

NAVIGATING COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

“Sam calls in unable to come to work again. This is the 5th day this month. In addition, you know he missed TAFE last week and is struggling to keep up with his TAFE work. Previously, you’ve been able to speak with his parents, but now you sense your concerns may not be taken seriously. You’ve noticed Sam may not be fully committed to his role, and while you don’t want to take on a parental role, you believe you need to have an honest, open conversation with him about his attitude toward work.”

Tips for open and constructive conversations with your new employee:

1. Good feedback is timely, specific and relevant:

When you notice an issue with attendance or conduct, address it promptly and clearly. Providing timely feedback shows you value transparent communication and gives the employee a fair chance to improve.

2. Explore what’s happening for them:

Start the conversation by exploring what you’ve noticed and give them the chance to raise anything with you. For example, “Sam, it’s now been 5 days you’ve been off in the last month. This isn’t the way we agreed to work, is there anything going on for you that you want to discuss with me?” Listening first demonstrates genuine care and encourages honesty.

3. Set out your expectations:

After hearing them out, reinforce your expectations regarding their attendance, responsibilities, and overall engagement.

Make the implicit explicit by clearly stating any assumptions or norms that might otherwise go unstated (e.g., communicating daily progress on TAFE requirements or strict punctuality for morning shifts). Remind them of the contract they signed and why meeting these commitments is important for both the team and the business.

4. Reach agreement:

Once you’ve made your expectations clear, confirm whether they can commit to these standards. For example, “We’ve discussed this before, and I need to know if this is something you can fully commit to, as we need consistent effort for this to work.” You may also consider creating a short-written agreement that outlines the key responsibilities, next steps, and timelines for any changes. A written record helps prevent misunderstandings by clearly stating what both parties have agreed to.

5. Follow-up after the conversation:

Continue to model the standards you’ve set and reinforce positive changes. If their behaviour improves, acknowledge it specifically and promptly. If improvement doesn’t occur, refer to the original conversation and consider setting a clear timeline for change. For example, “If we don’t see improvement in the next two months, we may have to reassess whether this arrangement is working.”

By promptly addressing concerns, exploring the situation together, and clarifying expectations, you create a supportive environment that fosters mutual respect, personal growth, and accountability.