

REVISED AND UPDATED SECOND EDITION
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DEALING WITH THE **TOUGH STUFF**

HOW TO ACHIEVE
RESULTS FROM
KEY CONVERSATIONS



DARREN HILL, ALISON HILL & DR SEAN RICHARDSON

WILEY

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PREFACE

It all started with a printer.

Sue used to send her printing to the printer but, rather than immediately picking it up, would leave it for a few minutes—sometimes hours. Not with any intent. She just got distracted. But before casting a stone for this heinous crime, admit it: we have all done it.

John didn't like having to sort out someone else's printing when fetching his own. Who does? So one day he decided enough was enough and put up a sign above the printer. The sign read:

PLEASE PICK UP YOUR PRINTING.

IT IS DISRESPECTFUL TO LEAVE IT

FOR OTHERS TO SORT OUT.

Of course, you know what happened next. Sue—who left her stuff in the printer—saw the sign as a direct attack on her and felt offended and humiliated. And she responded in kind. Sue's retaliation wasn't overt or loud, but in her mind she placed a black mark against everything and anything John said or did in the office.

It started with small things: expressing opinions contrary to John's at the team meeting and refusing to participate in projects or working groups that John was involved in.

John also changed his behaviour towards Sue. Responding to Sue's contrary behaviour, John made every attempt to point out flaws, mistakes or shortcomings in Sue's work to anyone in the office who would listen.

The relationship had quickly become adversarial—the battlelines had been drawn.

Fast forward four years.

The team that Sue and John belong to is in total disarray. There are now not one, but two longstanding grievance procedures in place. Turnover of the best staff has been high, and morale and productivity are at an all-time low. Chaos reigns supreme.

The dysfunction within the work team has resulted in several workers' compensation claims for psychosocial injury (that's a fancy term for stress leave), and the cost to the organisation of this dysfunctional team is now estimated to be more than one million dollars.

How did things go so wrong?

The better question is this: Who is responsible?

It's easy to start with the person who left their printing behind, or perhaps the blame could be directed at the person who put up the rather direct sign. But the cold, hard truth is that the responsibility for this whole mess lies with the manager of the section, who did not control the key conversations that needed to happen at the start.

Blowups occur. Interpersonal tensions happen. It's a fact of life when you put two or more people in the same vicinity. Whether it's a difference in values, beliefs, actions, expectations or what we like or dislike for lunch, we're all unique and have our own opinions, and at some point that difference is bound to manifest in a potential disagreement or conflict.

While Sue and John's example may seem dramatic at face value (one million dollars in lost productivity, let alone the personal costs

involved), the reality is that this situation is all too common. You may have a similar story to tell.

Our workplaces and society have forgone the necessary direct conversations in favour of cotton wool and avoidance. We have created systems, procedures and policies that enable longstanding conflict to survive through layers of bureaucracy and hinder quick resolution through robust conversation. The cost of this approach is considerable on so many levels, and yet these costs can be minimised, mitigated and even eliminated by a manager who leads well in a time of crisis.

If leadership is measured on a continuum, at one end might be maligned leadership, where the people who work for you speak badly of you, and maliciously obstruct or even sabotage their own or your work efforts. It's not a great place to be.

The other, more desirable, end of the management continuum is aligned leadership, where the thoughts, attitudes and behaviours of the entire workgroup come into line with each other.

In essence, the gap between aligned leadership and maligned leadership boils down to two things:

- the decisions we make
- the actions we take.

In picking up this book, you have made a very good decision.

As for the actions you take — well, that's where you come in, and we are in your corner all the way.

Darren, Alison and Sean

March 2016

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Darren Hill is one of Australia's most in-demand strategists with a client book of Fortune 50 and ASX Top-20 companies. The culture-change programs Darren works on have been used in PepsiCo, McDonald's, Siemens, Suncorp Bank and the Australian Federal Government to name a few.

Darren is a best-selling author whose work has appeared regularly across the Fairfax Group (including the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*), News Limited (*The Daily Telegraph* and *The Courier-Mail*), Business Insider and Smart Company. He now writes exclusively for *BRW*, and has appeared on the 'Today' show and Sky's 'Business News'.

A behavioural scientist and Executive Director at Pragmatic Thinking (www.pragmaticthinking.com), Darren understands people like few others do. It is his intricate knowledge of people and culture that sees him not only delivering international keynote presentations at conferences but also designing, delivering and implementing complex, cross-layered multiyear culture-change programs inside organisations.

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Alison Hill is a psychologist who frequently appears on Channel 9's 'Mornings' program, regularly has articles published with Business Chicks, and is highly sought after to assist individuals and teams transition through the 'tough stuff'.

Her work has found its way inside a few big businesses you may have heard of... PepsiCo, Sydney Water, BHP Billiton, Bond University, Griffith University and BlueCare, just to name a few.

Alison presents her unique and authentic message as a sought-after keynote speaker, engaging her audience with humour, practicality and real-world thinking.

Alison is a founder and director of the super-cool behaviour and motivation strategy company Pragmatic Thinking.

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Dr Sean Richardson is a registered psychologist with a PhD in the psychology of excellence. He has a wealth of experience with elite sports teams, both as a high performance consultant and as a former world-class athlete. Sean has helped a number of professional sports teams go from middle of the pack to number one, and

has delivered leading-edge, high-performance presentations and programs into the likes of Suncorp, Johnson & Johnson, Chrysler, ANZ, AMP and Mercedes.

A successful TEDx speaker, mentor to pro coaches and executive leaders, and facilitator for elite performing teams, Sean is known for his powerful messages on the mindsets of excellence, and delivers game-changing IP to individuals and organisations on the five sciences for building and delivering sustained high performance.

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So much has happened since the release of our first edition of *Dealing with the Tough Stuff*. There was the cracking of bottles of champagne when we were at the top of booksellers' charts and the feeling of joy at seeing our title in various languages, but most of all our biggest thrill has been the responses from readers on email, social media or in person who have said this book has been a game changer. So our first thank you truly belongs to you: the reader. Much gratitude.

Darren wants to thank his two co-authors, Alison and Sean. Alison, you're a gift to this world. Anyone who knows you also knows what an understatement that is. It's been an amazing ride and we've got plenty of gas in the tank to go further. Richo, mate, can't wait to see you, Kate and the kids grow their roots and flourish, and the corporate world to be shifted by your quality of thinking. It's world class.

Alison wants to express her deep gratitude to her best friend and husband, Darren. Seeing the corporate world embrace your expertise and thinking, and being changed by your ability to tackle the toughest of tough stuff head-on is an inspiration. It's only the

beginning too. Thanks also to our beautiful children, Patrick and Kate, with whom some of the strategies in this book have worked exceptionally well! You are our future! Sean, your passion to step up and bring your best to any project is awesome. Hanging with you makes anything seem possible.

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To all of you who are at the forefront of the tough conversations at work, thank you for having the courage and desire to want to tackle these situations. The world needs your leadership and we admire you for what you step up and do every single day.

It isn't the
**MEANINGFUL
CONVERSATIONS**
in the
GOOD TIMES
*that define a leader;
it's the ability to have a*
**MEANINGFUL
CONVERSATION**
at the
WORST
of times.



INTRODUCTION

If you were to sit down and list all the tasks, skills and abilities of a leader of note, the ability to establish a meaningful conversation would have to be among the highest ranked responses.

Interestingly, though, it isn't the ability to have meaningful conversations in the good times that defines a leader; it's the ability to have a meaningful conversation at the worst of times. It's having the key conversations at key times that makes a leader truly worth following.

It is inevitable that as a leader or manager you will face conversations that are less than great. These are the conversations we simply label as the Tough Stuff. And the Tough Stuff is different for everyone. For some it is the underperformance discussion with an employee; for others it is the conversation with an excellent worker who has stepped over the line in one area. It could be the termination discussion, or it could be the first conversation with a new graduate who has messed up. It could be any one of a thousand scenarios, but the common denominator is this: all of these discussions are tough, some more than others.

Making a difference

It is a simple fact: the difference-makers in any organisation are its leaders and managers. Our job description at Pragmatic Thinking is an awesome one: to make a difference to these difference-makers. Our profession sees us leap out of bed in the morning, excited to start another day—we are so passionate about working with, educating and mentoring this highly influential group of hard-working people.

So what is the area we've spent the most time on, and where we've achieved the biggest results? Helping the difference-makers deal with the tough stuff.

The ability of the difference-makers to have an unenviable, yet completely necessary, conversation is at an all-time low. Most have been shockingly under-coached in what is undoubtedly one of the most important skills any leader must possess: the ability to handle a crisis.

So, if you're one of the difference-makers, a leader or manager in your place of work, there is good news. We're here to help. We believe the processes, actions and methods described in this book will fundamentally change how you deal with the tough stuff. They will make your life easier, and you will achieve better outcomes from your team as a result. Our expectations are high, and for good reason: the information in this book is reliable and valid because it has been delivered to thousands of difference-makers just like you.

The foundation for success

Between us, we've had more than five decades of witnessing various levels of dysfunction in the workplace and we've seen common and uncommon examples of conflict handled both well and very poorly.

We can assure you the strategies and approaches we present in this book work. In fact, we guarantee it 100 per cent. All the elements of the strategies are tried and tested via a better testing process than any statistical analytics program: they have been shown to be robust through

good, old-fashioned practical application. People put into place these strategies and their ability to handle the tough stuff gets easier.

Our 100 per cent guarantee is taken off the table if you don't have one thing in place. The success of a workable outcome rests on one foundational principle: the belief that all people are good.

We're challenged every day in relation to this belief by reports in newspapers or on television, and occasionally we come across someone who confronts us with a set of behaviours that make us challenge that belief. But the good in others can often be hidden from view—both your view and their view. Our belief is unshakeable: as much as the sun comes up in the east and sets in the west, we know it to be true.

The moment we forget this principle is the moment our chance of a favourable outcome is extinguished. When positive regard leaves the building, so does hope.

And as you step towards greater confidence in being able to approach and handle tough situations, this is the first belief that you need to tap back into. It is your true north.

Difficult behaviours, not difficult people

There is a plethora of books and workshop programs that use the title and theme of dealing with difficult people. We would like to clearly and succinctly state the following: this is not a book about dealing with difficult people.

In fact, we take umbrage at the 'dealing with difficult people' title, let alone the contents of any educational material that carries it. Any program or resource that classifies and labels individuals into certain types of 'difficult' people is setting the reader up for failure. The moment you label someone as difficult is the moment you'll get that behaviour. This labelling mentality creates a powerful psychological frame that people filter their current circumstance through, and as a result they see only difficult types of people. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

So what we choose to focus on is an entirely different approach. It is this: there are no difficult people; there are only difficult behaviours.

And behaviours, even the really difficult ones, can be changed, as we will show you in this book.

Manipulating for good

There is a well-worn myth that says: ‘You cannot change other people; only people can change themselves’. We refer to this as a myth because the reality is that we all influence and change each other’s behaviours every single day. If we were to go for a walk up the street together we could show you how we change the behaviour of others simply by smiling and being friendly to the people we come across.

Being able to deal with tough situations more confidently will require you to adjust your own behaviour. Role modelling is the key first step in being able to reflect the behaviour you desire from others.

But we are also going to explore ways to adjust the behaviour of others. This may sound to you a lot like manipulation—and that’s exactly what it is.

Before we proceed, though, it’s important to be clear on what we mean by manipulation. The origin of the word ‘manipulation’ means ‘to mould and shape with the hands’ and, when you think about it, that’s what we do with each other every day. You have no doubt already been doing it to people today. As you walked in to work, you smiled and greeted others; as you sat down at your desk and as you passed others in the tea room, you were manipulating them in certain ways. When you purchased this book, you undoubtedly had an effect on the shop assistant, and if you ordered it online, you effected change on others. For starters, we’re smiling!

We shape each other’s behaviour with our hands, our minds, our speech and our body language, among other things. And that’s manipulation, but the term ‘manipulation’ has earned itself a bad rap socially.

The only difference between manipulation and influence is the intent behind them. Manipulation with good intent is a great thing.

If what we're aiming for is a better outcome for me and a better outcome for you, then the intent behind the process of moulding and shaping others is a good thing. It's when the intent is that others lose so that I can win that manipulation can go sour.

Ensuring that your intent is good and that you hold onto the first principle that all people are good means we can move away from the social definition of manipulation being something that is bad and towards a more accurate definition: that manipulation is the way that we shape and mould others' behaviours. As a manager or a leader, it's your role to influence and mould others: make sure you don't shy away from this incredible responsibility.

Upgrade your expectations

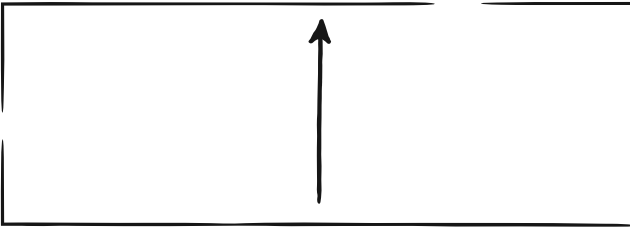
Tough situations weigh heavily on us, emotionally and physically. They can keep us awake at night, they consume our thoughts, they tap into a range of strong emotions (they can churn your stomach, and give you headaches or neck pain), and they can infect other relationships around you. Tough situations have a way of following you home from work and having an impact on things outside of work. They are insidious, and if left, or dealt with poorly, they can become insidious for a long time.

We believe you should have high expectations of what is in this book because we know that having the confidence and the skills to be able to handle the tough stuff better can dramatically improve your life. That's a grandiose claim, but it's our hope that this will be the outcome for you.

Regardless of what your expectations were when you picked up this book and started reading, upgrade them. Entertain the thought that there may be something that you read that will fundamentally change how you deal with the tough stuff. If this isn't your filter, you might just miss out on something life-changing.

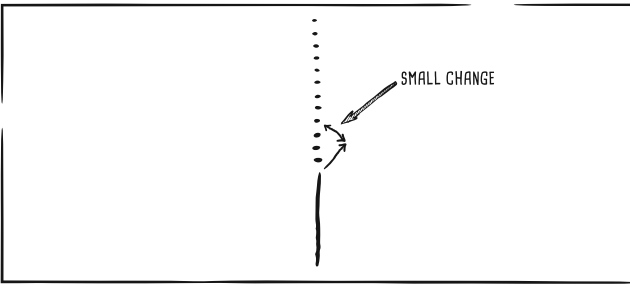
Think of it this way: before you picked up this book your method or path for dealing with the tough stuff may have been heading in the direction shown in figure 1 (overleaf).

Figure 1: your current path



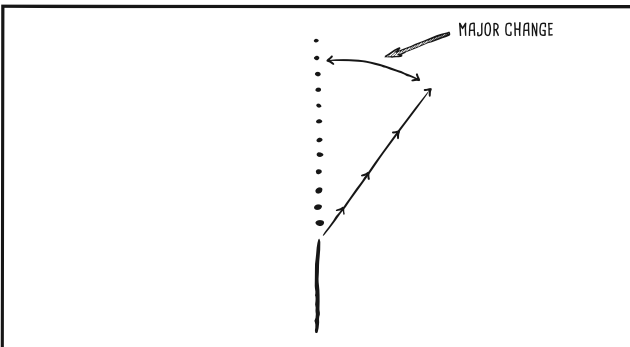
Let's say you learn something from reading these pages that just seems small today: just a little tip or a trick or a way to do things slightly differently, though it doesn't look that big in today's context (see figure 2).

Figure 2: your path after a small change in behaviour



But you put the theory into practice and it works (we did tell you it works 100 per cent!) so you continue to use it (see figure 3).

Figure 3: small changes bring big results



Then, over the course of that journey, over the following months or years, that small change could become huge.

Haven't you had a tough-stuff conversation where you have sat back and thought to yourself, 'I could have done that differently', and it weighed heavily on you for a while? A feeling of, 'If I could have changed this then the outcome would have been different'? Imagine if there were something in this book that allowed you to be able to influence a situation so that it did not escalate. Wouldn't that be a life changer?

Let's raise the bar on what these strategies could mean for you, because you have nothing to lose anyway. To quote from Michelangelo: 'The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it'.

How to use this book

We are practical and pragmatic people, and that's how we want you to view and use this book. We have designed the book to provide you with a wealth of resources, information and portals to access ongoing learning.

The key to implementing changes is to start putting into place the strategies outlined in this book throughout your day-to-day activities. The strategies are purposefully practical and relevant for the workplace.

Here's another suggestion to assist you in maximising your learning throughout the book: whenever you come across a key point, practical strategy or new idea you want to use, note it down. Whether you use an electronic diary or a paper diary, take the time to add one note into your calendar every Monday morning for the next however-many weeks. If you make 25 notes while reading the book, you have just created six months' worth of Monday-morning reminders to help adjust and shape your behaviour.

Our insights

With a deep expertise in human behaviour (two psychologists, a behavioural scientist and all of us parents of very young children), we possess a wealth of understanding, experience and research in dealing with the tough stuff in our working careers. As well as providing you with key research, case studies and information, we have also provided you with our own insights from different points of view. At the end of each chapter you'll find insights from Darren, Alison and Sean, each from a slightly different perspective.

Darren's insights come from a behavioural economics perspective and relate the information in that chapter to the business environment. Darren loves the game of business.

Alison's insights consider the things that may get in the way of making changes and she suggests strategies for addressing these barriers by tapping into values, drivers and motivations.

As a former elite athlete, and now a consulting psychologist to some of North America's and Australia's highest profile sports and corporate organisations, Sean's insights will show you how you can relate key information to achieving success through high performance.

By bringing you our individual insights we aim to showcase other facets of human behaviour and interactions. Through our insights, we trust you will have your own insights along the way.

Stepping up to the challenge

Tackling the tough stuff in your workplace takes courage. It may not be the sort of courage that comes to mind when you think of someone skydiving or someone who runs through a burning house to save a small child. But it takes the everyday, ordinary courage of deliberate action. It takes the courage to stop avoiding situations: to say 'enough is enough', and to step up and be accountable.

By picking up this book, by choosing to make differences in how you deal with tough situations, by tapping back into your belief that all people are good, you are taking the courageous first step on a journey worth travelling.

1

WHAT'S YOUR TOUGH STUFF?

Getting clear on what's tough for you

Leadership can be a lonely place at times. Sure, there are few experiences more enjoyable than leading people towards great outcomes for both themselves and your organisation, but then there's the other side of leadership. There are the times when you won't see eye to eye with others. Conflict is inevitable. That's when the loneliness of leadership truly presents itself. It certainly is a tough gig being responsible for dealing with the tough stuff.

It's worth taking the time to be clear on what the tough stuff is for you: those key work conversations that you have to have and that you would like to be better at. What are they for you?

One thing is
CERTAIN:
IT'S HARD TO CHANGE
what we don't
ACKNOWLEDGE.



Each of us has a unique set of skills, abilities and experiences that we bring to any tough conversation. What's tough for one person may not be tough for another. Having the personal insight into which situations are particularly tough for you will help guide you towards making relevant changes in your behaviour. One thing is certain: we can't change what we don't acknowledge.

Finding out your tough stuff

To be able to prioritise what requires the greatest attention for improving results in your key conversations, rate yourself on the following questions and their corresponding continuums (see figure 1.1, overleaf).

Your answers to these seven questions will give you greater clarity on which tough-stuff situations you have strengths in, and which areas may need some attention. When you identify these areas to work on, you may be tempted to turn away from them because in the past you possibly avoided these situations. We urge you not to slip into old habits but to instead take the courage to change your approach.