



PRE-DRILL CAMP 2026 · LEADERSHIP SEMINARS · DAY 2

# Difficult Conversations

*"Care Enough to Say It."*

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Director of University Bands · All Leaders, Sunday, August 2, 2026

The Hampton University Marching Force

**HAMPTON'S HEARTBEAT**

# Icebreaker

"How come you ain't never liked me?" Cory asks. Troy's answer is blunt and unforgettable: it was never about like—it's about responsibility. The hardest conversations we have as leaders are rarely about being liked. They're about caring enough to say the thing that has to be said.

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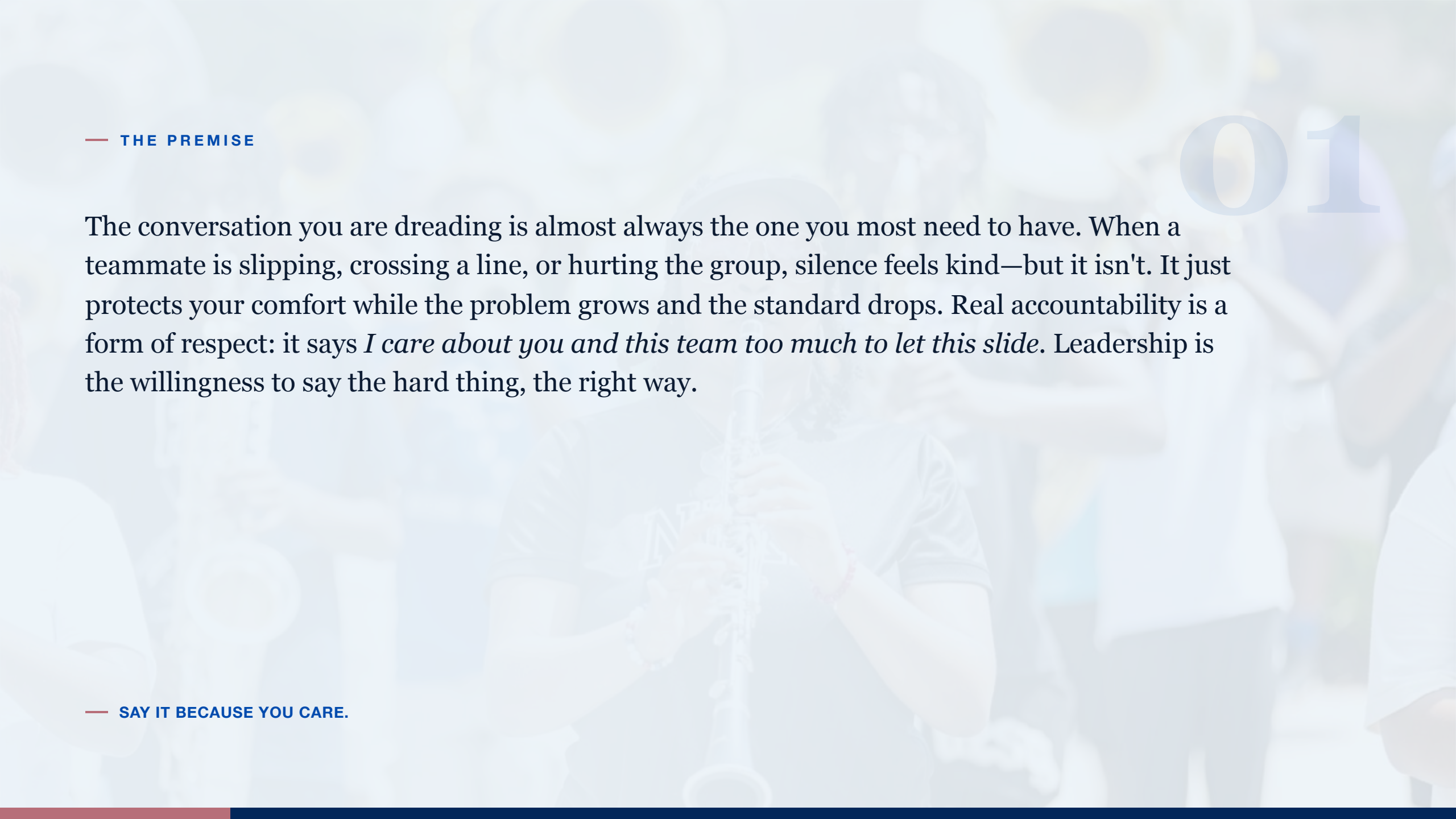


**Fences — “I Ain't Got to Like You”**

**[youtu.be/tVxYCeRXzGo](https://youtu.be/tVxYCeRXzGo)**

WATCH · 2:20

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## — THE PREMISE

# 01

The conversation you are dreading is almost always the one you most need to have. When a teammate is slipping, crossing a line, or hurting the group, silence feels kind—but it isn't. It just protects your comfort while the problem grows and the standard drops. Real accountability is a form of respect: it says *I care about you and this team too much to let this slide*. Leadership is the willingness to say the hard thing, the right way.

## — SAY IT BECAUSE YOU CARE.



# Why We Avoid Them

Silence feels safe. It isn't.

- ◆ We avoid hard conversations because we fear the conflict, the awkwardness, and being disliked. That fear is human.
- ◆ But avoidance has a price: the behavior continues, the standard erodes, and resentment builds in everyone who sees it ignored.
- ◆ Kim Scott calls silence-to-be-nice "**ruinous empathy**"—you protect someone's feelings today and let them fail in the long run.
- ◆ Saying nothing is not neutral. It is a choice—and usually the wrong one.

Source: Kim Scott, *Radical Candor* — "ruinous empathy."

# Care Personally, Challenge Directly

The two things a hard conversation needs—at the same time.

- ◆ Kim Scott's **Radical Candor** is the mix of both: you **care personally** about the person *and* you **challenge them directly** on the problem.
- ◆ Drop the care and challenge becomes **obnoxious aggression**—honest, but it lands as an attack.
- ◆ Drop the challenge and care becomes **ruinous empathy**—kind, but useless; the problem never gets fixed.
- ◆ Drop both and you get **manipulative insincerity**—the fake-nice that helps no one. Aim for the corner with *both*.

**Source:** Kim Scott, *Radical Candor* (care personally + challenge directly).

# Start With Heart

Check your motive before you open your mouth.

- ◆ Before the conversation, get clear on what you **really want**—for them, for the team, and for the relationship.
- ◆ If your goal is to win, to vent, or to look right, stop. That conversation will only make things worse.
- ◆ The right heart is simple: you want the person to succeed and the standard to hold. Lead with that, and it shows.
- ◆ People can feel your intent. Come in as an ally solving a problem, not a prosecutor making a case.

**Source:** Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler, *Crucial Conversations* ("start with heart").



# Facts, Not Stories

Separate what happened from what you decided it means.

- ◆ A **fact** is what you saw or heard ("you missed the last three rehearsals"). A **story** is what you make it mean ("you don't care").
- ◆ We confuse the two constantly—and people will fight your story even while they agree with your facts.
- ◆ Lead with the facts, and hold your interpretation **loosely**: "here's what I saw—help me understand it."
- ◆ You are often wrong about the story. Ask before you accuse.

**Source:** *Crucial Conversations* — separate facts from the stories we tell ourselves.

# Make It Safe

People get defensive when they feel unsafe—not when they hear truth.

- ◆ The moment someone feels attacked, they stop listening and start defending. No safety, no conversation.
- ◆ Open by making your **respect** and your **shared purpose** clear: "I'm on your side, and I think we both want the same thing."
- ◆ Watch for the signs that safety broke—silence, sarcasm, shutting down—and pause to rebuild it before you push on.
- ◆ You can say almost anything to almost anyone, if they trust that you mean them well.

**Source:** *Crucial Conversations* — mutual purpose and mutual respect.



# Name It: Situation, Behavior, Impact

A clean, fair way to put the issue on the table.

- ◆ **Situation:** anchor it in a specific time and place—"in yesterday's sectional..."—not a vague "you always."
- ◆ **Behavior:** describe exactly what they did, observably—"you were on your phone during the run"—no labels, no character read.
- ◆ **Impact:** name the effect it had—"so the section lost focus and we ran late."
- ◆ Specific and factual beats general and personal every time. SBI keeps it honest without making it an attack.

**Source:** Center for Creative Leadership — the Situation-Behavior-Impact (SBI) feedback model.

# Then Listen

It's a conversation, not a verdict.

- ◆ Say your piece, then genuinely **ask for theirs**: "that's how it looked to me—what's your take?"
- ◆ Talk tentatively and stay curious. You may be missing context that changes the whole picture.
- ◆ Listen to understand, not to reload. When people feel heard, they are far more likely to change.
- ◆ The goal isn't to win the conversation. It's to fix the problem and keep the person.

# Holding a Peer Accountable

The hardest accountability—because you have no rank.

- ◆ With a peer, you can't fall back on authority. Your only leverage is the **relationship** and the **shared standard**.
- ◆ Frame it as "us," not "me over you": "we hold each other to this—that's what makes us leaders."
- ◆ Do it privately and early, before it becomes a thing the whole section is watching.
- ◆ When peers hold each other accountable, the director rarely has to. That is a section running itself.



# When It's Hazing

The one conversation you never skip.

- ◆ Hazing is where "difficult" becomes **non-negotiable**. The culture team's job is to see it, name it, and stop it—immediately.
- ◆ **Silence is complicity.** Looking away, laughing it off, or "not my business" makes you part of it.
- ◆ Confront it directly, and protect the person over the tradition, the comfort, or the friendship.
- ◆ This is bigger than a peer talk: **escalate to the director.** On hazing, you are never handling it alone.

**Reference:** the HU Bands Handbook anti-hazing policy — hazing is prohibited, and every member is responsible for stopping and reporting it.

# Follow Through

The conversation isn't the fix—the change is.

- ◆ End with something concrete: what changes, starting when. Vague agreement fades by the next rehearsal.
- ◆ **Follow up.** Check back, notice the effort, and say so—accountability includes catching people doing it right.
- ◆ If it doesn't change, have the next conversation. One talk rarely settles a real pattern.
- ◆ And when it does change, let it go completely. No grudges, no bringing it back up. Settled is settled.



# The Hard-Conversation Playbook

Four moves for saying the thing that has to be said.

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## 1 Start With Heart

Get your motive right: you want them to succeed and the standard to hold.

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## 3 Then Listen

Ask for their side, stay curious, and talk it through as a dialogue.

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## 2 State the Facts

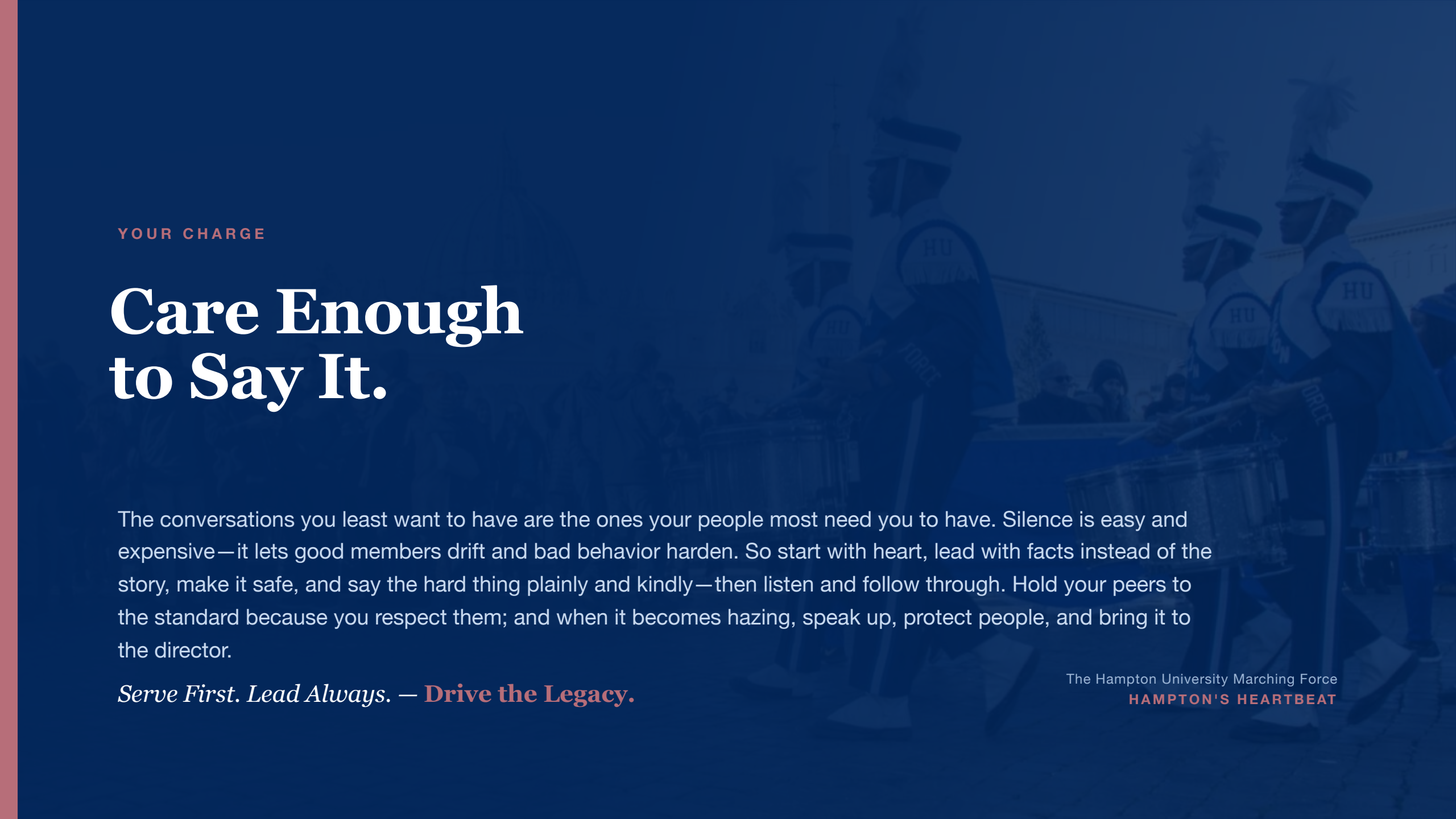
Lead with what you saw (Situation-Behavior-Impact), not the story you built. Keep it safe and specific.

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## 4 Follow Through

Land on a concrete change, follow up—and on hazing, escalate to the director.





YOUR CHARGE

# Care Enough to Say It.

The conversations you least want to have are the ones your people most need you to have. Silence is easy and expensive—it lets good members drift and bad behavior harden. So start with heart, lead with facts instead of the story, make it safe, and say the hard thing plainly and kindly—then listen and follow through. Hold your peers to the standard because you respect them; and when it becomes hazing, speak up, protect people, and bring it to the director.

*Serve First. Lead Always.* — **Drive the Legacy.**

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