

Conversation@Work

Discover 10 ways to revolutionize your legal organization, one conversation at a time.

BY JAMIE SHOWKEIR AND MAREN SHOWKEIR



Need to be right or do everything your way? Get over it.

Seven out of 10 people say that conversation is *essential* to getting things done at work. Yet, roughly half of today's career professionals – regardless of level or position – admit to finding it difficult to have open, honest conversations in their organizations. The result? Everyday conversations – the “invisible” driver of workplace culture and business success in law firms and similar organizations – are frequently manipulative and counterproductive.

Legal administrators should consider these ways to take the lead and create change their organizations, one authentic conversation at a time:

- 1. Have a point of view.** Develop an informed, independent viewpoint about the topic at hand. Have a strong voice, but be open to others' perspectives, too.
- 2. Focus on choice.** Need to be right or do everything your way? Get over it. Leadership – formal or informal – is no longer defined as “having the right answers,” but as an ability to engage others in considering all the choices and finding the best solution. This is a primary strength for any successful legal administrator.
- 3. Raise difficult issues.** It's not easy to bring up a hard subject. Still, be the one who acknowledges the “elephant in the room” and concentrates on resolution.
- 4. Extend goodwill.** Approach others as allies, not adversaries. Choose to convey goodwill – despite any existing stress or strain – and manage your emotions.
- 5. Take the other side.** Go ahead: Argue the other person's point of view. You'll help people feel heard and understood, and get to the heart of collaboration.
- 6. Own it.** Resist the urge to point fingers when things go wrong. Identify your own contribution to the problem and make it public.
- 7. Deny denial.** Denying or downplaying difficulties is dishonest and demeaning. Address the truth of a situation – the cold, hard facts – and invite others to join you in moving forward.
- 8. Confront cynicism.** Beware the cynics, victims, and bystanders. Sure, they're everywhere in legal organizations – including attorneys, management, and support staff – but if you're clear on where *you* stand, you needn't pour your energies into winning them over. Just invite them to make their own choices instead.
- 9. Deal with resistance.** Turning a blind eye to resistance won't make it disappear. Learn to see it, call it out, and deal with it.
- 10. Process.** When a conversation takes a turn for the worse, stop and “process” what's happening. Admit you're at an impasse, make a good-faith statement, and ask for help. Finally, stop playing the parent and taking responsibility for others' feelings. Encourage everyone – co-workers, attorneys, and even the managing partners – to deal with their own emotions and let go of the childlike hopes that somebody else will make it “all better.” ✨

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