# Handling Difficult Conversations

The following stages are intended to give supervisors a framework for discussing potential concerns regarding performance with the worker concerned.

1. **State the Problem**

Stick to the specific behaviour you want to change.

***“As I understand it you were going to have the new rota set up by 1st November. Was that your understanding?”***

Don’t make judgements. You are trying to solve a problem, not run a courtroom! Don’t proceed beyond this point without an agreement that you both have something to talk about.

If there is disagreement at this point:

* Provide more detail
* Ask the worker to describe the situation as s/he sees it

***The interview/conversation doesn’t have to stop if you don’t agree on the obvious problem. You have an issue. You have different perceptions of an important issue. You have to work on that.***

1. **Listen**

Don’t interrupt. Listening is not the same as endorsing a negative response. It is acceptance of their feelings and an exploration of their perceptions.

1. **Consider Extenuating Circumstances**

 **Examples**

* Has there been any change in working conditions since the standard was set?
* Has it become clear that more training is required?
* Is the person in the right post?
* Has their workload become disproportionate to their responsibility?
* Has there been, or is there now, any conflict within or between this team and the agency/other agencies which is interfering?
* Are there personal problems?

Decide where the source of the poor performance lies. It is possible that at this point some things need checking on before you know how to proceed.

1. **Look for the Desired Alternative**

**If it’s a *‘capability’* problem:**

* Change systems or targets
* Provide time, technical assistance, etc.
* Provide training or counselling
* Refer to East Riding of Yorkshire Council Disciplinary and Grievance policies and procedures, which can be viewed on the corporate intranet

 **If it’s a *‘disinclination’* problem:**

* Provide feedback on consequences
* Provide positive ‘payoffs’ for improved performance
* Remove positive’ payoffs’ for poor performance
1. **Design Action Plan**

Ensure that this is concrete, visible and within a set timescale with a review date. Clarify what each of you will do.

1. **Check the Worker’s Perception of the Agreement**

Don’t assume understanding unless you have thoroughly checked. Ask the worker to state what has been agreed.

1. **Follow Through: Improving Performance Takes Time**

The purpose of the process is to change the unwanted behaviour. Therefore, there needs to be a systematic follow-up, otherwise the process is devalued. If the targets have been met, celebrate the success. You have both succeeded. If the targets have not been achieved, discipline may be a necessary step.