



# Difficult Conversations

Speaker Script · "Care Enough to Say It."

THE HAMPTON UNIVERSITY MARCHING FORCE · PRE-DRILL CAMP 2026



**PRESENTER** Dr. Thomas L. Jones, Jr.

**SLIDES** 15

Presenter notes for every slide, in order. Bracketed cues are stage directions; quoted lines are suggested wording — say them in your own voice.

## 01 Difficult Conversations

SLIDE 1 — TITLE: Difficult Conversations

SAY: "The conversation you're dreading is almost always the one you most need to have. That's the whole session."

NOTE: this is the confrontation session. Conflict Resolution was about mediating between two other people. This is about YOU having to say something hard.

## 02 Icebreaker

SLIDE 2 — ICEBREAKER: Fences, "I Ain't Got to Like You" (2:20)

SET UP: "Denzel, in August Wilson's Fences. Cory asks his father why he never liked him. Listen to the answer."

Play it.

AFTER: "It was never about like. It was about responsibility." Then: "Most hard conversations you'll have aren't about being liked either."

## 03 The Premise

SLIDE 3 — THE PREMISE (statement slide)

Read it.

THE CORE: "Silence feels kind, but it isn't. It protects your comfort while the problem grows."

Takeaway: "Say it because you care."

## 04 Why We Avoid Them

SLIDE 4 — WHY WE AVOID THEM

Name the fear honestly — conflict, awkwardness, being disliked. "That's human."

THEN THE COST: Kim Scott's ruinous empathy — "you protect somebody's feelings today and let them fail long-term."

LAND: "Saying nothing is not neutral. It's a choice, and usually the wrong one."

## 05 Care Personally, Challenge Directly

SLIDE 5 — CARE PERSONALLY, CHALLENGE DIRECTLY

Radical Candor's two axes. Walk all four quadrants — obnoxious aggression, ruinous empathy, manipulative insincerity, and the target.

MAKE THEM PLACE THEMSELVES: "Which quadrant do you fall into when it's hard? Most of us default to ruinous empathy."

NOTE: Jay Jones teaches this same model in his own Leadership 101 — if he's in the room, hand it to him for a minute.

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## 06 Start With Heart

SLIDE 6 — START WITH HEART

"Check your motive before you open your mouth."

THE TEST: "If your goal is to win, to vent, or to look right — stop. That conversation will make it worse."

"Come in as an ally solving a problem, not a prosecutor making a case."

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## 07 Facts, Not Stories

SLIDE 7 — FACTS, NOT STORIES

Teach the distinction crisply: "'You missed the last three rehearsals' is a fact. 'You don't care' is a story you built."

"People will fight your story even when they agree with your facts."

THE MOVE: "Lead with the facts and hold your interpretation loosely — 'here's what I saw, help me understand it.'"

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## 08 Make It Safe

SLIDE 8 — MAKE IT SAFE

"People get defensive when they feel unsafe — not when they hear truth."

OPEN WITH RESPECT AND SHARED PURPOSE: "I'm on your side, and I think we both want the same thing."

WATCH FOR THE BREAK: silence, sarcasm, shutting down. Pause and rebuild before pushing on.

LAND: "You can say almost anything to almost anyone if they trust you mean them well."

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## 09 Name It: Situation, Behavior, Impact

SLIDE 9 — NAME IT: SITUATION, BEHAVIOR, IMPACT

The practical tool. Walk all three with the example.

Situation: 'in yesterday's sectional.' Behavior: 'you were on your phone during the run.' Impact: 'the section lost focus and we ran late.'

DRILL IT: have two leaders build an SBI out loud for a real situation. Two minutes. It's the most useful thing in the session.

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## 10 Then Listen

SLIDE 10 — THEN LISTEN

"It's a conversation, not a verdict."

GIVE THEM THE LINE: "'That's how it looked to me — what's your take?'"

"Listen to understand, not to reload. You may be missing context that changes the whole picture."

LAND: "The goal isn't to win the conversation. It's to fix the problem and keep the person."

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## 11 Holding a Peer Accountable

SLIDE 11 — HOLDING A PEER ACCOUNTABLE

The hardest version — no rank to fall back on.

"Your only leverage is the relationship and the shared standard."

THE FRAMING: "'We hold each other to this — that's what makes us leaders.' Us, not me over you."

"When peers hold each other accountable, the director rarely has to."

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## 12 When It's Hazing

SLIDE 12 — WHEN IT'S HAZING

STOP. Slow all the way down. This slide is non-negotiable and your tone should change.

"Hazing is where difficult becomes non-negotiable."

SAY IT FLAT: "Silence is complicity. Looking away, laughing it off, 'not my business' — that makes you part of it."

"Protect the person over the tradition, the comfort, or the friendship."

AND THE INSTRUCTION: "Escalate to the director. On hazing you are never handling it alone."

Do not rush off this slide. Let it be uncomfortable.

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## 13 Follow Through

SLIDE 13 — FOLLOW THROUGH

"The conversation isn't the fix. The change is."

End with something concrete: what changes, starting when.

"Catch them doing it right — accountability includes noticing the improvement."

AND: "When it does change, let it go completely. No grudges."

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## 14 The Hard-Conversation Playbook

SLIDE 14 — THE HARD-CONVERSATION PLAYBOOK

Start With Heart, State the Facts, Then Listen, Follow Through.

Photograph slide.

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## 15 Care Enough to Say It.

SLIDE 15 — CLOSE: Care Enough to Say It.

"Hold your peers to the standard because you respect them, not in spite of it."

Re-state the hazing line one final time before the sign-off. It's the thing you most need them to leave with.