

advertising

Tough talk necessary, says author

PUBLISHED: 05 DEC 2012 00:05:22 | UPDATED: 05 DEC 2012 08:38:40

SHARE LINKS: [in](#) [Twee](#) [f Like](#) [Like](#) 0

A+ A-

RACHEL NICKLESS

Rachel is Work Space editor, based in our Melbourne bureau.

Stories by Rachel Nickless

- [What not to do at the Christmas party](#)
- [HR experts back leadership over law reform to boost productivity](#)
- [Shorten vows to act on disability plan](#)
- [Conversation killers: managers who can't talk the talk](#)

RACHEL NICKLESS

High-performance teams must have tough conversations, but these days many executives are ducking for cover, says author and coach Howard Guttman.



Howard Guttman.

Speaking to *The Australian Financial Review* from New Jersey in the US ahead of a consulting trip to Australia this month, Guttman says "many people have an old story that conflict is a bad thing, but it's necessary. The question of whether it turns out well or badly is a question of skill."

Guttman says "if you want to be perceived as a player having an impact in the businesses of today . . . you need to be adept at pushing the envelope, having difficult conversations but preserving the relationship." Guttman, principal of consultancy Guttman Development Strategies, says being able to have hard conversations is growing more important and not just because of financial turbulence, but also because the most innovative companies are moving away from hierarchical structures.

This means executives need to hold their peers to account, and be able to influence without official authority, he says.

Guttman has consulted with many large employers, including chocolate giant Mars, on moving to horizontal organisational structure to ensure they are more nimble, silos are broken down and there is no decision-making "hang time".

He argues any firm that has a conflict-averse culture is sabotaging itself, because people do not challenge accepted practices and problems fester. It leads to "triangulation" where people vent their frustrations with a third party, who then feeds that information back to the person involved.

"You would think in today's world you would have far less of that, but that's the reverse . . . people are frightened of losing their job so they try to maintain the illusion that everything is OK," he says.

Guttman, author of *Coach Yourself to Win* and *Great Business Teams*, adds the two most important skills when it comes to conflict management are first to listen and "hold up a non-judgmental mirror to the person who's talking and let them know that you've got it". The second is "your ability to assert your point of view in a neutral manner that is assertive not aggressive".

The Australian Financial Review

RACHEL NICKLESS

Rachel is Work Space editor, based in our Melbourne bureau.

Stories by Rachel Nickless

- [What not to do at the Christmas party](#)
- [HR experts back leadership over law reform to boost productivity](#)
- [Shorten vows to act on disability plan](#)
- [Conversation killers: managers who can't talk the talk](#)

RELATED NEWS

- [Conversation killers: managers who can't talk the talk](#)

advertising

**FINANCIAL REVIEW
CONFERENCES
AND EVENTS**

advertising



Defence Housing Australia
Invest in more than just bricks and mortar.

accenture

The new Australian consumer & employee
Who are they? And are you prepared?
Download Accenture research report

READ MORE

TOPICS [Employment & Industrial Relations](#)

FINANCIAL REVIEW

<p>News</p>	<p>Viewing options</p>	<p>Tools & Research</p>	<p>Financial Review Group</p>
<p>National World Business Technology Markets Personal Finance Opinion Lifestyle</p> <p>AFR MarketWrap5pm Capital</p> <p>Chanticleer Street Talk The Prince Rear Window</p> <p>Special Reports</p>	<p>Mobile iPad Digital Edition</p> <p>My afr.com</p> <p>Alerts My Alerts Create a new Alert</p> <p>Portfolios & Watchlists My Portfolios Create a new Portfolio Create a new Watchlist</p> <p>My Account</p>	<p>ASX Quotes ASIC Search</p> <p>Markets Data Australian Equities World Equities Commodities Currencies Derivatives Interest Rates</p> <p>Share Tables Economic Indicators Investment Banking League Tables</p> <p>Managed Funds Top Performing Search Managed Funds</p>	<p>➤ AFR BOSS ➤ AFR Magazine ➤ AFR TV ➤ BRW ➤ AFR Smart Investor ➤ MIS Australia ➤ AFR CFO ➤ AFR Asset ➤ Financial Review Conferences ➤ Fairfax Business Research</p>
<p>Events</p> <p>Events Register for Updates</p>	<p>Subscriptions</p> <p>Free 14 day trial to afr.com Subscribe Now</p>	<p>Advanced Search Articles & Videos ASX Announcements ASX Quotes Executive Profiles</p> <p>Other Tools & Resources Investment Guides</p>	<p>Help & Information</p> <p>Help Contact Us Letters to the Editor What's in afr.com? What's in <i>The Australian Financial Review</i>?</p> <p>About</p> <p>Services About Us Advertise Online Subscription Terms Newspaper Subscription Terms Conditions of Use</p>