

REEF

A Model for Difficult Conversations

Ready · Empathy · Express · Forward

Coached by Nelson · coachedbynelson.com.au

To “reef” a sail is to shorten it and brace before heavy weather. Difficult conversations work the same way — what sinks them isn't the hard news, it's sailing in unprepared. REEF is how you navigate the conversation without running aground.

R

Ready

Get clear before you speak — the specific behaviour (not character), its impact, and your intention for the conversation. Vague or personal framing sinks it early.

E

Empathy

Open by understanding their side before delivering yours. Ask a genuine question first — people hear feedback better once they feel heard.

E

Express

State the issue directly, specifically and kindly — the behaviour and its impact, not a judgment on character. Say the hard sentence early; don't bury it.

F

Forward

Agree the next step and how you'll both know it's changed. Then actually follow up — an unreviewed conversation quietly teaches people that nothing really changes.