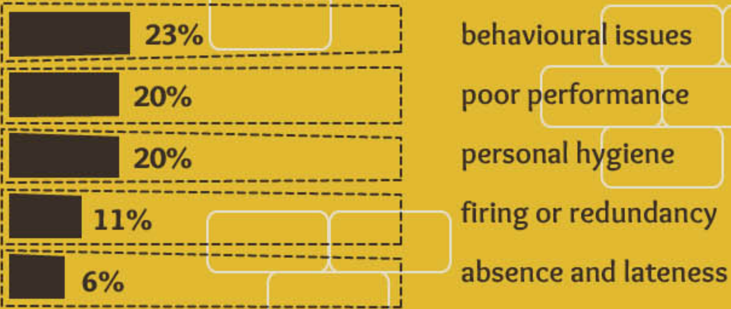
COMMON MISTAKES

Ten tips to help you pluck up the courage to have those difficult conversations

50% of managers cite difficult conversations as the biggest challenge they face in their role.[1]

Cost of not having that uncomfortable conversation: **35%** of employees leave their jobs voluntarily because of internal politics and conflict.[2]

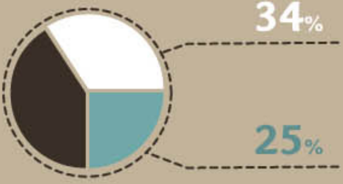
The most difficult conversation subjects for managers[3]



MISTAKE 1

PROCRASTINATION

Don't assume the need to have a difficult conversation will just go away – it won't.
Just do it!



34% have put off holding a difficult conversation for at least a month. **25%** have put it off for more than a year.[4]

MISTAKE 2

BEING UNPREPARED

Jumping straight in without thinking can cause serious problems, which can be just as bad as delaying the meeting.

To prepare well:

- Gather as much factual information and evidence as you can.
- Identify the key points you want to make.
- Reflect on what you know about the other person – e.g. is their behaviour out of character?
- Be clear on your desired outcome – what do you want to happen?

MISTAKE 3

WRONG TIME, WRONG PLACE

- Choose a suitable time and place by booking a quiet, private room where you won't be disturbed.
- Give the other person plenty of notice.
- Be sure to allow enough time to explore both sides of the story.

MISTAKE 4

NOT BEING CLEAR ABOUT THE ISSUE

Focus on two things:

1. Describe:
What exactly is the behaviour that is causing the problem?

2. Explain:
What impact is the behaviour having on you, the team or the organisation?

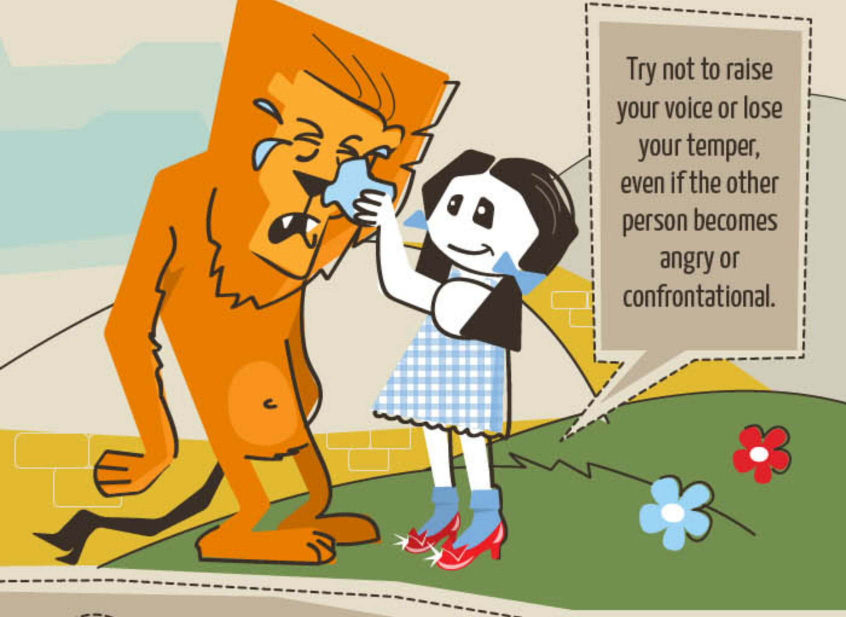
MISTAKE 5

JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

Don't fall into the trap of making assumptions. There may be mitigating circumstances (e.g. illness or stress) which explain the negative behaviour both inside and outside the workplace.

MISTAKE 6

GETTING EMOTIONAL



Try not to raise your voice or lose your temper, even if the other person becomes angry or confrontational.

- Stay focused on the issue, not the person.
- Remain calm and objective.
- Concentrate on facts and observable behaviours, not hearsay or personal opinion.

MISTAKE 7

NOT ASKING ENOUGH QUESTIONS

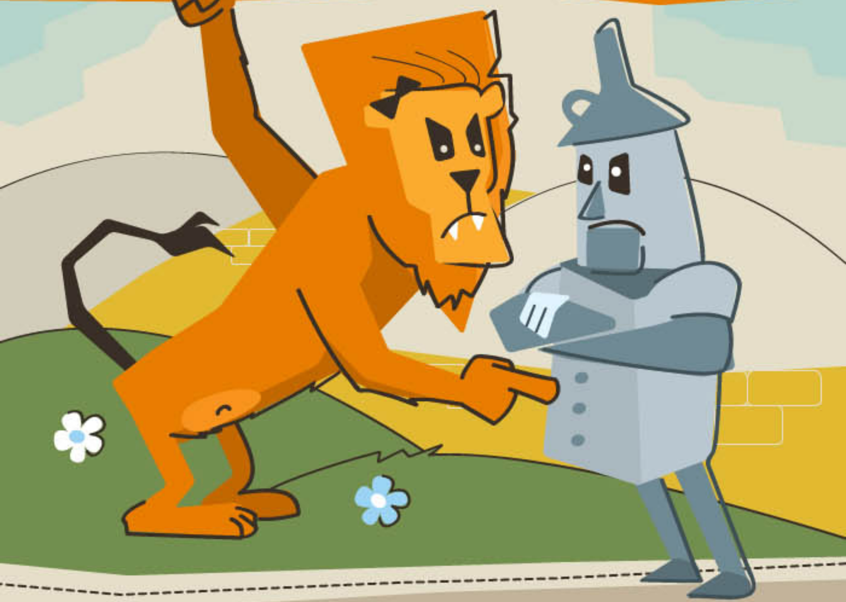
Use open-ended, probing questions to get to the bottom of things.

For example:

- Can you tell me more about …?
- How did you feel…?
- What happened when…?
- What was that like?

MISTAKE 8

I'M RIGHT AND YOU'RE WRONG



Avoid using accusatory language or laying blame

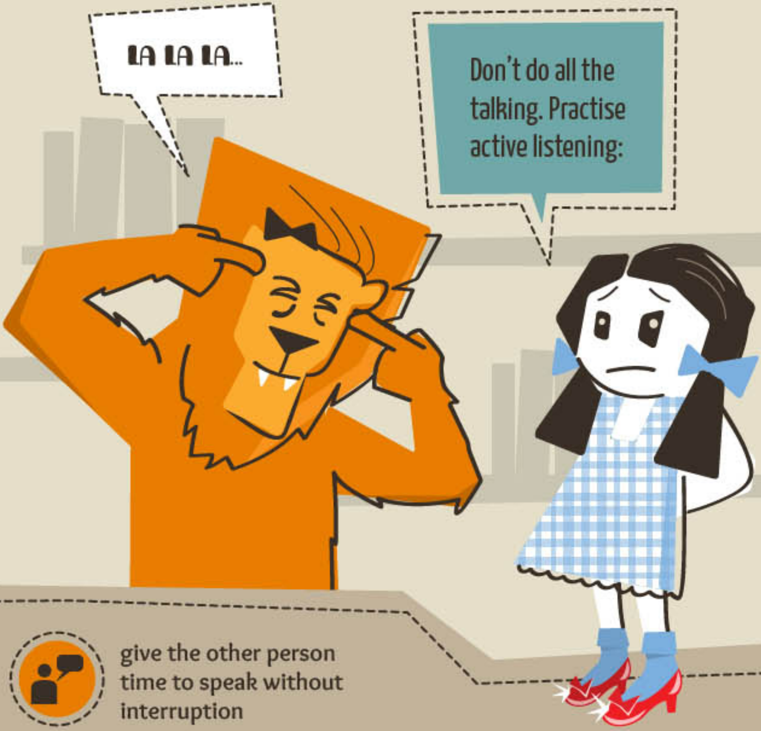
✗ e.g. ‘You always…’, ‘You never…’ etc.

Keep it neutral and use the passive voice

✓ e.g. ‘It was disappointing when...’ rather than ‘I was disappointed…’

MISTAKE 9

NOT LISTENING



Don't do all the talking. Practise active listening:

- give the other person time to speak without interruption
- acknowledge what you've heard
- pay attention to body language and non-verbal signals

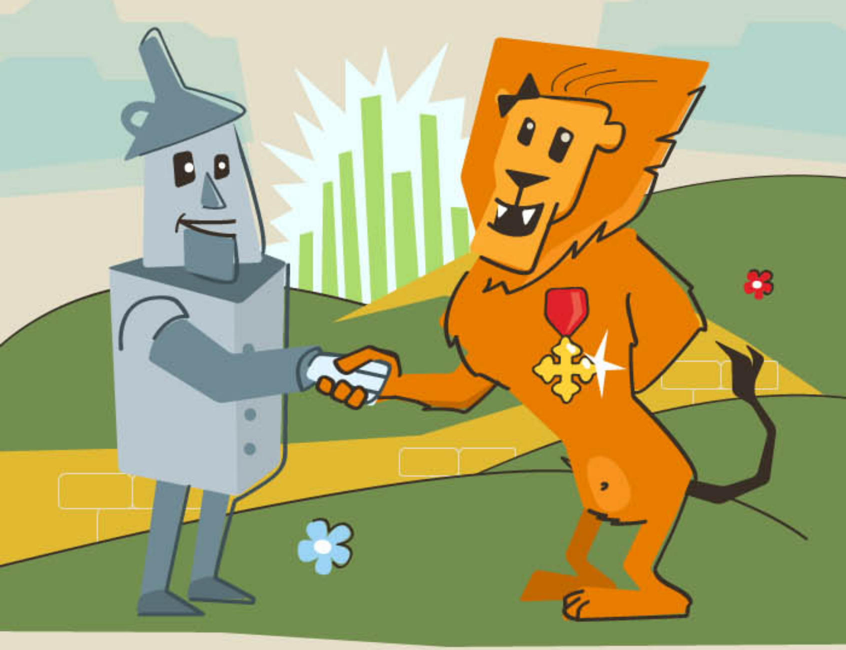
MISTAKE 10

NOT WORKING TOGETHER ON A JOINT SOLUTION

❓ Ask the other person for suggestions on addressing the situation.

☰ Agree next steps, who will be responsible for doing what and how to monitor progress.

FINALLY, DON'T FORGET TO THANK THEM FOR THEIR TIME!



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4. VitalSmarts, 'Employees Fear Crucial Conversations' (2009). Available at: http://cms.vitalsmarts.com/d/d/workspace/spacesstore/29512982-0d6e-4ccb-9bb4-2389f3bf358a/employees (accessed 30 September 2014).

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