



COACHING CONVERSATIONS

(cheat sheet)

A MEMBERSHIP-BASED HR SUPPORT FORUM
PRESENTED BY BOLY:WELCH

[BOLYWELCH.COM/BSIDE](https://bolywelch.com/bside)

b:side

COACHING CONVERSATIONS: YOUR CHEAT SHEET

PREP

Meet soon.

Address it while it's still relevant and fair. You don't have to react instantly – but don't let patterns set in.

Choose the setting wisely.

Calm moment. Private space. The goal is safety and focus – not surprise or public correction.

Break tension first.

"I know it's never a good feeling to get a meeting invite like this."

"Thanks for being open to talking this through."

Ask for permission.

"Can I share an observation?"

"Are you open to some feedback?"

"Can we check in about something I noticed?"

Clarify intent.

"My goal is to support you in getting back on track – not to punish."

DURING

Lead with facts, not assumptions.

Anchor in 1-2 specific examples (who, what, when, impact).

Avoid trigger words like always or never.

Stay curious.

"What's going on for you?"

"How do you see it?"

"What might help this go differently?"

Acknowledge emotion without over-validating.

"I can hear that this feels frustrating."

Empathy lowers tension faster than logic.

End with clarity.

“Here’s what I’d like to see — how does that sound?”

“What’s our next step to make sure that happens?”

Shared expectations. Clear timeline.

AFTER

Send a short recap email the same day.

“Thanks for meeting. We agreed you’ll (specific change) by (date). I’ll check in next week.”

Follow through.

Check-ins builds consistency and trust.

Document lightly but consistently.

Brief notes in a reliable place. Patterns matter.

Acknowledge improvement.

“I’ve noticed the difference.”

“Thank you for adjusting.”

Coaching sticks when progress is recognized.

HANDLING REACTIONS

Defensive / Justifying

What’s happening: The person’s in protect mode, explaining, rationalizing, or debating small points.

Do: Shift from proving to partnering.

“I’m not questioning your intent. I’m describing the impact.”

“I hear your side; can I share what I’m seeing?”

“It sounds like you care. Let’s figure out how to move forward.”

Why it works: It honors their dignity while re-centering on shared goals, not blame.

Emotional / Overwhelmed

What’s happening: They tear up, shut down, or show visible stress.

Do: Slow the pace and normalize.

“I can tell this feels like a lot. Let’s take a breath.”

“This matters to you – I appreciate that. We can pause for a moment.”

“Would a quick break or some water help right now?”

Why it works: You acknowledge emotion without rescuing or retreating.

Angry / Combative

What’s happening: Volume, posture, or tone spike and control feels threatened. This is a fight response.

Do: De-escalate before proceeding.

“I can see you’re upset. Let’s pause and reset.”

“We both want to solve this. I’ll step out and check back shortly.”

“We can disagree, but we can’t be disrespectful. Let’s reset.”

Why it works: You model composure and hold boundaries, diffusing the heat without matching it.

Shut Down

What’s happening: They retreat into short replies, folded arms, and avoiding eye contact. It’s similar to being overwhelmed, but instead of fight or flight, it’s freeze.

Do: Reduce pressure. Invite perspective.

“I’m sensing this is hard to talk about. Is that right?”

“If you need time to think, that’s okay.”

“What feels stuck right now?”

Why it works: Re-engagement without pressure.

Defensive Humor / Deflection

What’s happening: Avoidance through lightness. They joke or change topics to dodge discomfort. This is fawning.

Do: Name it and gently refocus.

“I appreciate you keeping things light, but I want to make sure we address this directly.”

“Let’s stay with this for a minute.”

Why it works: Keeps tone kind while reclaiming seriousness.

>

Escalating / Unsafe

What’s happening: Behavior slips toward shouting, threats, or intimidation.

Do: End it professionally.

“This conversation isn’t productive right now. Let’s pause and reconvene with HR.”

“I’m ending this meeting until we can speak respectfully.”

Why it works: Safety and policy take precedence. Escalate immediately if risk remains.

REPEAT OFFENDERS

Call back clearly:

“Last time, we talked about X. What’s changed?”

Be explicit about expectations and timeline:

“I need to see fewer errors. Please double-check your work and send me a draft by Friday so we can review before it goes to the client.”

Document consistently:

If progress stalls, this becomes the foundation for a formal improvement plan.

Stay steady:

“I want to give you a fair chance to improve, but we can’t keep having the same conversation.”