

MIDWEST NICE AT WORK

A 10-Min Guide to Strengthen Team Clarity and Honesty

GUIDE 1: STARTING THE CONVERSATION

This conversation is part of the 10-minute team conversation system - short, structured discussions built into meetings teams already hold.

It focuses on a common midwestern pattern: being polite at the expense of clarity. When feedback is softened, when we say “that’s fine” when it’s not, or when real concerns surface after the meeting instead of during it, confusion and mistrust grow.

This isn’t about blaming personalities or forcing boldness. It’s about noticing patterns.

Culture doesn’t shift through one dramatic moment. It shifts through small conversations repeated over time. Consistency - not perfection - is what strengthens how teams work together.

10-MINUTE CONVERSATION AGENDA

1 Minute | Set the Tone

Leader Open: “Let’s pause for a few minutes to talk about something that affects how we work together: being polite at the expense of being clear. We pride ourselves on being kind and easy to work with - and that’s a strength. But sometimes it also means we hold back real concerns or soften feedback so much it loses meaning. Today is just about noticing patterns - not fixing everything.”

4 Minutes | Spark Discussion

Discussion Prompt: “After our meetings, do we ever realize we had more to say than we said in the moment? If so, what impact does that have on us as a team?”

If helpful, you can gently name patterns such as:

- *Saying “that’s fine” when it’s not*
 - *Softening feedback to avoid discomfort*
 - *Raising concerns after the meeting instead of during it*
-

4 Minutes | Agree on One Team Norm

Discussion Prompt: “If we wanted to make it easier to be both kind and clear, what’s one small behavior we could try?”

Examples might include:

- Ending meetings with: “What concerns haven’t we discussed yet?”
 - Agreeing that it’s okay to respectfully disagree in the room
 - Normalizing the phrase: “I’m not sure I agree - can we talk that through?”
-

1 Minute | Close the Conversation

Leader Close: “Thanks for the discussion. I heard [insert 1–3 themes]. Let’s try a short experiment - for the next [X] weeks, let’s try [one specific behavior]. We’ll come back to this in a future meeting [set date] and talk briefly about what helped, what got in the way and what we need to adjust.”

After the Conversation | Follow-Through Guidance

- Email everyone the key themes that surfaced and the team practice you agreed to test, noting the date when the team will briefly revisit the experiment.
- At the follow-up, spend 5 minutes discussing: a) what helped, b) what got in the way, c) what to keep, adjust, or drop.

Facilitation Notes

- This does not need to be perfect. Employees don't expect polished facilitation. They want to see leaders thinking how work feels day to day.
- If the group is large, do pair or small-group discussion before sharing highlights with the full team.