

TIPS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY DISCUSSIONS

When behaviors emerge that can undermine teamwork, productivity, or collaboration, leaders or their designees may consider having accountability discussions. These conversations, when handled delicately, can address concerns and recalibrate engagement toward shared goals. This can be a step toward addressing interpersonal dynamics and destructive behaviors that erode productivity or detract from the focus of important conversations. Accountability discussions can signal a leader's commitment to constructive paths forward. Below are some steps to assist in preparing for and holding these types of conversations. Since every situation is different, consider reaching out to the Ombuds Office to discuss the specifics related to your concerns, as an Ombuds can help you with a tailored approach.

STEP ONE: Preparation and Early Considerations

Roles & Relationship

- Consider your relationship with and role within the group as well as with the individuals.
- If you observe the behaviors, but do not have authority in the group, do you have buy-in from those who do have authority to engage in these conversations?
- Specifically, if you are not the direct supervisor of the person, does the direct supervisor support you in sharing this feedback with the individual(s)?
- If not you, who is the most effective person to hold these conversations?
- How might you talk to the person with authority about approaching the concerns?

Gather Information

- Prepare examples of the disruptive behaviors you observed.
Examples: Bullying, over reacting, downplaying, micromanaging, placating, insincerity, uninformed decision-making, indecisiveness, etc.
- Are there any behaviors that would potentially violate policies?
- Consult resources if needed:
Technical Resources: Human Resources, Academic Personnel, Harassment and Discrimination Assistance and Prevention Program (HDAPP), Office of Campus Counsel, Student Conduct and Integrity, or Compliance
Counseling Resources: Academic and Staff Assistance Program (ASAP) and Student Health and Counseling Services
Ombuds Office: Confidential (off-the-record), impartial, informal, and independent

Plan Logistics

- Will you hold the meeting by phone, zoom, or in person?
- When will you schedule the meeting?
- How will you invite the person to the meeting?
Example: I'd like to set up some time to talk to you about what I've observed in meetings.
- As an initial step, one-on-one meetings is generally more effective than addressing the group as a whole.
- Consider how you are going to message what you want to say including ways to objectively identify the behaviors and impact by preparing a script.

Desired Outcome of the Conversation

- Identify the desired outcome before starting the conversations.
- Think through how you want to communicate what changes you expect to see.

Potential Response

- Anticipate and prepare for possible responses (e.g., defensiveness, denial, blame, withdrawal, high emotions). These are normal reactions.
- Consider strategies to prepare yourself for discomfort that might arise so that you can stay on message.

STEP TWO: Opening the Conversation

Setting the Tone: Clear & Direct

- State why you are having the conversation and share the desired outcome.
Example: "Thank you for meeting with me. I'd like to have a candid conversation about some things I'm seeing that are causing concerns for me, and my hope is to work together to find solutions."
Example: "My goal is for this group to be able to problem-solve together."
Example: "I'd like you to start thinking about how you can flag these behaviors yourself and begin to make changes, since I'm starting to see the impacts on the group."

Acknowledge the Challenge or Discomfort

- Recognize the challenge or discomfort that the conversation might evoke for yourself or the other.
Example: "This isn't an easy conversation for us to have; however, we need change to move forward."

If Addressing Multiple Individuals

- Acknowledge that you plan to have additional individual conversations.
Example: "I'm having several individual conversations to share my observations about behaviors that I think are shifting the group's dynamic and creating barriers to collaboration."



STEP THREE: Communicate Issues and Concerns

State the Issue(s) Clearly

- Be specific – focus on observations and facts, rather than assumptions or intent.
- Use neutral, nonjudgmental language to describe the instances, and include time and place.
- Consider how these behaviors affect the group's dynamic or goal(s).
- Provide something concrete to think about and work on.

Example: "I've noticed a change in your demeanor whenever our colleague starts talking in meetings."

Example: "I've heard you make remarks at our colleague when they're presenting that take us off track."

Example: "On a couple of occasions now, I've heard you cut our colleague off mid-sentence."

Example: "I've observed you staying quiet in meetings unless your unit's needs are affected directly, but not when the collective needs of the whole are being discussed."

Identify the Impact(s)

- Share how these behaviors are negatively impacting the group's decision-making, discussions, productivity, etc.
- Highlight how this relates to the goals of the group.

Example: "This is getting us stuck and hindering our ability to move toward innovative solutions."

Example: "We're wasting valuable time in meetings because we don't have enough information."

Invite their Perspective

- Take the time to quietly listen to their response, answer questions, and then clarify your expectations.
- Check in with their understanding and clarify ambiguity.

Example: "What is your perspective on this?"

Example: "How is this landing for you?"

Example: "What questions do you have for me?"

STEP FOUR: Set and Confirm Expectation

Describe Expectations for Engagement

- Reiterate the message you are delivering and your observations.
- Describe expected behavior.

Example: "Next time you disagree with what your colleague says, please consider reflecting what you understand of the other person's point or perspective before responding with your own point or perspective."

- Outline changes and specific actions you expect.

Document

- During and after the meeting take notes and consider how to document what you shared, their reaction, and next steps.

Discuss Possible Consequences if Nothing Changes

- Communicate the stakes or consequences if changes are not made and expectations are not met within the communicated timeline.

Examples: Develop a negative reputation, lose influence or trust, a distorted sense of what's happening due to lack of information coming to you.

- If there is not change you may consider contacting Human Resources or Academic Affairs to discuss appropriate options.

Example: Change in job responsibilities or expectation of attendance at certain meetings.

STEP FIVE: Summarize and Close the Conversation

Summarize and Close the Conversation

- Ask again what questions they may have before closing.
- Reiterate your expectations.
- Focus on the future.
- *Example: "Over time, as you change the way you interact with your colleague, the group will benefit from both of your areas of expertise, and other group members may consult you more often."*

Next Steps

- Identify a timeline for implementation and mechanisms for checking back.

Offer Support

- Highlight resources as appropriate

Examples: Ombuds Office, ASAP, mentorship, additional follow up with you, etc.

STEP SIX: Follow Up

It is very likely that you will need a follow up conversation. In subsequent conversations, acknowledge efforts and what you notice as productive or constructive behaviors. Highlight how they've made a difference within the environment. If you see more examples of the behaviors that were problematic talk about those and consider possible next steps.

