Here’s how to approach those courageous conversations that need to take place . . .

Be Courageous: The essence of a courageous conversation is being direct and not fearful. Having a conversation in your head isn’t the same as having a real conversation. Being courageous means being connected to your feelings. Feelings of fear and anxiety create distance. When we are courageous we are fearless. When we act with courage, there is a certain grace that is brought to the conversation.

Be Present: In order to have a courageous conversation, we need to be completely in the moment. Often, in meetings and in relationships where we interact with others, we fail to be fully present. We go through the motions, but we’re not really there, or we’re mentally checked out. In order to have a successful courageous conversation, we need to stay present and engaged. When we are present, we can be more aware of our feelings and the feelings of others.

Be Reflective: In order for us to have a productive courageous conversation, we need to pause and reflect. Sometimes we react without thinking about how our response might impact the person(s) with whom we are interacting. Without pausing, without being reflective, we might choose an inappropriate response. We may say something we will regret.

Be Human: When participating in a courageous conversation, we need to be human. Most of us have a limited vocabulary when expressing our feelings, so we are more likely to offer an automatic or habitual response than to connect heart to heart. When we are human, we have a need to connect, to understand, to listen and to belong. When we are being human, we can bring meaning and energy to the heart of what is important.

Be Attentive: When involved in a courageous conversation, you must be a great listener. Pay close attention and demonstrate sincere interest in the other person’s thoughts and feelings. Be the person who is truly listening by tapping into hidden dialogue, and uncovering what is not being said. When you make more meaningful contact, you are more likely to get the other person’s full attention.

Be Honest: When engaging courageous conversation, we need to be honest and say what we truly feel, without putting off what’s really on our mind. Honesty is not easy. We often repress our true feelings, so much so that sometimes we don’t really know what we honestly want. We must be able to be honest and to say what we are truly feeling, seeing, and wanting. To be honest with yourself and others is to honor self. Being honest will set you free.

Be Curious: When involved in a courageous conversation, leave control at the door. Stay open and curious. The more you try to control, the more out of control you will feel. Try to understand what the other is saying. This does not mean you accept what they say as your truth: it simply means you are open to the possibilities. It is essential to remain open and curious, and not judgmental and controlling.
Be Accountable: When having a courageous conversation, being accountable means that you take responsibility for what you say and how you say it. Do not blame, claim or abuse anyone else. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Be the one who recognizes that being accountable will help shift the conversation from blame to gaining understanding.

Be Committed: By bringing commitment to your interactions, you learn the power of courageous conversation. Your commitment to be courageous fosters connection. Being committed to courageous conversation will make your communications clear and compelling. It will bring knowing to the unknown.

Lead From Within: When we are aware, we listen to each other, even if there are differences. If we stay focused, if we remain our caring human self, and if we pay attention to others’ feelings and ideas, we foster greater understanding.

If we are honest about our feelings, if we remain curious, and if we are committed to forging courageous conversations, we will help strengthen relationships, productivity, and communication. Here are some helpful tips when having your next courageous conversation.

Use empathy or acknowledgement
When appropriate, start out your response with empathy and/or acknowledgement of the other person and/or their viewpoint.
“I hear how important this is to you.” “This week has been difficult with so many patients coming in.” or, “I really appreciate your input.”

Instant replay or broken record
Stand your ground. Repeat your message over and over in a calm voice. For example, “The shift begins at 8:30, everyone needs to be here.” “The shift begins at 8:30, everyone needs to be here.” “The shift . . .”

Agree with the odds
Accepting the possibility that there might be some truth in what has been said without agreeing or disagreeing with the content. “You could be right. Maybe I could be more. . .”

Agree with the truth
Admitting to a mistake without losing your self-esteem. “You’re right. I really handled that poorly. What can I do to set things right?”
Ask for more information: (Assertive Inquiry)
Beware of nominalizations – labels that can mean different things to different people, i.e. “care” or “respect”. Also, the words “it”, “they” or absolutes like “all” or “nobody” are unspecified. It’s important to ask for more information to help you and the speaker gain greater clarity.
Example: “It’s all wrong, this whole thing. Nobody cares.”
Response: “Specifically, what is wrong?” Then, “How would you know somebody cares?”

Free Information
Keep your eyes and ears open. Receive facts from others and use that information wisely.
“I recall you said you need a new assistant. I may have the right person for you.”

Self-Disclosure
Openly giving information about your thought, feelings and reactions.
“I think this plan is a mistake, because we’re not focused on patient care the way I think we should be.”

Disagreeing Diplomatically: I respect your opinion, and here is mine
Paraphrasing and respecting the other person’s position followed by stating your position.
“Denise does have some strong qualifications for the job, I agree. I believe that Alicia has stronger qualifications and will connect better with the team overall.”

Using “I” statements:
Classic “I” Message, Alternative “I” Message, and Implied Mutual Benefit, as well as simple one-two sentence statements such as: “I’m finding this situation difficult to deal with right now. How about we take a 10 minute break, then come back?”

If you would like to consult with an EAP Coordinator about having “Courageous Conversations”, please visit:
insidekp.kp.org/eap