



Future Forum

How To: Hard Conversations, Interpersonal Comms & Managing Up

If you have any intention of moving forward in your career, then you need to know how to communicate effectively - even when the topics are contentious. From negotiating your next promotion to managing the challenges of working with other humans, hard conversations are a business reality.

Luckily our PTTOW! mentors shared their war stories and valuable lessons learned so you can emerge from your next challenging conversation graceful and victorious!

Are you ready for your next moment to shine?
Well, check out this **TOOLKIT!**

Featured Experts:

Brooke Finlayson // Chief Learning Officer // **Mondelez International**

Smita Reddy // Brand Chair, U.S // **Edelman**

Taylor Smith // GM, Xbox Global Brand Marketing // **Microsoft**

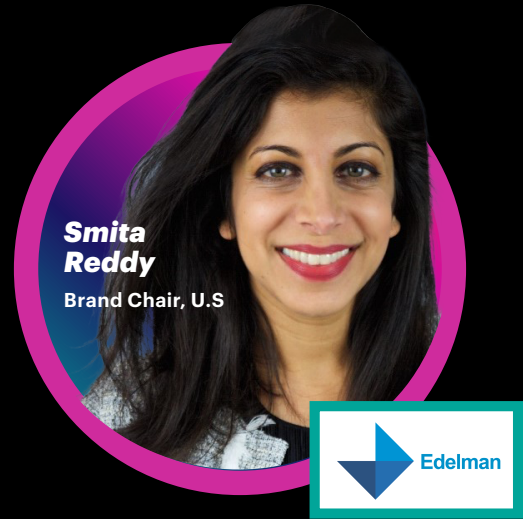
Sean Cohan // Chief Growth Officer and President, International // **Nielsen**



Brooke Finlayson is the Chief Learning Officer at Mondelez International. She leads the Capability, Learning and Performance functions globally. Originally from Australia, Brooke joined Cadbury in 2003, and managed through the transition to Kraft in 2010 and Mondelez in 2012. Driven by a passion to create environments that maximize potential, Brooke has successfully led in HR Leadership roles (in Australia, China & Japan), she has partnered with global functions in a generalist HR capacity, center of excellence roles (in talent management, talent acquisition and organizational effectiveness), as well as taking a cross-functional role in the Supply Chain, where she led the Lean Manufacturing program for Asia Pacific.

As a Global Client Lead for one of Edelman’s largest accounts and Chair of the US Brand Practice, Smita serves as a senior strategist, providing her clients and team with strategic counsel, thought leadership and program management, in addition to driving all activity across programs. She leads a team of 250+ employees around the world. Passion areas include mentoring and supporting the professional development of staff while helping to drive new business growth for the firm overall.

Her creative and strategic chops have been applied to building brands in the beauty & personal care, food & beverage, technology, fashion and media industries.



Sean Cohan is Nielsen’s Chief Growth Officer and President, International since March 2020. He is responsible for overseeing Nielsen’s strategy, partnerships, corporate development, and its range of growth businesses outside the U.S., including Measurement, Impact, Sports and Gracenote.

Cohan has spent decades in the media ecosystem, including 15 years at A+E Networks, where he served most recently as President, International and Digital Media. He has also held positions at Primedia, Morgan Stanley, NBC, and A.T. Kearney. He brings extensive strategic, financial, operational and growth experience to Nielsen, along with a track record of transforming businesses, brands, teams, relationships and culture.

Taylor’s mission is to inspire gamers around the world. He currently leads the Xbox global brand marketing team. His team is based in Seattle, and develops branding, packaging, integrated campaigns, partnerships and research. They work across the Xbox line-up of consoles, across services like Xbox Game Pass - as well as across the incredible line-up of games IP. Leading up to this role, Taylor spent a decade leading Xbox Game Studios marketing communications, focused on developing iconic franchises such as Halo, Gears of War, Forza Motorsport, Tomb Raider, Minecraft and more.



CURATED SESSION TAKEAWAYS

Brooke Finlayson (Mondelez International)

1. Take time to reflect.

- a. What are the reasons you avoid speaking up? The most common reasons are:
 - i. Lack of confidence in being heard.
 - ii. Relying on others to make it safe for you to speak up.
 - iii. Or both!

2. Question yourself.

- a. Ask "how can I be 100% honest & respectful?". A good framework is:
 - i. Present the facts.
 - ii. Explain why you care about the facts.
 - iii. Invite collaboration and discussion. Specifically, asking a question that invites others to collaborate and discuss.

3. Things to consider.

- a. Keep it short. Try to keep speaking periods to 4 sentences; when we're uncomfortable we tend to talk more!
- b. Practice. Do NOT make the first time you say it the most important.
- c. Bring your Best Self. Consider your own well-being and make sure you are at your best by staying focused, rested, and with clear intention & purpose.
- d. Be transparent in your intention: The trust equation can help you discover the best ways to build trust.
- e. Focus on outcomes and avoid ego.
- f. Managing up is not linear: consider how you enroll people up, down & across. Managing your network is how you get things done. How will you 'co-elevate' your networks to deliver outcomes?

Smita Reddy (Edelman)

1. Be human.

- a. When it comes to managing up, know that your stakeholders are human too - try to speak to them on a personal level. Celebrate their wins like they are your own and help them through difficult times.

2. Feedback is your friend (seriously, it is).

- b. Don't shy away from asking for it. By simply asking "is there anything that I'm missing?" or "anything I could be doing to help YOU" goes a long way.

3. Think laterally, not hierarchically.

- c. Future organizations will become flatter over time. Don't just think about "managing up," consider managing horizontally as well. Think about the advocates/peers you need to help make change internally as well.

CURATED SESSION TAKEAWAYS

Taylor Smith (Microsoft)

1. Want to handle hard conversations?

- a. Build relationships that have a strong shared foundation, are built on trust, shared goals, and frequent conversations - with that, the door to hard conversations is open. Discuss the hard stuff frequently: uncertainty, learning, and adversity are key topics. Also, don't sugarcoat discussions. Lay the hard stuff on the table and chip away at it together.

2. The key to relationship connection and strength is empathy.

- a. Center your conversation in your shared goals. What's in it for the team and for the person at hand? How do we make traction against those shared goals? That and synergy are what generates a true relationship.

3. Teams must set expectations on mindset, approach, and communication.

- a. At Microsoft, this is a growth mindset mantra that is both discussed and practiced. A brand's values need to be consistent both internally & externally. Same values, same thought process, and same actions. The internal feeds the external and then it's a propeller with momentum. Authenticity, conviction, and progress all meet when the the internal and external are in complete alignment.

4. Managing Up

- a. There's the adage, "Be brief, be bright, be gone". Instead of that, you should "Be present, be unique, and add value". Senior leaders don't need more of the same, they need unique talents and perspectives to add to the whole picture. So have a presence, be unique and be yourself. Also come to the table with constant ideas and suggestions. Be in the business of generating ideas and most of all take swings constantly.

Sean Cohan (Nielsen)

1. Timing is everything.

- a. When having hard conversations, always avoid conducting them during problematic times (e.g. unrelated crises, the minute someone becomes CEO, Friday end of day).

2. It's not about you (for the most part).

- a. Keep and articulate a maniacal focus on what's in the long-term best interest for the company, customer, and team at large.

3. You are an equal and you belong.

- a. Business is all about first names. It doesn't matter what someone's title or role is.

4. Manage fear and speak up when it counts.

- a. "Closed mouths don't get fed".

5. Respected and trusted, doesn't necessarily mean liked.

- a. Taking on difficult subjects will sometimes mean the former and not the latter.

6. Do your homework.

- a. Preparation will make for more audience trust, confident delivery, AND fewer open questions which sometimes stunt impact/action.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

Brooke Finlayson (Mondelez International)

1. [The Trust Equation by David Maister explained: How to build trust \(video\)](#)
2. [What Is Co-Elevation | Keith Ferrazzi \(video\)](#)
3. [The Essentials: Managing Up by Women at Work \(podcast\)](#)
4. [Ways to Strengthen Your Ability to Influence Others \(article\)](#)
5. [The Four Greatest Coaching Conversations \(book\)](#)

Smita Reddy (Edelman)

1. [The Belief Driven Employee: Edelman Trust Barometer \(report\)](#) – At Edelman, we have been studying Trust for the past 20+ years and what is driving Trust amongst consumers, businesses, employees, media, NGOs and a magnitude of other stakeholders. We've taken a deep dive on the high expectations employees have in the modern workplace. From workplace activism to the new expectations of CEOs and leaders, this a great resource if you are managing a team.
2. [Brown Table Talk \(podcast\)](#) – Hosted by my dear friend Mita Mallick and Dee C. Marshall. Most leadership lessons, advice and coaching flooding the market place are not speaking to Women of Color. Dee (CEO of Diverse & Engaged and Wall Street Alumni) and Mita (LinkedIn Top Voice & DEI Thought Leader) break down the challenges women of color face in the workplace. There's a specific episode on "What To Do When Your Name is Mispronounced" –which resonates for me in particular. (It's pronounced Smith-a, btw)
3. [Adam Grant \(author\)](#) – Adam Grant is an organizational psychologist and bestselling author who explores the science of motivation, generosity, original thinking, and rethinking. I am listening to his book "Think Again" but I love him every time he's on Dax Shepard's "Armchair Expert." My favorite Adam Grant quote is: "Bad bosses keep their people stuck in the same job. Good bosses create opportunities for their people to grow and advance. Great bosses encourage their people to pursue growth and advancement even if it means leaving for another organization."

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

Taylor Smith (Microsoft)

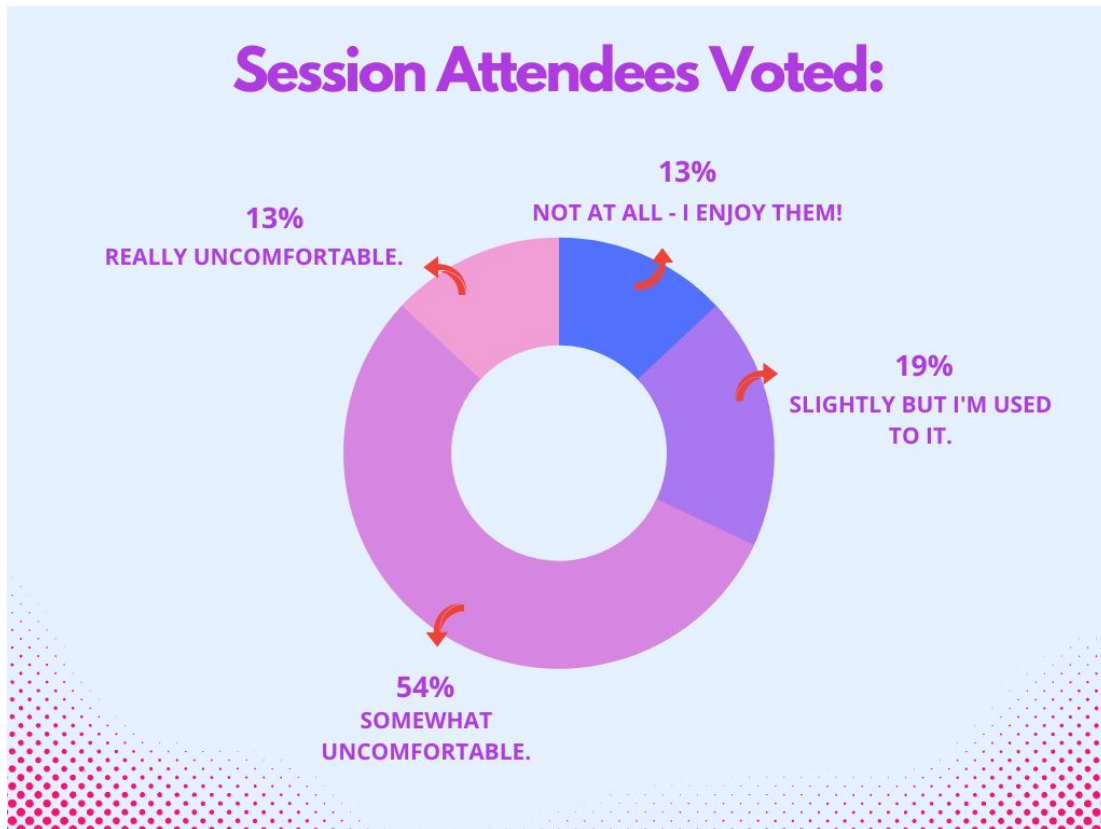
1. [Hit Refresh: The Quest to Rediscover Microsoft's Soul and Imagine a Better Future for Everyone](#) (book)
2. [Microsoft case study by Harvard Business Review](#) (article)
3. [Conscious Leadership Group](#) - *a great perspective and guidance on how to recognize systems and show-up the way that you want for the kind of impact that you want. There's a free series on YouTube you should check out.*
4. [Gary V](#) – *any and all of his content, especially podcasts.*

Sean Cohan (Nielsen)

1. [How to have difficult conversations by Mel Robbins](#) (video blog)
2. [How to Hold a Difficult Conversation with an Employee](#) (article)
3. [7 ways to learn from difficult conversations](#) (article)
4. [8 tips on how to manage up successfully](#) (article)

Session Poll

Q: How comfortable are you with uncomfortable conversations?



Want to dive back in? [CLICKHERE](#) to access the session recording.

