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A Difficult Conversation Is Anything You Find It Hard to Talk About

Sexuality, race, gender, politics, and religion come quickly to mind as difficult topics to discuss, and for many of us they are. But discrimination and awkwardness are not limited to topics on the cultural page. Anyone is vulnerable to conflict, and conflict is inevitable when the intent at stake is important and the outcome uncertain, when we care deeply about what is being discussed or about the people whose lives are affected. It is not the subject of the conversation that makes it difficult, but the intent and the outcome.

We all have conversations that are difficult, and we all have conversations that are easy. The difference is not in the subject, but in the intent and the outcome.

One of the senior engineers at your company, an old friend, has become a liability. Management has asked you to fire him.