

A Difficult Message

Supporting Workbook

"It might be a five year or even a ten-year issue, but what we can do is improve it."



Calling out the problem, not apportioning blame

"It's all brilliant what you've done but actually, you're carrying the highest deficit. It's a really a tough message for clinicians and operational leaders who actually work so, so hard just to keep the lights on."

Martin joined the NHS from a corporate role with Vodafone. He quickly assimilated what issues he was presented with and was very clear about what the problems were. He didn't shy away from calling out these problems, but his approach is not one of "I'm right and you're all wrong". Instead, he helps people understand what the issues are, and what can and can't be done. Martin acknowledges that messages can be tough, because clinicians and operational managers work extremely hard to deliver services for patients. That said, some things must change, and Martin takes care to focus people on what can be controlled, changed and influenced. He doesn't apportion blame but identifies what can be improved with everyone contributing.

Ш	Think about difficult messages you may have to deliver as a leader.
	Don't point the finger of blame. It doesn't achieve anything.
	Research why things are as they are. Identify what can be controlled and focus on what can be done.
	It's important that people feel part of the solution, not the problem.
No	tes and reflections:

Honest, evidence based and unemotional

"When we get into those conversations that are difficult to have, it's got to be very honest, it's got to be evidence based and it's got to be unemotional."

Having difficult conversations effectively is something that we have focused upon in Building Healthier Teams. Martin provides a good example of the approach he takes, when he talks about dealing with people as a Finance person, without clinical or operational specialism. Martin highlights honesty, facts and an unemotional approach as vital. Even then, he may get emotional reactions from some people, or the complete opposite. Martin pitches his messages to ensure people understand and then fosters an approach of shared accountability. 'It's our problem'.

F		As a leader you will have to adapt your approach depending on who you are talking to.
		The weight of the message you can land with someone, will depend on the strength of the relationship you have.
		Shared accountability can't be fake. You must mean it and follow through with the relevant actions.
		Watch Effective Conversations on Building Healthier Teams: https://buildinghealthier.co.uk/episode/effective-conversations/
Ø	No	tes and reflections:

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Passion, energy,	commitment and	humility

99	"What I've learnt from the NHS is humility."
	Martin talks about being prepared to say you don't understand something. You don't always get it right. Martin uses his team to help him get the facts right to enable him to tell a story and get people bought into solving a problem. Martin is the first one to say he doesn't have all the answers.
•	☐ Think about Martin's approach to having a narrative for problems.
	☐ His team help him articulate what the story is.
	☐ How could you apply this to your team/service?
\oslash	Notes and reflections: