AI + SKILLS

HARD CONVERSATIONS

Prepare for hard conversations with clarity, confidence, and empathy using AI as your coach, thought partner, and practice lab.

Learning Impact Statement: Participants will increase their ability to prepare for and navigate hard conversations by learning to enhance their communication skills, emotional intelligence, and readiness to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics in the workplace.

Skill Focus Areas:

Clarifying Purpose	Framing the Message
Anticipating Reactions	Practicing Out Loud
Debriefing & Adjusting	Common Conversations Themes

REFLECTION PROMPTS:

- How might my own assumptions be shaping how I see the problem?

- What went well in my last difficult conversation?

---

1. CLARIFYING PURPOSE

AI can help learners clarify the core issue and desired outcomes before initiating a conversation.

AI Prompt Example: Help me clarify the real issue I need to address with my colleague. [Give a summary of the situation]. What outcome do I want from this conversation? What's the simplest way to state the problem without blame?

Conversation Purpose and Root Issue to Address

Human Resources
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
Office of Organizational and Professional Development

2. FRAMING THE MESSAGE

AI can provide language options that will help balance empathy and accountability.

AI Prompt Example: Draft 3 different was I could open a conversation about missed deadlines that sound professional and supportive. Give me language that balances empathy with accountability. Rewrite this feedback so it's direct but not harsh [insert drafted feedback].

Conversation Opener 1	Conversation Opener 2	Conversation Opener 3

Feedback Adjustment

3. ANTICIPATING REACTIONS

AI can simulate possible responses to help learners prepare for emotional or defensive reactions.

AI Prompt Example: What pushback might I get if I tell someone their performance isn't meeting expectations? How could someone react emotionally, and how might I respond? Give me calm responses I can use if the person becomes defensive while receiving feedback.

Calm Responses to Pushback or Defensiveness

4. PRACTICING OUT LOUD

AI can role-play scenarios to help learners rehearse tone and delivery before a hard conversation.

AI Prompt Example: Role-play as my employee who is upset about being told their workload is too low. Let me practice my side of the conversation. Pretend you're resistant and defensive. I'll practice responding, then give me feedback. Act as a neutral observer—after I try this script, tell me if I sound clear, confusing, or too harsh. Help me stay professional and supportive.

Conversation Role-Play Feedback from AI

5. DEBRIEFING & ADJUSTING

AI can guide learners to refine their approach based on feedback and reflection.

AI Prompt Example: Evaluate my script for clarity, empathy, and accountability. What part of this might come across as too vague or too harsh? How can I close the conversation so expectations are clear?

Conversation Feedback & Adjustments	Conversation Closers

Human Resources
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

6. COMMON CONVERSTATION THEMES

AI can support practice across a range of common workplace scenarios.

AI Prompt Example for Workplace Conversations: Performance & Accountability (missed deadlines, quality concerns), Interpersonal Dynamics (conflict, tone, respect), Equity & Fairness (workload distribution, perceived favoritism), Career Conversations (growth gaps, selection decisions), Change Management (resistance to new processes).

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Remember, AI won't have the conversation for you—but it can help you prepare, practice, and polish so you enter hard conversations with clarity, confidence, and care.

Human Resources
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA