

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

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LEARNING CONVERSATIONS

- Seek “meaning” and “interpretation” rather than “truth”
- Adopt a stance of curiosity rather than certainty
- Avoid confusing actions and impacts with intentions
- Discuss “contributions” by all involved rather than trying to identify “the one” who caused the problem
- Focus on problem solving and prevention rather than blame and punishment
- Use the “And” Stance
- Don’t forget the feelings

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Questions that Help You:

--Decide whether to have a conversation at all
--Have a “Learning Conversation”

- **Is it kind?** (What are your intentions? Do you mean well? Are your intentions complex? How will they perceive your intentions? Can you frame it kindly?)
- **Is it true?** (What is the specific message you wish to convey? Is the content of the message objectively true or is it your “truth”? Would they agree with you?)
- **Is it necessary?** (What is causing you to consider having this conversation? Is it important and sufficiently worthwhile?)
- **Is it timely?** (Is this conversation relevant at this time? Too late? Too early? Makes no difference when it occurs? Are you ready for it? Are they?)
- **Is it helpful?** (Is it likely that the conversation will produce some kind of result that is helpful. Helpfulness can be defined many ways, including improvement of the situation, new perceptions, emotional release etc... Will it be helpful enough to outweigh any negative outcomes?)

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Essential Influencing Skills

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Communication & Influencing Skills

- Empathy/ Active Listening → 
- Curious/Interested Questions → 
- Effective Assertion → 
- Reframing → 

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Empathy / Active Listening

Demonstrating Understanding

FIRST
Listen using:

- Eyes,
- Ears
- Attention (mental and physical)
- Heart

CONTINUE
Until you believe Speaker has been adequately and accurately heard

SECOND
Offer Your Understanding to the Speaker in your own words including:

- Factual Content
- Feelings Perceived

INVITE or WAIT FOR
Speaker response to your paraphrase

- validation
- clarification
- expansion
- correction

NOTE: Frequency, length and focus (factual & emotional) of paraphrasing vary according to the perceived needs of the Speaker.

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Listener Pitfalls ("Noise")

JUDGING

- Criticizing
- Evaluating
- Labeling/Name Calling
- Diagnosing
- Moralizing
- Praising Evaluatively

SENDING SOLUTIONS

- Trying to "Fix It"
- Advising
- Ordering
- Threatening

Communication Barriers

AVOIDING OR MOVING AWAY FROM THE OTHER'S CONCERNS

- Shifting to "My Story"
- Diverting Topics
- Excessive & Inappropriate Questioning
- Logical Argument
- Reassuring

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Benefits of Empathy

NOTE: Empathy is Understanding
NOT Sympathy or Agreement

FOR RECIPIENT

- Feel heard/understood
- Can stop repeating
- Decreases tension
- Feel respected
- Willing/ Able to share more
- Deepens own understanding
- Clarifies
- Helps get to "heart of matter"
- Promotes readiness to move on

FOR LISTENER

- Build rapport with speaker
- Helps you stay focused/attentive
- Reduces repetition
- Encourages information sharing
- Promotes forward movement
- Helps identify interests/concerns
- Clarifies situation
- Increases respect for you
- Makes speaker more receptive to listening when roles reversed

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CAUTION
Questions are:

- Directive
- Often misused

Questions ?

Effective Questions:

- Come from curiosity
- Come from real desire to seek:
 - information
 - understanding
 - interests
 - ideas
 - clarification
 - agreement
 - solutions
- Are used as a supplement to empathy (not a substitute)

Problematic Questions:

- Disguised messages:
 - attacks
 - judgments
 - signaled solutions
- Excessively Frequent
 - feel like interrogation
 - feel like investigation
 - too directive (not allow Speaker to develop own story) -
- Closed-Ended at the wrong time
 - good for narrowing and pinning down
 - bad for opening up and exploring
 - seem more investigative

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ASSERTION

Problematic Assertion:

- Failure to combine with listening
- Too early and too often
- Defensive
 - looks like an attack
- Disrespectful
- Blaming
- Attacking
- Highly positional
- Focus on "truth" seeking

Effective Assertion:

- Usually preceded by empathy
- Avoids assumptions
- Principled
- Respectful
- Conveys own needs, feelings, information, perceptions
- Talks about contribution rather than blame
- Looks at perceptions, personal meaning and interpretation rather than "truth"

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"I MESSAGES" (a method for effective assertion)

Standard Format:

1. I feel _____
(use authentic, non "sneaky-attack" feeling here)
2. When _____
(provide specific, neutral description of issue here)
3. Because _____
(describe tangible effect on you and/or values/interpretations that lead to your feelings)
4. And I would like _____
(add present request for dealing with the issue)

Purpose:

- To take ownership
- To speak respectfully
- To eliminate assumptions and attacks
- To increase probability other can hear difficult message

Notes:

- Order of elements may be varied
- Can leave out elements
- Results not guaranteed

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Feedback

Feedback is giving information regarding reaction and results, based on observation and data.

Purpose:

- To reinforce good performance.
- To improve performance.
- To prepare the foundation for joint problem solving.

Challenge:

- Thinking feedback is only negative.
- Using positive feedback as frequently as constructive feedback.
- Being vague, unspecific, personal.
- Making sure it is based on agreed upon guidelines, ground rules, or performance standards.
- Making it motivating, not personal or punishing.

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Giving Feedback

Techniques for Giving Feedback

1. Describe your own reaction to the relevant situation, based on your perception or data.
"When I attended the last team meeting, I was concerned about everyone having a chance to be heard."
2. Be specific. Telling someone they are being "dominating" is not as specific as to say:
"When the team was deciding the issue, you seemed not to listen to others and kept repeating your own point of view."
3. Focus feedback toward behavior the receiver can do something about and that achieves improved behavior and productivity.
"Your opinions are valuable, and I would like you to state them, as well as to hear others."
4. Be aware of appropriate timing and tone. Make feedback immediate and use a motivational tone.

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Receiving Feedback

Techniques for Receiving Feedback

1. Listen carefully.
2. Don't be defensive.
3. Note where you agree or where you do not.
4. Summarize and check back to assure you are clear.
5. Modify your behavior if you agree.

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Managing Negative Communication Directed Your Way

What are My Choices?? Give Me Some Tools!

- Try prevention: ground rules, empathy etc.
- "Step to the Balcony" – Manage reactions, withhold judgment
- Ignore it – don't give it space in the room
- Gentle ground rule reminders
- Name it (diplomatically) and negotiate process
- Play "Columbo" (innocent questions). Get curious
- Invite Self-Correction
- Shift from adversarial to collaborative orientation; Separate the people from the problem
- Fight fire with fire? Show strength. (dangerous?)
- Reframing

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What is it?

- Attacks, insults, blame
- Negative characterization
- Rigid positioning
- Unreasonable demands
- One upmanship
- Other communications that make you uncomfortable and/or make conversation unproductive



Reframing

How Do I "Reframe" a Negative Statement??

- Identify and paraphrase the understandable and non-offensive parts of the communication (may have to guess at underlying, unspoken causes)
- Do not paraphrase or repeat the problematic elements of the communication

Examples – Paraphrase and convert from:

Positional Statement → Underlying Need

"You" Attack → "I message"

Demand → Aspiration

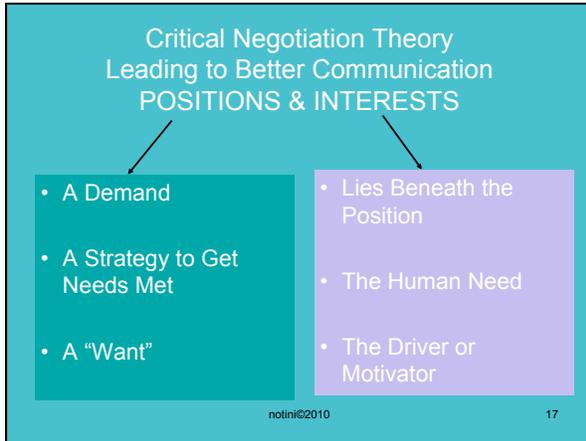
Fault Finding → Contribution

Past Blame → Future prevention

Unchecked Assumption → Possible interpretation

What is it?

- A form of empathy
- A defense against attacks
- A powerful tool for converting negative communications into manageable communications
- Not the only tool and not the best in every difficult situation



Categories of Interests/Needs

<u>CONCRETE SUBSTANTIVE</u>	<u>PSYCHOLOGICAL EMOTIONAL</u>	<u>PROCEDURAL</u>
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food • Shelter • Clothing • Health 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect • Autonomy • Enjoyment • Love • Understanding • Growth/Challenge 	<p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation • Order • Voice • Fairness/Equality

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Why seek the underlying interests?

- Communication occurs at more meaningful, respectful and "human" level
- Promotes better understanding
- Improves negotiation atmosphere. Tends to decrease hostility and conflict
- Often discover more possible solutions or more different strategies to meet the underlying needs
- Solutions are more likely to solve the "real" problem and be more effective and durable

But NOTE: Revealing interests too quickly and without adequate trust and reciprocity may be unwise as it can leave you vulnerable to exploitation.

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