

The 5 scripts every manager needs on file.

Five conversations most managers get wrong — and the exact words to get them right. Written by the ST4Y READY leadership team, the same people who coach Fortune 500 executives through the conversations that matter most.

You can use everything here today. No account needed.

1. Critical feedback that actually lands

Use it when: When a strong performer is starting to slip, or a behavior is affecting the team.

Frame: Situation → Behavior → Impact → Ask.

“I want to talk about the client sync on Tuesday. When the timeline slipped and you brought it up in front of the client instead of flagging it to me first, it put us in a defensive position with them. Going forward, I need surprises like that to come to me first so we can walk into the room aligned. Can we agree on that?”

If they push back: If they get defensive: don’t argue the facts. Say, “I’m not asking you to agree with my read of it right now. I’m asking you to hear it, sit with it, and come back tomorrow with how you want to handle it next time.”

2. Asking for a raise without shrinking

Use it when: When the market has moved, your scope has grown, or you've been quietly carrying more than your title.

Frame: Value delivered → Market context → Specific ask → Silence.

"I want to talk about compensation. In the last twelve months I've owned [X, Y, Z] — work that in most orgs sits a level above where I am today. Based on where the market is for that scope, I'd like to move to \$[number]. I know this isn't a decision you make alone, so I'd like to understand what it would take to get there."

If they push back: Then stop talking. Do not fill the silence. If the answer is "not right now," ask: "What would need to be true in the next six months for the answer to be yes?"

3. Resetting a peer relationship that's gone sideways

Use it when: When a colleague you have to work with has become someone you avoid.

Frame: Name it → Own your part → Propose the reset.

"I want to reset something between us. I've noticed we've been talking past each other on [project], and I don't think either of us wants that. I've probably contributed to it by [specific thing]. I'd like to try a different mode: quick 10 minutes on Mondays to align, and if something is bugging either of us, we say it in that room, not around it. Are you open to that?"

If they push back: If they downplay it: "I hear you that it's not a big deal for you. It's been on my mind, and I'd rather clear it than let it drift. Humor me on the ten minutes."

4. Saying no without burning the bridge

Use it when: When a boss, peer, or client asks for something you cannot or should not give.

Frame: Acknowledge → Decline cleanly → Offer the next best thing.

“I hear how important this is, and I want to be straight with you: I can’t take this on this quarter. Between [priority 1] and [priority 2], adding this would mean one of them slips, and I don’t think that’s the trade you want me to make. What I can do is [smaller specific offer]. If you need the full thing, we should talk about what comes off the list.”

If they push back: If they push: “I want to say yes. That’s why I’m being honest about what yes would actually cost.”

5. Ending it with dignity

Use it when: When you have to let someone go, and you want them to walk out of the room with their footing intact.

Frame: Be first, be clear, be human — in that order.

“Thanks for coming in. I have hard news. We’ve decided to end your role here, effective [date]. This decision is final and it isn’t up for debate today. I know this is a lot to take in, so I’m going to walk you through what happens next, and then we’ll pause for whatever you need to ask. [Package details, transition details, references.] I’m sorry. You’ve done real work here, and I mean that.”

If they push back: Do not soften the decision. Do not over-explain. Do not promise things you cannot deliver. Silence after the news is not something you have to rescue.

Your next hard conversation isn't in this guide.

TACT writes the exact script for the situation on your calendar this week — tuned to who you are in the room. Free to try at tacttalk.org.