

Top 10 Tips for Hosting Candid Conversations

Designed to help CHROs and CDOs plan and host successful candid conversations, this guide offers a curated set of insight and tips from signatories who have hosted successful employee dialogues.

Below are the top ten suggestions to help promote and execute successful candid conversations within your organization.

PART 1. PREPARATION AND PLANNING:

- 1. Define the why and the experience:** Focus on creating an experience that is grounded in clear messaging, key takeaways, and to help drive behavior change.
 - **Peer Insight:** Use data to your advantage. Leverage employees surveys [or other employee communications tools] to guide the direction and focus of your event. In addition to measuring the pulse of your employees, be sure to review and take your organizational dimensions (race, gender, sexuality, religion, etc.) into consideration.
 - **Peer Insight:** Transparency is a key way to build trust. Discussing the potential of sharing the areas where your organization may be struggling and be sure to highlight and celebrate the areas you are proud of.
- 2. Obtain CEO buy-in:** Leadership involvement is essential when conducting these conversations. CEOs should be asked to open the event or participate, and their leadership team should also be present to actively listen to employee dialogue.
 - **Peer Insight:** Have your CEO send an all-employee message to promote the conversation. This can help reinforce D&I as a top priority of the organization, one that is fully supported by leadership.
- 3. Don't just create a safe space, create a brave space:** Consider hosting your conversations in a setting where your employees will feel empowered to participate and share.
 - **Peer Insight:** Ways to make employees feel more comfortable opening up include: balancing conversation time with and without senior leaders; offering small groups or multiple sessions; providing pre-reading materials; and not recording the sessions.

PART 2. ESTABLISHING YOUR AGENDA:

- 4. Develop a framework for the conversation:**
 - Consider starting with an icebreaker and inserting energizer moments throughout the discussion, which can help to ease any concerns or anxiety.
 - Determine the path for your conversation, i.e., open dialogue, question-driven or speaker / panel-led.

- Save time at the end of the session to express appreciation, encourage employees to continue having candid conversations, and get their feedback.
- 5. Identify stories instead of speakers:**
- Instead of focusing on name or title recognition, identify and elevate the personal stories that align to your why, which can help reinforce the value of the experience.
 - **Peer Insights:** Connect with your ERGs to help identify employees as well as external voices that can bring powerful experiences to the conversation.
 - **Peer Insights:** For employees that aren't used to speaking or sharing publicly, provide them with coaching to help them feel more at ease and be more engaging for the audience.
- Balance the diversity of your speakers.
 - Set parameters for each speaker, including speaking time and topic.
 - **Peer Insights:** Reminder your leadership team that this is a time to listen and not defend the topics employees may bring up.
- 6. Use technology to your advantage:** It can be challenging to hold these conversations in a remote or hybrid environment, but the use of interactive tools like polling questions or a virtual whiteboard can actually add to your experience, allow real-time feedback and help keep employees engaged.
- **Peer Insights:** If you include a chat feature, consider monitoring incoming comments and questions so they can be addressed either in the event or in the meeting follow-up.

PART 3. EXECUTING YOUR EVENT:

- 7. Find ways to engage all your attendees:** : Have a host establish ground rules to give permission to engage without fear of saying the wrong thing, build in ways to obtain input from all the voices in the room (or virtual conference) and keep the conversation on track.
- **Peer Insights:** Acknowledge that individuals may make mistakes when speaking; it's okay to ask questions for clarity, and forgive one another for any awkwardness.
- 8. Give them breathing room:** Allow space for moments of silence and plan time for employees to explore topics and issues during the conversation that may arise
- 9. Incorporate a “call to action”:** Share what the organization is planning to do moving forward in order to continue their efforts and commitment around D&I and commit to specific actions. Remind employees of the available internal and external resources, including self-led training.

PART 4. CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION:

- 10. Have a plan for the day after (....and the day after that):**
- Be prepared to action the feedback that you receive during -- and after -- the event, and invite your employees to participate in the action.
 - Give employees the tools and opportunities to continue sharing their stories and listening to each other.