

Doug Smith ([00:06](#)):

Hey leader and welcome to episode number 329 of the L3 Leadership podcast, where we are obsessed with helping you grow to your maximum potential and to maximize the impact of your leadership. My name is Doug Smith and I am your host. And today's episode is brought to you by my friends at Beratung Advisors. If you're new to the podcast, welcome, I'm so glad that you're here. And I hope that you'll enjoy our content and become a subscriber, know that you can also watch all of our episodes over on our YouTube channels to make sure you're subscribed there as well. And if you've been listening to the podcast for a while and it's impacted your life, it would mean the world to me. If you'd leave us a rating and review on apple podcast or Spotify or whatever app you listen to podcast through, that really does help us to grow our audience and reach more leaders.

Doug Smith ([00:44](#)):

So thank you in advance for that while leader, it is August of 2022, and I am taking some time to unplug and refresh. And as a result, the entire month of August, we're gonna be playing Encore episodes. You know, I get asked all the time, Hey, I just started listening to the podcast. You have over 300 episodes, where do I start? Or what are some of the best episodes? And so that'll be the whole purpose of this month is us bringing some of the best episodes back for you to listen to. And if you've never listened to these, I promise you they're gold. They're gonna add massive value to your life. And we'll start with today. And today I'm gonna be sharing a lesson that I did a few years ago called how to have hard conversations. And I basically shared my entire process for how I learned to get good at hard conversations, which is a crazy story that I think you're gonna enjoy.

Doug Smith ([01:27](#)):

And then how I actually walk through having hard conversations. I've sent this to so many leaders I've lost count of. I don't think there's a more critical skill. You can learn in leadership than having hard conversations. And I know also that that's one of the biggest struggles in fears that people have is they don't know how to have these hard conversations. And so, if, if that's you, if you struggle with having hard conversations, I hope that this episode will give you a process to do that. And so before we dive into the lesson, just a few announcements. This episode of the L3 Leadership podcast is sponsored by Beratung Advisors, the financial advisors at Beratung Advisors, help educate and empower clients to make informed financial decisions. You can find out how Beratung Advisors can help you develop a customized financial plan for your financial future by visiting their website at [BeratungAdvisors.Com](#).

Doug Smith ([02:13](#)):

That's [beratungadvisors.com](#), securities and investment products and services offered through LPL financial member, FINRA S I P C Beratung Advisors, LPL financial, and L3 Leadership are separate entities. I'd also like to thank our sponsor. Henne Jewelerst hey're jeweler owned by my friend and mentor John Henne, my wife, Laura, and I got our engagement and wedding rings at Henne Jewelers and had a wonderful experience. And not only do they have great jewelry, but they also invest in people. In fact, for every couple that comes into their store and gets engaged, they give them a book to prepare for marriage. And we just love that. So if you're in need of a good jeweler, check out, [hennejewelers.com](#). And with all that being said, let's dive in. Here's my lesson on how to have hard conversations.

Doug Smith ([02:55](#)):

Hey, everyone, today, I'd like to talk to you on the subject, how to have hard conversations. This is a subject that is near and dear to me, because this has been a huge area of growth in my life. I can't tell

you how bad I was at having hard conversations early on and how much it cost me in my leadership journey and in my life. And here's what I've come to learn about hard conversations that if you want to be successful in your career in leadership, in your marriage and your family and in your relationships, then you must learn how to have hard conversations. Absolutely must. However, through my experience with people, I found that very few people are equipped to have hard conversations in a healthy way. And so that's why I'm doing this lesson. I wanna share with you what I've learned about having hard conversations.

Doug Smith ([03:35](#)):

And my hope is that it'll help. Some of you become aware of your need to have hard conversations and that it will also equip you to actually start having them. And if you've been good at having hard conversations, but haven't done them in a healthy way, I hope to bring some health to the hard conversations that you need to have in your life. So with that being said, let me just briefly walk you through my journey to having hard conversations. And let me just inform you that this was over a 10 year process in a 10 year journey because I'm slow. A lot of you guys will get this a lot faster than I will, and I hope that you'll be able to, to make my 10 journey your 10 minute journey so to speak. And so let me walk you through my journey.

Doug Smith ([04:11](#)):

The first step in my journey was that I did not recognize the need to have hard conversations and therefore I never had them. And instead of handling them, I complain in gossip nonstop about an issue or a person. Some of the reasons for this were I never saw conflict handled in a healthy way. So I always viewed it as negative. Secondly, I had a fear of conflict with those in authority because I always saw myself as a child and not an adult. And just a side note on that. If you're looking for a great resource on that, if you feel like you're always a child and everyone else is an adult, I highly encourage you to read changes that heal by Dr. Henry Cloud. There's a whole section called growing into adulthood and it is absolutely phenomenal. And I've had to learn to see myself as an adult.

Doug Smith ([04:51](#)):

And so that was a big reason that I, I didn't have them as I never saw myself as an adult. And then I also loved gossiping. I don't know about you, but it feels good to persuade others about my negative opinions of someone or something. I actually loved gossiping. And you have to be careful cuz gossip can be really, really addicting. And so this was, this was the beginning of my journey. I didn't even recognize the need to have hard conversations. And so I didn't have them. Step two in my journey is I recognize the need to have hard conversations. However, I still lack the courage and skill to have them. And so I continue to just gossip about the issues and the people that were issues in my life. And so how did I become aware, two main things really in Matthew 18 and again, I'm a person of faith and Matthew chapter 18, Jesus actually sets up a process of having hard conversations and just to summarize it.

Doug Smith ([05:41](#)):

He said, listen, if you have an issue with someone, go to that person and have a hard conversation. And if you guys are unable to, to resolve the issue, then bring a third party in and then there's a whole other step. But I won't go into that today. But again, Matthew 18, it's the biblical model for hard conversations is go to the person. If you can't resolve it, bring someone else in. And then the second thing was Dave Ramsey. I'm a huge Dave Ramsey fan and his organization has a thing that they call the no gossip rule. And so literally if you gossip more than once in their organization, if you gossip twice and get caught,

you are fired or no questions asked, they do not tolerate gossip. And if that were the case at this point in my, my journey of having hard conversations, I would've been fired immediately from Dave Ramsey because all I did was gossip.

Doug Smith ([06:23](#)):

I never actually confronted issues in my life. So I recognized the need to have 'em at this point, but I lacked the courage and skillset to have them. And so I just continued to gossip the third step in my journey. And this was the, the life altering one for me is I was forced to have a hard conversation. I was forced. And I'll tell you that story in a second. And so as a result of having a hard conversation, I recognized that it wasn't as bad as I thought. And I determined to have them from now on in my life. And so this story real briefly, I was, I was complaining about an authority figure in my life a lot. And there was a guy that was coaching me and I started complaining to him about this person. And he said, well, when are you gonna have a conversation with that person?

Doug Smith ([07:05](#)):

And I said, I don't know. He's like, well, you need to put a date on it. I said, well, maybe sometime this week, he's like, why don't you call this person right now and schedule a time to have this conversation. And literally like my heart sunk, you know, sunk into my stomach. I said right now, and he said, yeah, right now I'm like, but we're in your office. He goes, I know. And he said, pick up your phone right now, call this person and say, I wanna schedule a time to have a conversation with you. And I'm like right now, right now. And he's like, yes, right now. And he made me call this person and I was, oh, I was just miserable. I called the person, I set up a meeting with her and ended up having a hard conversation. And at the end of the day, it was tough at first, but it wasn't nearly as bad as I thought.

Doug Smith ([07:46](#)):

And because it went so well, I determined from now on that I was gonna learn how to have hard conversations, no matter what, and handle them in a healthy way. And so that leads to the fourth step of my journey, which is I learned how to have hard conversations, which I'll be sharing about today. I grew in my ability to have them. And as a result, I stopped gossiping and I stopped allowing gossip to come to me, which was absolutely huge. And then the fifth step in my journey, which is where I am today is I try to model this in my personal life and on our organization, I try to model the ability to have hard conversations. I try to train others how to have hard conversations in a healthy way, because it it's been so beneficial for me. So that's been my journey again, that was over a 10 year period.

Doug Smith ([08:28](#)):

And I don't know where you are. Maybe you find yourself, you found, you find yourself right now, somewhere where I was along the way. And again, I just wanna share some things that'll help you expedite your growth in this area throughout the rest of the rest of the lesson. And so I'm gonna start before I walk you through the steps of having a hard conversation. I just wanna lay some ground rules for having hard conversations. And again, these are ground rules or values that I've developed over the past 10 years that I believe are absolutely essential to have late as a foundation, if you're gonna have hard conversations, either one on one or as a team. And so as you're listening to these, these are things that I share with our team when we're about to have a hard conversation. These are also things that I will share.

Doug Smith ([09:08](#)):

One on one with someone I'm gonna have a hard conversation with because I want the foundation and the groundwork to be laid. So we can actually have a healthy conversation. So here's the ground rules that I have. One I already shared. It's Matthew 18, 15 through 17. So when I talk to our team, I say, listen, we follow the Matthew 18 biblical model. We go to the person and actually address issues. We don't gossip and complain about them. And if we can't resolve this issue within, we bring in a third party to help us deal with that. And rarely what would have to go beyond that in a relationship. So we buy into that model. We have hard conversations. We go to people. We don't go behind their backs. The second ground rule that I always lay is listen. We have honest, hard, and awkward conversations all the time.

Doug Smith ([09:54](#)):

We have honest, hard and awkward conversations all the time. If this becomes normal for your organization, you're much more likely to have a lot healthier conflict, a lot healthier, hard conversations in your organization because people just expect it. So listen, we will always have honest, hard and awkward conversations. Number three is we don't let things linger. We leave it all out on the table. We don't let things linger. We leave it all out on the table. I believe this is your job. My friend, Ben Rath always told me that if you are getting paid by an organization, then it's your job to speak up and have hard conversations. That'll make the organization and make the other, other people around you better. It is your job. So listen, we don't let things linger. We leave it all on the table. And a great quote that I use for this.

Doug Smith ([10:37](#)):

I love what Colin Powell said. He said this, and this just lays the groundwork. He said, when, when we are debating an issue, loyalty means giving me your honest opinion, whether you think I'll like it or not disagreement at this stage stimulates me. But once a decision has been made, the debate ends from that point on loyalty means executing the decision as if it were your own. I love that. What was Colin trying to say? He said, listen, your job, when we're discussing an issue is to lay it all on the table. Not after your decision's been made, right? That that's not the time, but listen right now, right here, we're gonna, we're gonna lay everything out. We're gonna make a decision and move forward. And that's what you need to agree to. As a team, we're gonna leave it all out on the table and we're not gonna go behind each other's back after a decision's been made after this issue has been resolved.

Doug Smith ([11:25](#)):

The next ground rule is that we just believe the best about each other. We always give each other the benefit of the doubt. The next one is we know that everyone communicates differently and we respond accordingly. This is why personality assessments are so essential. And one that I'm really enjoying right now is the predictive index. I'd encourage you to check out that a lot of people use the disc profile. But once you become aware of how other people communicate, it changes the game on how you can have hard conversations. So listen, some people are very direct and those people need to learn actually how to listen and allow other people to take time to process, cuz they process very quickly and they don't always listen. They just speak, but other people are processors and they, they just need time to process before they speak.

Doug Smith ([12:09](#)):

And so once you start to learn different personalities and how they communicate, you can respect each other and have much healthier conversations. So learn and know that everyone communicates differently and we will respond in hard conversations accordingly. The next ground rule is we do not

gossip about others in the organization. We have direct conversations and direct others to do the same. It's basically the Dave Ramsey rule. We do not gossip. The next ground rule I always lay down is this is we all have the same goals and the same mission. Listen, we're all on the same team here, which is my next one. We're all one team. We all love each other. And then lastly, and again, that we're the organization I work in as a faith-based organization. But I, I love a person of faith as well. I just say that we all love G God and are growing in our walk with him.

Doug Smith ([12:56](#)):

Listen, nobody's perfect. Nobody has arrived. We're all trying to grow. And so so let's allow room for growth in each other's lives. As we walk in our journey with God, and those are the ground rules that I lay and I feel like that gets everyone on the same page and on the same foundation to have hard conversations. And listen, if you're the leader, then you need to model this on a daily basis. You know, do you go directly to people instead of gossiping about them? Do you leave it all on the table? Do you believe the best about each other? Do you know that everyone on your team communicates differently and respond accordingly? Not just know that, but actually do something with that information. Do you model this? Cuz here's what I know. If you don't model this on a daily basis, if you don't share these ground rules and values with your team, then you'll soon be surrounded with people with nothing to say and you'll think everything is fine when it isn't.

Doug Smith ([13:47](#)):

And so I wanna encourage you. If you're a leader here, I'll include all these in the show notes, share these values and ground rules with your team on a consistent basis and before an opportunity for your team to have a hard conversation and not just your team. How about in your one on ones? Share these values and ground rules with them. Hey, I want you to always be able to speak up and have hard conversations with me. So here's some ground rules that I live by and that I want our team to live by for when we wanna have hard conversations. And when you start doing that, it'll get everyone on the same page and you start to create a culture of people, willing and able to have hard conversations and move on. So now that we've laid the ground rules, I just wanna walk you through the steps in actually having hard conversations that I've learned.

Doug Smith ([14:30](#)):

And so seven quick steps, and then we'll wrap up the lesson. The first thing to do when you need to have a hard conversation is actually recognize the need to have hard conversations. I talked about my leadership journey that I, I wasn't even aware in my journey that I needed to have hard conversations. And so I just wrote here, if you find yourself consistently complaining about others or about other issues, then you most likely need to have a hard conversation. If you find yourself gossiping about people who are underperforming about people who are not treating you right about people that you're not working well together with when, when you find yourself gossiping about a decision that was made, that you don't understand or that you start to think you can make a better decision than the leaders in your organization. Or if you don't think you're moving up fast enough or you don't think the leaders in your organization know what they're doing, right?

Doug Smith ([15:19](#)):

These are all opportunities to have hard conversations. And so first just recognize the need to have hard conversations, which leads to step number two, at least at this point, determine how many hard conversations you've been putting off that you need to, to have how many hard conversations have you

been putting off that you need to have, and literally get out a piece of paper, get out your journal and start listening to them one by one, which leads to step number three, which is plan for the hard conversation plan for the hard conversation. Again, you now you have a list of hard conversations to have, start to look at each person and each issue, right? And, and ask yourself this about the other person. How does this person communicate? Are they direct do and thinks and speak quickly? Do they need time to process, et cetera?

Doug Smith ([16:06](#)):

Again, I talked about this earlier, but this is why personality tests are so important because you become aware of the way other people like to be communicated to and the way they communicate. And so just plan, just start to think through what is this conversation gonna look like? Which leads to step. Number four is actually write out the hard conversation in a journal. This was probably the most life changing step that changed the way I have hard conversations cuz I, I like I process out loud. And so sometimes if I just process out loud in a conversation, I say I'll kind of dumb things, but journaling enables me to process on my own before I process out loud to someone else. And so step four is write out hard conversations in a journal. And here's the questions that I would ask yourself and in journal about number one, what is the context of this situation that I'm upset about number two?

Doug Smith ([16:54](#)):

What am, what am I thinking? What am I thinking about the whole situation or the person number three, what am I feeling? What am I feeling about or what emotions are coming out as a result of this number four, what do I want for myself in this situation? What do I want, what are my wants? And then number five. How about this? What do you want for the other person? What do you want for the other person? Number six, what do you want for the organization? What's the, the win-win for the organization. If an organization is involved and then seven, what is your proposed plan for a solution? And I encourage you literally take those questions and literally write out your entire response of the conversation in a journal. And I think you'll be shocked at how much comes out and, and how much you learn before you even have the hard conversation about the conversation you want to have.

Doug Smith ([17:43](#)):

And again, I'll include notes to this in the show notes. And so you'll be able to access these questions there. Number five is once you've prepared for the conversation and, and journaled out what you wanna say, then it's time to pull off the bandaid and schedule the hard conversation. Just like that coach did to me in his office and said, call right now and set up the appointment. That's what I'm telling you to do right now. Take your list of people that you need to have hard conversations with and reach out to each of them and put a time on the calendar. Just pull off the bandaid. That's one of the greatest principles I think in having hard conversations, you're never gonna go to a point where it's like, man, this is gonna feel really good. I can't wait to have a hard conversation today.

Doug Smith ([18:21](#)):

No, you're never gonna get there. Just pull off the bandaid and go number six, have the hard conversation actually have it. So you've scheduled the appointment. Now you're sitting one on one across from a person that you're having an issue with. Here's my thoughts on what that conversation should look like first is to simply tell the person upfront that this is gonna be a difficult conversation and it's difficult for you because you've never really done these well in your past and then share the ground rules. But Hey, I want you to know that I'm not gonna leave anything on the table. I want you to know

that I believe the best about you. That I want this to be a win-win again, just go through some ground rules and set a foundation for a hard conversation. And then I always, I think this is so vital.

Doug Smith ([19:02](#)):

Ask them to listen to you all the way through before you're done before they speak. Cause a lot of times, if someone has a direct personality, they won't listen. They'll wanna start to justify or start to answer whatever question that that they think needs to be answered here and say, Hey, could you do me a favor? And actually listen to me all the way through. And then three, I want you to repeat what I said. So it's clear that we're both on the same page and I didn't miscommunicate anything. And then once they repeat that, then they can respond. Okay. So, Hey, this is what I heard you say, is that correct? And then you can say, yes, that's correct. Let's move forward and then they can respond and then you do the exact same thing. So Hey you repeat back to them, what you heard and then continue the conversation.

Doug Smith ([19:43](#)):

So, Hey, I heard you say this, is that correct? No, it wasn't quite that. Okay. Well, could you explain better or more? Do it again? Okay. Now it makes sense. Let's move forward. And ultimately you just go back and forth like that and don't stop until you both feel like you're on the same page with a plan of how to move forward. And again, if you get to an impasse where you can't move forward, that's where the Matthew 18 model would say, maybe you need to bring in a third party to help facilitate the conversation. And there's nothing wrong with that. And so again and then step seven is once resolved, move on, move on, stop gossiping about the issue or the person and refuse to allow others to gossip to you about it. I used to love being the person that everyone came to and gossip to cuz it made me feel I probably powerful, right?

Doug Smith ([20:29](#)):

Or like that everyone's on my team. But it was extremely unhealthy for me and it's unhealthy for them. And so refuse to allow others to gossip, to you and teach them how to have hard conversations. And you just repeat that process over and over and over again. So those are the steps that I used to have hard conversations. So in summary, having hard conversations is absolutely necessary if you're gonna be successful in life. It'll matter in your workplace, in your leadership, in your marriage, in your friendships, in every other area of, of your life. And I hope that if you've been unable to have hard conversations because of your past or you're on the other end, you've always been able to have them, but not in the most healthy way. I hope that you'll start to grow in this area starting today. And if this lesson helped you, I would love to know you can simply email me at Doug Smith, L3 Leadership.org or share this on social media.

Doug Smith ([21:17](#)):

It's always encouraging and helpful to know that we're actually adding value to leaders and helping them in their leadership journey. So thanks again for listening and I'll be back again next episode. Hey leader, thank you so much for listening to my lesson on how to have hard conversations. I hope that it added value to your life. You can find links to everything that I discussed in the lesson in the show notes at l3leadership.org/329. And as always leader, I wanna challenge you that if you wanna 10 X your growth this year, then you need to either launch or join in L3 Leadership mastermind group. Mastermind groups have been the greatest source of growth in my life over the last seven years. And if you don't know what they are, they're just simply groups of six to 12 leaders that meet together for at least one year in order to help each other grow, hold each other accountable and to do life together. So

if you're interested in learning more about launching or joining a group, go to [L3 Leadership.org](https://L3Leadership.org) for slash masterminds. Well, Hey leader, thanks again for listening today. My wife, Laura, and I love you. We believe in you and remember don't quit. Keep leading the world desperately needs your leadership. We'll talk to you next episode.