Preparing for difficult conversations - TalkWise worksheet

One thing *not* in short supply in our working lives is the potentially difficult conversation. We are all faced with a multitude of occasions when we need to make our voices work in a particular way and where it can be difficult to ensure the outcome we would wish.

What makes these conversations difficult is not just the uncertainty of the outcome, but the more immediate uncertainty of how the other person is going to react to what you say. Unfortunately, we often fill this uncertainty with negative anticipations and self-limiting beliefs.

There is no single, archetypal difficult conversation. Any conversation can be difficult, and it becomes a difficult conversation as soon as it feels like that to any of the people involved. Which might be before, during or after the conversation itself, or indeed before, during *and* after.

The purpose of this worksheet is to support you to think through and prepare for a potentially difficult upcoming conversation. You can use it on its own, or in conjunction with the Tips for steering a difficult conversation and Reflecting on difficult conversations TalkWise worksheets.

Thinking specifically about an upcoming conversation that has the potential to be difficult, reflect on and answer the following questions:

- What is the purpose of this conversation?
- What sort of conversation is it (Exploring, Positioning, Controlling)?
- What makes it potentially difficult?
- What is the desired outcome from this conversation?
- What is the distinctive contribution that you personally need to make?
- Therefore, what voice(s) does the conversation need?
- Ideally what would be the sequence for deploying the necessary voice? (i.e. What would be a useful dynamic or trajectory?)
- What can you actually say and do to make use of these voices?
- What in your own tendencies might disrupt your intentions to use these voices?
- How can you invite the other person(s) to use these voices?
- What sensitivities in yourself or the other person(s) is it important to be alert to during the conversation?
- What is your strategy if you notice yourself or someone else being triggered by a particular voice? Where (on the VoicePrint model) will you go instead?

While it is impossible to fully prepare for a conversation, because we cannot know what the other person will say or do, it may still be useful to practice speaking your key points out loud. The following prompts may be useful:

- What will you actually say?
- What words will you use?
- Which voices will you use?
- How does it sound when you say it out loud?
- How can your non-verbals (posture, gesture, tone, pitch, pace and volume) help you deliver your message effectively?
- How do you expect this to land? What might you adjust to help it land better?