

Sample Script for a Difficult Conversation with a Fictitious Employee Named Billy Page

1. Performance Issues (Not Meeting Expectations)

Manager:

"Billy, thanks for taking the time to meet with me. I want to talk with you today about some concerns I've noticed regarding your recent performance. This isn't an easy conversation, but it's an important one because I want to help you succeed."

"Over the past few weeks, I've seen that a few of your tasks haven't been completed accurately or on time. For example, [insert specific example]. This is below the expectations for your role as [Job Title]. Can you tell me what's been going on from your perspective?"

(Listen. Let Billy speak. Don't interrupt.)

"Thanks for sharing that. I want you to know this isn't about punishment—it's about improvement. My goal is to see you succeed in your role, and that's going to take some changes starting now. Here's what needs to happen going forward..."

[Outline expectations and any support being offered.]

"I'm going to check in with you again on [date]. In the meantime, please come to me with any questions or concerns. We're in this together."

2. Behavioral Issues (Disrespect, Negativity, etc.)

Manager:

"Billy, I need to speak with you about a pattern I've observed that's been affecting the team and coming across to others."

"For instance, during team meetings, your tone has come off as dismissive, and some of your comments have been interpreted as negative or disrespectful. I want to give you the chance to explain, because I know that may not be your intention."

(Listen openly, stay neutral.)

"Regardless of intent, the impact is what matters. We need a respectful, cooperative environment, and this kind of behavior undercuts that. Going forward, I need to see a consistent improvement in how you interact with teammates and communicate your concerns."

"Are you clear on what I'm asking? Do you need anything from me to help make this shift?"

“We’ll touch base again in a week, but I’ll be watching how things go day to day.”

3. Chronic Tardiness or Absenteeism

Manager:

“Billy, I want to talk about your attendance. I’ve noticed a pattern of being late or missing work, and it’s starting to affect the team’s workflow.”

“Just this past month, you’ve been late [X times] and called out unexpectedly on [X dates]. I understand that things happen, but this is becoming a trend. What’s going on?”

(Give Billy space to respond.)

“Thanks for being honest. I appreciate that. But I need to be really clear—reliable attendance is part of the job. If this continues, it could lead to further disciplinary action.”

“From here forward, I expect you to arrive on time unless there’s a valid emergency—and in that case, you need to notify me ahead of time per our policy. Can I count on you for that?”

4. Violation of Company Policy or Boundaries

Manager:

“Billy, we need to talk about a serious issue. It’s about [briefly state the incident—e.g., ‘how you spoke to a client yesterday,’ or ‘what happened on the job site last Friday’].”

“This behavior goes against our company policy on [respect, conduct, ethics, etc.]. I need to understand your side before moving forward.”

(Allow Billy to explain.)

“Thanks for your explanation. I want you to understand that regardless of intention, this kind of behavior isn’t acceptable. It reflects on you and on the company.”

“As a result, I’m issuing a [verbal warning/written warning/etc.]. If this happens again, further consequences may follow, up to and including termination. Do you understand?”

“I’m here if you have any questions going forward, but I need to be clear that this behavior must stop immediately.”