



# A Fresh Start Guide: Leading Difficult Conversations







# Intro & contents

## Overcoming difficult conversations during a time of stress is a process that can be learned.

Being able to plan and prepare accordingly, will help alleviate some of the stress your co-workers, employees and family could be experiencing.

With some of the information you need to get started, we will walk you through a process to stay on-task, aware and conflict free - allowing you to remain as productive as possible and focus on building positive experiences during an otherwise difficult time.

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Adversity can fuel growth; however, this is only true when people work together, communicate, and are willing to grow.

### Overview

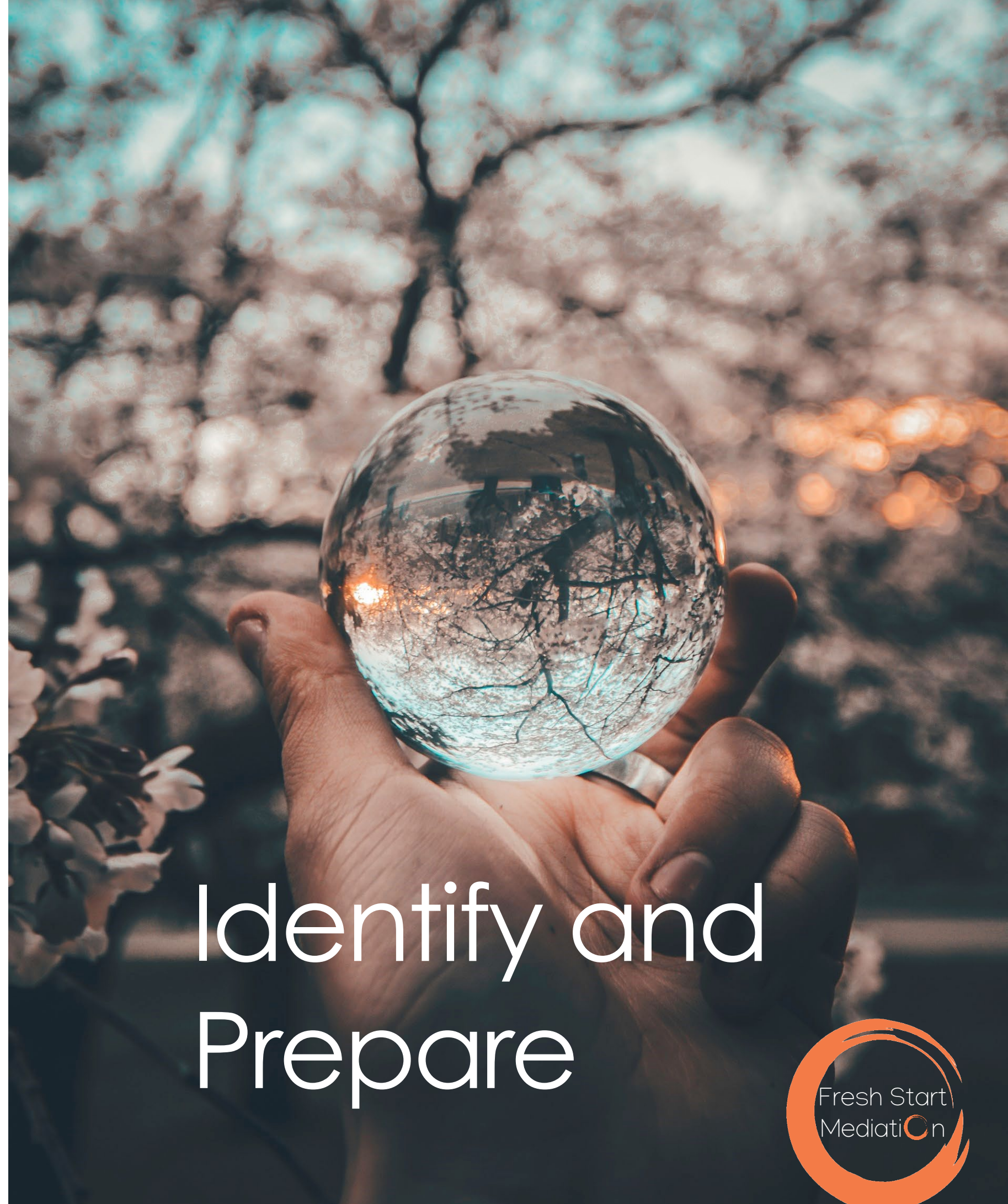
Sometimes a person, a situation, or an issue really drives you crazy. Often, the only way forward is to face the issue head on by having a conversation about it with those involved. While that may sound simple, the situations are often emotionally charged, and people tend to avoid these conversations at all costs. Generally, issues that require these conversations don't rise to the levels of a conflict and aren't considered performance issues, making it even harder for those involved to know how they should move forward.

## 2 Face your discomfort

Leading challenging conversations is about facing your discomfort and dedicating yourself to the conversation that needs to happen. You'll learn to identify issues that require a conversation and to self-check whether you are the correct person to have the conversation. Once you've identified a conversation, you'll follow a process that helps you create a plan, conduct the conversation, and follow up.

## 3 Be flexible in your goals

Let's be clear: having the conversation doesn't automatically lead to a resolution. Not having a resolution can be frustrating for many of us, so it's important that you think about success as either fully resolving the issue or helping you identify a path for productively approaching the problem using tools that you have. In the course project, you'll identify a potentially challenging conversation in your workplace, create a plan, practice having the conversation, and determine the appropriate next steps. We will guide you on how to do this, using proven strategies and a refined process.



# Identify and Prepare





# Impact of Our Lens

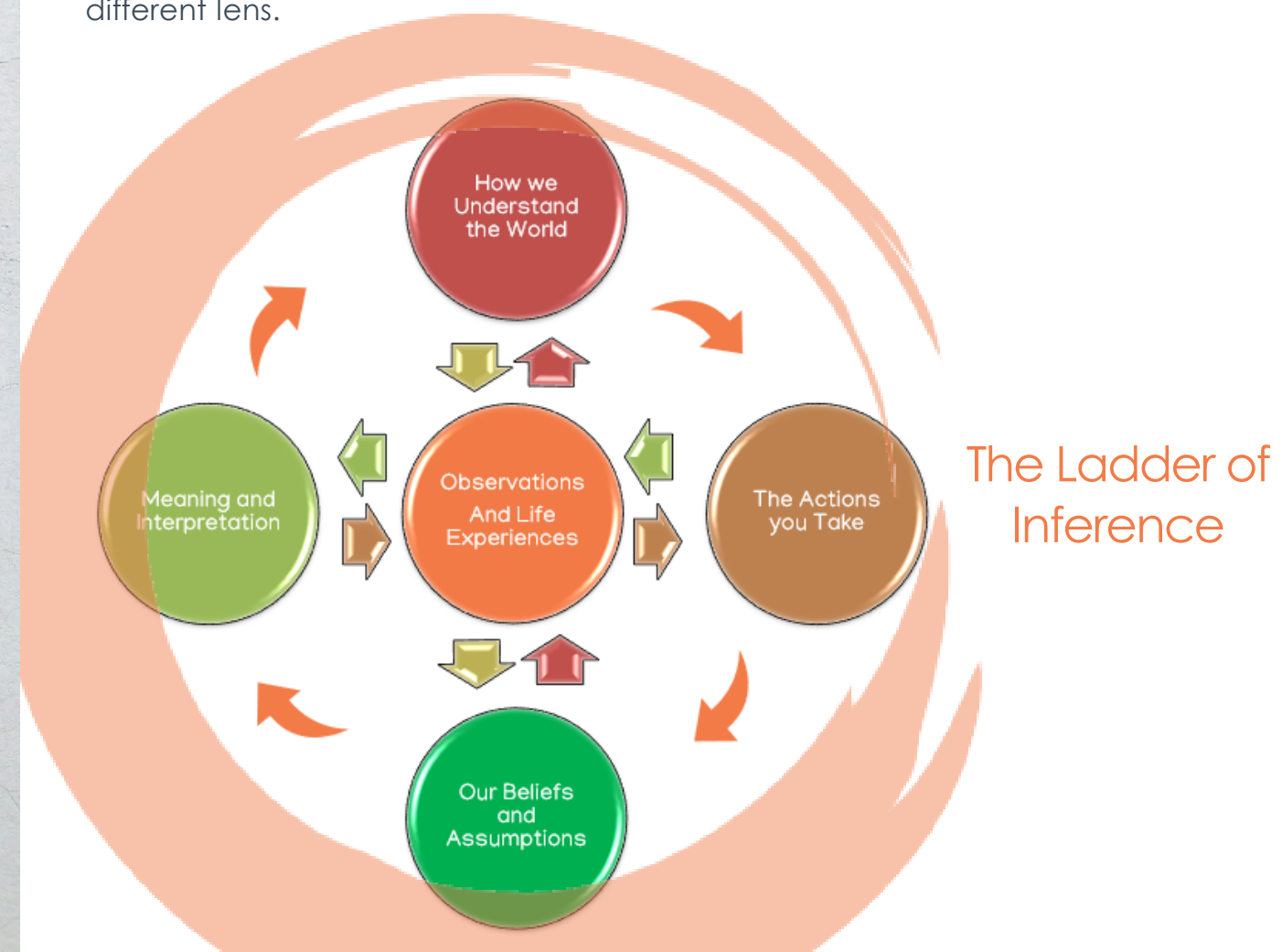
Preparing emotionally is an important part of this journey.

In any challenging conversation, both parties come to the table with different perspectives, different lenses that they're looking through. So when you come to a challenging conversation, it's good to understand the lens through which you look. An easy model to use for this is called the **ladder of inference**.

Basically, what the ladder of inference puts together is that there's a ton of observations that we make throughout our lives, and those observations lead to meaning making or how we understand the world and things that happen in it, which leads to beliefs and assumptions that we make which ultimately lead to actions that we take.

And that cycles throughout our entire life. And as that cycle goes, it's the cycle of interpretation. So it's how we interpret things in the world. Each time something is more solidified, we move away from all the things that we could observe, and we use just selected data that we know that justifies our reasoning.

It can be visible and invisible like our gender, our race. It can also be things like style. And so coming into a challenging conversation, the reason that that is important is because not only do we come in with our lens, but the person that we're going to approach comes in with their lens, completely different life experiences, completely different selected data, completely different meanings, interpretations of the world. And so we need to be prepared to understand our own lens to approach another person with a completely different lens.







## Defining your goals and interests

### **Planning and Consideration**

This will help you determine if the conversation is worth having. It can be hard to know when you should or should not have a challenging conversation. Ultimately, you are the only person who can answer the question of "is it worth moving forward?" There is no checklist or equation to determine this; in the end, it comes down to your feelings and to predictions about the situation and the impact and likelihood of meeting your goal.

### **Moving Forward**

Once you have decided to move forward, it's important to note that you can't just present your desired end goal (or initial position). Rather, you need to present specific situations, behaviors, and actions, and the impact or issues that you are seeing based on this. You need to use the conversation to guide the other person to the desired outcome.

### **Consider the situation**

We often think about things and think about conversations and we've thought them through fully in our minds and so we're already arrived at an end goal. That's often what we're ready to present to somebody who we're going to talk to. But that can come across as rather abrupt.

### **Walking backwards**

Before having an a challenging conversation, we need to work our way backwards from our end goal of hopefully getting someone to do something differently to what our interests are, why that's an issue, to what the behaviors and actions are associated with that to get to how we might open that conversation better.

### **Understanding the impact**

We must be able to describe exactly what behaviors, actions, or inactions can be associated with this so that we can provide the other person with specific examples. They may not understand why this is an issue. We also need to understand what the impact is on the individual, the work group, and the organization so that we can discuss how that impact might change if there's changed behaviors.



# Goals and Interests







# Structuring your conversation

## The 6-Steps to structuring a difficult conversation

- 1 Perspective and lens - Ours**
- 2 Perspective and lens - Theirs**
- 3 Why did we avoid this conversation in the past**
- 4 Preparing for adverse reactions**
- 5 Understanding the impact**
- 6 Talking about next steps**

We need to understand our own perspectives, our own lens, and how we make meaning out of things. We also need to understand the lens and perspective of the other person. Also why we may have avoided this conversation in the past. It's important to know that adverse reactions may come up during the conversation and we need to be prepared to continue moving the conversation forward and hopefully make it productive.

Use this conversation to guide the other person to the desired outcome. We often think about things and think about conversations and we've thought them through fully in our minds and so we're already arrived at an end goal. That's often what we're ready to present to somebody who we're going to talk to. But that can be rather abrupt. Before having the actual challenging conversation, we need to kind of work our way backwards from our end goal of hopefully getting someone to do something differently to what our interests are, why that's an issue, to what the behaviors and actions are associated with that to get to how we might open that conversation better.

We must then be able to describe exactly what behaviors, actions, or inactions can be associated with this so that we can provide the other person with specific examples. They may not understand why this is an issue. We also need to understand what the impact is on the individual, the work group, and the organization so that we can discuss how that impact might change if there's changed behaviors.





## Practice is essential in preparing yourself for the conversation, and acknowledging possible reactions and triggers

Going into a challenging conversation requires a little bit of practice, and with the preparation that you've done, you want to make sure that you think through many things that may happen during that conversation. Therefore, it is important to have a specific issue statement in mind, ways that you're going to frame specific examples and illustrations of the things that you want to bring up to the other person and be prepared for reactions that that person may have.

One really good way to do this is to work with a trusted confidant or mentor. Try out some different issue statements on them. Try out how you might frame the beginning of a conversation, sharing what your interests are, and sharing what your potential goals are. Then you can see how they would react if you brought that issue to them. This may bring questions forward that they may have about understanding what you're saying better, so that you can refine better your issue statement. This will determine how you encourage the person across the table from you to engage in a discussion as opposed to reacting in negative ways.



# Practising your plan







# Managing Reactions

What to do and not to do in certain situations is of utmost importance.

This guide focuses on assisting with and handling reactions. You may want to review it when preparing for or having challenging conversations. Below, you'll find a list of common reactions, along with dos and don'ts for your response.

Reactions	Do's	Don'ts
<u>Defensive</u>	Focus on examples that help reinforce the message you are trying to convey	Ignore what the person is trying to say or dismiss their viewpoint.
<u>Angry</u>	Acknowledge the person's anger. Clarify that the conversation is to gain mutual understanding and is not meant as a personal attack.	Become defensive and respond to the person with anger.
<u>Quiet</u>	Acknowledge the response and express your concern. Be sure to occasionally ask the person for his/her feelings to keep him/her engaged in the conversation.	Continue to talk as though nothing's wrong.
<u>Passing Blame</u>	Encourage the person to focus on aspects that they believe they can control. If possible, work with the person to identify ways to increase support and resources.	Ignore the person's concerns and enforce blame on him/her.
<u>Apathy</u>	Make the person aware of what you believe they are feeling and allow them time to respond. Be sure to reemphasize the purpose of the conversation and its impact on the person, team, and/or business.	Penalize or disregard the person for not showing the concern.







'Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional'  
- Max Lucado

A challenging conversation may not immediately resolve the issue that drove the need for the conversation. To resolve the issue, you may need to escalate the conversation, follow-up on the conversation, or provide some level of ongoing feedback.

### Defining Success

Preparation, navigation and follow-through are the mainstays of success in a difficult conversation. Your first challenging conversation may not immediately garner a successful resolution, but it may take you down a path that eventually leads to one.

### Moving on

Success is not instant, and a conversation is often only the first step. Follow-up's, and ensuring that not every interaction is about this topic are essential. Not expecting immediate results, being prepared to have additional conversations and being able to problem solve and continue the process are all essential.

### Know the limits

We all need to know when a conversation is not appropriate or needs to be stopped and referred to someone else, especially if you're feeling attacked and have an emotional response. You can always reschedule to a time after enough time to process has occurred.

### Is escalation required?

When it comes to escalating a conversation, there are no clear rules. The type of assistance or escalation needed is impacted by who is involved in the conversation, the nature of the issue, and the skills of the person who wants to engage in the conversation.

### Giving feedback

Providing feedback lets you share direct feedback that does not require a discussion or joint problem-solving. The goal is to achieve mutual respect by giving one-on-one feedback in a positive way and responding to the feedback with an open mind.

# Determining next steps







# Resources

## The Fresh Start six-step process to better conversations

### Fresh Start Services

#### Understanding your business

Listening to what you need is of utmost importance to us. By understanding what conflicts your business is facing we can cater a plan specifically for you that increases productivity and profitability.

#### Conflict Management Workshops

These workshops are designed for the entire team to listen, learn and grow. We can work with you to ensure the focus is on the strategies your team needs to succeed.

#### Workplace Mediations

We work with you and your staff with the utmost assurances to confidentiality, collaboration and a results-oriented approach.

#### Internal Review & Assessment

Compiling and assessing the results of our process is essential in understanding whether we are dealing with personalities or structure.

#### Implementation & Support

We will work with you side-by-side to ensure that the new strategies are put into effect and that your team not only accepts the shift but are leading the charge. We are there to support the transition every step of the way.

#### Training & Maintenance

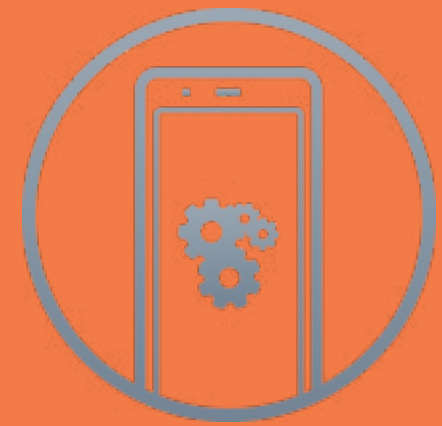
Our 3-day intensive Communication & Mediation Skills program can help your team move from conflict to dealing with it effectively and efficiently, maximizing your team's productivity.



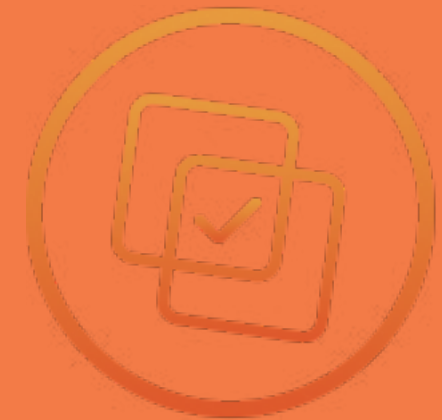




# Get in touch



Call Fresh Start  
403.863.9700



Visit us at:

[www.FreshStartMediation.ca](http://www.FreshStartMediation.ca)

Or eMail us directly at:

[don@freshstartmediation.ca](mailto:don@freshstartmediation.ca)



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[Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/freshstartmediation)