



FREE TASTER

Free taster

Masterclasses

A 30-minute extract from the Leading Difficult Conversations masterclass, with a plan you can use this week

About 30 minutes on your own. Have one conversation in mind that you have been putting off.

Name

Date

STARBUCK & ASSOCIATES

COACHING & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

WHAT THIS IS

In-depth learning for leaders and coaches

The Masterclasses hub is for leaders, coaches, HR and OD practitioners who want to go properly deep on the subjects that matter most in leadership.

Each masterclass runs to about four hours. It brings together research, practical frameworks, real coaching conversations and structured reflection, so you finish with ideas you can use rather than notes you file away. There are more than 20 titles, and you can take them in any order.

This taster is a condensed extract from one of them, Leading Difficult Conversations, cut down to about 30 minutes.

What is inside

MASTERCLASS	WHAT IT HELPS WITH
Leading Difficult Conversations	Preparing for and holding the conversations most leaders avoid
Building High Performing Teams	What strong teams do differently and how to build it
Coaching Skills Every Leader Needs	Listening, questioning and coaching in everyday leadership
Creating Psychological Safety	Helping people speak up, ask for help and admit mistakes
Leading Through Change	Taking people with you when things are uncertain
Emotional Intelligence for Leaders	Understanding and managing your impact on others
Performance and Development Conversations	Honest, useful conversations about performance and growth
Imposter Syndrome (four-part series)	Understanding self-doubt and working with it

HOW TO USE THIS TASTER

Read page 3, then use page 4 to plan a real conversation. Page 5 shows what the full masterclass and the rest of the hub add.

Leading difficult conversations

We avoid difficult conversations for understandable reasons: we fear damaging the relationship, getting it wrong, or facing an emotional reaction. Meanwhile the issue grows, and the conversation we eventually have is harder than the one we avoided.

A preparation framework

PREPARE	ASK YOURSELF
Purpose	What do I want to be different after this conversation, for both of us?
Facts	What have I actually seen or heard, as opposed to what I have assumed?
Impact	What effect is it having on the work, the team or on me?
Their view	What might be going on for them that I do not know?
Outcome	What would a good next step look like, and what is not negotiable?

Opening words

The first minute sets the tone. Name the issue plainly, say why it matters, and invite their view. For example: "I want to talk about the last two project deadlines. When they slipped, the client escalated to me. I would like to understand what happened from your side."

Staying curious

Once you have opened, your main job is to listen. Ask open questions such as "What else is going on?" or "How do you see it?" and resist the urge to defend or fix too early. Curiosity keeps the conversation two-way, even when you disagree.

EXAMPLE

Jo has avoided talking to Ben about his short replies in team meetings. Preparing, she realises she has assumed he is disengaged. When she opens with the facts and asks how he sees it, Ben says he is struggling with a new workload he has not mentioned. The conversation becomes about priorities, not attitude.

Plan your conversation

Choose one conversation you have been putting off. Work through it here before you have it.

Exercise 1: Prepare

PREPARE	MY NOTES
Purpose	
Facts and impact	
Their view	
Outcome	

Exercise 2: Your opening words

Write the first two or three sentences you will say. Name the issue, say why it matters, invite their view.

Exercise 3: Staying curious

What two open questions will I ask once I have opened?

What is most likely to pull me into defending or fixing, and what will I do instead?

What the full masterclass adds

This extract covers the core of the preparation and the opening. The full four-hour masterclass goes much further, with frameworks, real coaching conversations to learn from and time for structured reflection.

IN THIS TASTER	IN THE FULL HUB
Why we avoid difficult conversations	A deeper look at what drives avoidance, in you and in others
A five-part preparation framework	Fuller frameworks and planning tools for different situations
Opening words and staying curious	Real coaching conversations to learn from, with reflection
One planning exercise	Structured reflection throughout, plus 20+ other masterclasses

Who gets most from it

- Leaders who want to go deeper than a short course allows
- Coaches building their own practice and range
- HR and OD practitioners designing development for others

HOW PEOPLE USE IT

Some take one masterclass a month as protected learning time. Others choose the title that matches a challenge in front of them, such as a restructure or a new team. HR and OD teams often use a masterclass to prepare before running a similar session themselves.

What I am going to do

Two or three small changes that you actually make will do more than a long list you never start.

My three actions

WHAT I WILL DO	WHEN	WHO I WILL TELL

Coming back to this

Put a date in your diary about a month from now and answer these three questions.

What has changed since I did this taster?

What did I not get to, and what got in the way?

What am I carrying forward?

READY FOR THE FULL HUB?

Masterclasses

More than 20 in-depth, four-hour masterclasses for leaders, coaches, HR and OD practitioners, combining research, frameworks, real coaching conversations and reflection.

£149 per person, per year, inc. VAT

Enrol at academy.starbuckassociates.com/courses/coaching-hub-2

Part of the Starbuck Academy free tasters from Starbuck & Associates. If you would like to run a masterclass live with your leaders, we would be glad to help. This taster is general learning and development material, not professional advice. © 2026 Starbuck & Associates Limited.