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Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most

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Authors: Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen of the Harvard Negotiation Project

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Forward by: Roger Fisher, coauthor of *Getting to Yes*

Author bio and credits: All three authors are involved in the Harvard Negotiation project in addition to being consultants and lecturers.

Noteworthy info regarding contents and chapter titles: The book is written as a roadmap to difficult conversations a summary of which follows.

Author's main point: Whether we are dealing with under-performing employees, disagreeing with our spouse, negotiating with a difficult client, or simply saying “no”, or “I’m sorry”, we attempt or avoid difficult conversations every day. This book, based on fifteen years of research at the Harvard Negotiation Project, walks you through a proven step-by-step approach for how to have better and less stressful outcomes from your most difficult conversations. It shows you how to prepare yourself; how to start the conversation without defensiveness; and how to keep it constructive and focused.

A Road Map to Difficult Conversations

Introduction

A difficult conversation is anything you find hard to talk about due to fear of the consequences:

- The Dilemma: Avoid or Confront – if we try to avoid the problem, we’ll feel taken advantage of, our feelings will fester, or we’ll wonder why we didn’t stick up for our selves, and we’ll rob the other person of the opportunity to improve things. But if we confront the problem, things may get worse.
- There Is No Such Thing as a Diplomatic Hand - delivering a difficult message is like throwing a hand grenade. There’s no way to throw it with tact or to outrun the consequences. Choosing not to deliver a difficult message is like hanging on to hand grenade once you’ve pulled the pin.
- Difficult Conversations Are a Normal Part of Life. The problem isn’t in your actions, it’s in your thinking. It makes sense to shift from a “message delivery stance” to a “learning stance.”

The Problem

1. Sort Out the Three Conversations

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Decoding the Structure of Difficult Conversations – all difficult conversations share a common structure. Understanding the structure is essential to improving how you handle your most challenging conversations.

There's More Here Than Meets the Ear – we need to understand not only what is said, but what is not said. We need to understand what people are thinking and feeling but not saying to each other. The gap between what you are thinking and you are saying is part of what makes a conversation difficult.

Each Difficult Conversation Is Really Three Conversations

1. The **“What Happened?” Conversation** – disagreement about what happened.
2. The **Feelings Conversation** – each conversation asks and answers questions about feeling. Even if they are not addressed, they leak in.
3. The **Identity Conversation** – the conversation we each have with ourselves about what the situation means to us. This determines if we are off-center and anxious or if we feel “balanced”.

What We Can't Change, and What We Can – What we can change is the way we respond to each of these challenges. We can explore what information the other person has, and explore our own identity issues.

The “What Happened?” Conversation: What's the Story Here?

The Truth Assumption – we often fail to question one key assumption – I am right, you are wrong. There's only one hitch: I am not always right. Difficult conversations are almost never about getting the facts right. They are about conflicting perceptions, interpretations, and values. They are not about what is true, but about what is important.

The Intention Invention – the error we make is simple: we assume we know the intention of others when we don't. Intentions are invisible. We make them up.

The Blame Frame - the third error we make is that most difficult conversations focus significant attention on who's to blame for the mess we're in. Talking about blame distracts us from exploring why things went wrong and how we might correct them going forward. Focusing instead on the Conversations System allows us to learn about the real causes of the problem, and to work on correcting them.

The Feelings Conversation: What Should We Do with Our Emotions?

An Opera Without Music – difficult conversations do not just *involve* feelings, they are at their very core *about* feelings. They are an integral part of the conflict. Understanding feelings, talking about feelings and managing feelings are among the greatest challenges of being human. Talking about feelings is a skill that can be learned.

The Identity Conversation: What Does This Say About Me?

This conversation offers us significant leverage in managing our anxiety and improving our skills in the other two conversations. The identity conversation is about what I am saying to myself about me. Something beyond the apparent substance of the conversation is at stake for you.

Keeping Your Balance – as you begin to sense the implications of the conversation for your self-image, you may begin to lose your balance. This may cause us to lose confidence in ourselves, lose concentration, or to forget what we were going to say.





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Moving Toward a Learning Conversation

Once you understand the challenges inherent in the Three Conversations and the mistakes we make in each, you are likely to find that your purpose for having a particular conversation will shift. You come to appreciate the complexity of the perceptions and intentions involved, the reality of joint contribution to the problem, the central role feelings play, and what the issues mean to each person's self-esteem and identity.

Instead of wanting to persuade and get your own way, you want to understand what has happened from the other person's point of view, explain your own point of view, share and understand feelings, and work together to figure out a way to manage the problem going forward.

Shift to a Learning Stance

The "What Happened?" Conversation

2. Stop Arguing About Who's Right: Explore Each Other's Stories

Why We Argue, and Why It Doesn't Help

- We Think They Are the Problem
- They Think We Are the Problem
- We Each Make Sense in Our Story of What Happened – difficult conversations arise at precisely those points where important parts of our story collide with another person's story. The collision is a result of our stories simply being different, with neither of us realizing it.

Arguing blocks us from exploring each other's stories – it inhibits our ability to learn how the other person sees the world. We tend to trade conclusions but neither conclusion makes sense in the other person's story.

Arguing without understanding is unpersuasive – it inhibits change. People almost never change without first feeling understood. To get anywhere in a disagreement, we need to understand the other person's story well enough to see how their conclusions make sense within it. And we need to help them understand the story in which our conclusions make sense.

Different Stories: Why We Each See the World Differently

First we take in information. Second, we interpret what we see, hear, and feel; we give it all meaning. Then we draw conclusions about what's happening. At each step there is an opportunity for different people's story to diverge.

In difficult conversations, too often we trade only conclusions back and forth, without stepping down to where most of the real action is: the information and interpretations that lead each of us to see the world as we do.

1. We Have Different Information

- We notice different things so our views are based on different information
- We each know ourselves better than anyone else can - we each have access to different information.
- We should also assume that there is important information we don't have access to.

2. We Have Different Interpretations of the same information

- We are influenced by past experiences, which give meaning to the present.





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We Apply Different Implicit Rules – whether we are aware or not, our past experiences often develop into “rules” by which we live our lives. We get into trouble when our rules collide. When you find yourself in conflict, it helps to make your rules explicit and to encourage the other person to do the same.

3. Our Conclusions Reflect Self-Interest. We look for information to support our view and give that information the most favorable interpretation.

Move from Certainty to Curiosity

Curiosity: The Way into Their Story. There is only one way to come to understand the other person’s story and that is by being curious.

What’s Your Story? Get curious about what you don’t know about yourself too.

Embrace Both Stories: Adopt the "And Stance"

The And Stance gives you a place from which to start the full strength of your views and feelings without having to diminish those of someone else.

Two Exceptions That Aren't

- I Really Am Right – what is getting in the way. What is keeping him in denial?
- Giving Bad News – the And Stance is probably the most powerful place to stand when engaging in a difficult conversation to deliver or enforce bad news.

To Move Forward, First Understand Where You Are

3. Don't Assume They Meant It: Disentangle Intent from Impact

The battle over intentions. The question of who intended what is central to our story about what’s happening in a difficult situation. Intentions strongly influence our judgments of others.

Two Key Mistakes

The First Mistake: Our Assumptions About Intentions Are Often Wrong

- We Assume Intentions from the Impact on Us
- We Assume the Worst
- We treat ourselves more charitably
- Are There Never Bad Intentions?

Getting Their Intentions Wrong Is Costly

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- We Assume Bad Intentions Mean Bad Character
- Accusing Them of Bad Intentions Creates Defensiveness
- Attributions Can Become Self-Fulfilling

The Second Mistake: Good Intentions Don't Sanitize Bad Impact

We Don't Hear What They Are Really Trying to Say. While it is useful to attempt to clarify intentions, the question is when. If you do so at the beginning of a conversation, you are likely doing it without fully understanding what the other person really means to express.

We Ignore the Complexity of Human Motivations – intentions are complex

We Aggravate Hostility - Especially Between Groups

Avoiding the Two Mistakes

Avoiding the First Mistake:

- Disentangle Impact and Intent – separate actions, impact and assumptions
- Hold Your View as a Hypothesis
- Share the Impact on You; Inquire About Their Intentions
- Don't Pretend You Don't Have a Hypothesis – be clear you are sharing assumptions
- Some Defensiveness Is Inevitable – anticipate and be prepared to clarify what you are trying to communicate

Avoiding the Second Mistake:

- Listen for Feelings, and Reflect on Your Intentions
- Listen Past the Accusation for the Feelings- if you start by listening and acknowledging the feelings, and then return to the question of intentions, it will make your conversation significantly easier and more constructive.
- Be Open to Reflecting on the Complexity of Your Intentions

4. Abandon Blame: Map the Contribution System

In our story, blame seems clear. We're caught in blame's web.

Distinguish blame from contribution

- Blame Is About Judging, and Looks Backward. Focusing on blame is a bad idea because it inhibits our ability to learn what is really causing the problem and to do anything meaningful to correct it.
- Contribution Is About Understanding, and Looks Forward
- Contribution Is Joint and Interactive

The Costs of the Blame Frame

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When Blame Is the Goal, Understanding Is the Casualty
Focusing on Blame Hinders Problem-Solving
Blame Can Leave a Bad System Undiscovered

The Benefits of Understanding Contribution

Contribution Is Easier to Raise
Contribution Encourages Learning and Change

Three Misconceptions About Contribution

1. I Should Focus Only on My Contribution – Finding your own contribution doesn't in any way negate the other person's contribution.
2. Putting Aside Blame Means Putting Aside My Feelings – sharing feelings is essential.
3. Exploring Contribution Means "Blaming the Victim" looking for contribution isn't blame of any kind. By identifying what you are doing to perpetuate a situation, you learn where you have leverage to affect the system. Simply by changing your own behavior, you gain at least some influence over the problem.

Finding Your Fair Share: Four Hard-to-Spot Contributions

1. Avoiding Until Now. You may just complain to a third person.
2. Being Unapproachable – you contribute by being uninterested, unpredictable, short-tempered, judgmental, punitive, hypersensitive, argumentative or unfriendly.
3. Intersections – result from a simple difference between two people in back ground, preferences, communication style, or assumptions about relationships. Past experiences can create an intersection of conflicting assumptions about communication and relationships.
4. Problematic Role Assumptions. You may have unconscious assumptions about your role in a situation.

Two Tools for Spotting Contribution

Role reversal – pretend you are the other person
The observer's insight – look at the problem from the perspective of a disinterested observer.

Moving from Blame to Contribution - Map the Contribution System

What Are They Contributing?
What Am I Contributing?
Who Else Is Involved?

Take Responsibility for Your Contribution Early

Help Them Understand Their Contribution

Make your observations & reasoning explicit. Clarify what you would have them do differently.





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The Feelings Conversation

5. Have Your Feelings (Or They Will Have You)

Feelings Matter: They Are Often at the Heart of Difficult Conversations. Our failure to acknowledge and discuss feelings derails a startling number of difficult conversations. And the inability to deal openly and well with feelings can undermine the quality and health of our relationships.

We Try to Frame Feelings Out of the Problem. Solving problems seems easier than talking about emotions. The problem is that when feelings are at the heart of what's going on, they are the business at hand and ignoring them is nearly impossible. In many difficult conversations, it is really only at the level of feelings that the problem can be addressed.

Unexpressed feelings **can leak into** the conversation- they can alter your affect and tone of voice. They express themselves through your body language or facial expressions.

Unexpressed feelings **can burst into** the conversation- for some people, the problem is not that they are unable to express feelings, but they are unable not to.

Unexpressed feelings **make it difficult** to listen – good listening requires an open and honest curiosity about the other person. Buried emotions draw the spotlight back to us. It's hard to hear someone when we are feeling unheard. Our listening ability often increases remarkably once we have expressed our own strong feelings.

Unexpressed feelings **take a toll on** our self-esteem & relationships – by keeping your feelings out of the relationship you are keeping an important part of yourself out of the relationship.

A Way Out of the Feelings Bind

If you are able to share your feelings with skill, you can avoid many of the potential costs associated with expressing feelings and even reap some unexpected benefits.

First you need to sort out just what your feelings are; second, you need to negotiate with your feelings; and third, you need to share your actual feelings, not attributions or judgments about the other person.

Finding Your Feelings: Learn Where Feelings Hide

When it comes to understanding our own emotions, most of us are lost. Explore your emotional footprint. Accept that feelings are normal and natural. Recognize that good people can have bad feelings.

Learn that your feelings are as important as theirs – when you are more concerned about others' feelings than your own, you teach others to ignore your feelings too. Beware: One of the reasons you haven't raised the issue is that you don't want to jeopardize the relationship. Yet by not raising it, the resentment you feel will grow and slowly erode the relationship anyway.

Find the bundle of feelings behind the simple labels – in many cases we are blinded to the complexity of our feelings by one strong feeling which trumps all the others. Don't let hidden feelings block other emotions. Find the feelings lurking under attributions, judgments & accusations.

Lift the Lid on Attributions and Judgments – finding the feelings lurking behind angry attributions and judgments is a key step in bringing feelings into a conversation effectively.

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You can improve your ability to recognize and cope with identity issues when they hit. Thinking clearly and honestly about who you are can help reduce your anxiety level during the conversation and significantly strengthen your foundation in its aftermath.

Use the Urge to Blame as a Clue to Find Important Feelings

Don't Treat Feelings as Gospel: Negotiate with Them

Before saying what you are feeling, negotiate with your feelings. Our feelings are based on perceptions and our perceptions are negotiable. This involves recognition that our feelings are formed in response to our thoughts. This means that the route to changing your feelings is through altering your thinking. Next we need to explore our assumptions about the other person's intentions. Finally we should consider the contribution system.

Don't Vent: Describe Feelings Carefully

1. Frame Feelings Back into the Problem – Step one in expressing feelings well is remembering that they're important. If feelings are the real issue, then feelings should be addressed.
2. Express the Full Spectrum of Your Feelings
3. Don't Evaluate - Just Share – getting everyone's feelings on the table, heard and acknowledged, is essential before you can begin to sort them through. You can establish an evaluation-free zone by respecting the following guidelines:
 - Express Your Feelings Without Judging, Attributing, or Blaming
 - Don't Monopolize: Both Sides Can Have "Strong Feelings at the Same Time
 - An Easy Reminder: Say "I Feel. . . ." this keeps the focus on feelings.

The Importance of Acknowledgment

Each side must have their feelings acknowledged – let people know that what they have said has made an impression on you, that their feelings matter to you, and that you are working to understand them.

Sometimes Feelings Are All That Matter

The Identity Conversation

6. Ground Your Identity: Ask yourself what's at stake

Difficult conversations threaten our identity. Our anxiety results not just from facing the other person, but having to face ourselves. The conversation threatens our identity - the story we tell ourselves about ourselves - and having our identity threatened can be profoundly disturbing.

Three core identity issues seem particularly common & often underlie what concerns us most during difficult conversations.

- Am I Competent?
- Am I a Good Person?
- Am I Worthy of Love?

An identity quake can knock us off balance and even cause us to react physically.





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There's No Quick Fix- Grappling with identity issues is what life and growth are all about, and no amount of love or accomplishment or skill can insulate you from these challenges.

Vulnerable Identities: The All-or-Nothing Syndrome

The primary peril of all-or-nothing thinking is that it leaves our identity unstable, making us hypersensitive to feedback.

Denial – Clinging to a purely positive identity leaves no place in our self-concept for negative feedback. The only way to keep my identity intact is to deny feedback – to figure out why it's not really true, why it doesn't really matter, or why what I did wasn't actually a mistake. Denial requires a huge amount of psychic energy, and sooner or later the story we're telling ourselves is going to become untenable. The bigger the gap between what we hope is true and what we fear is true, the easier it is for us to lose our balance.

Exaggeration- is the alternative to denial. In negative feedback we not only adjust our self-image but we flip it. We let their feedback define who we are – when we exaggerate, we act as if the other person's feedback is the only information we have about ourselves.

Ground Your Identity

Step One: Become Aware of Your Identity Issues – observe whether there are patterns to what tends to knock you off balance during difficult conversations, and then ask yourself why.

Step Two: Complexify Your Identity (Adopt the And Stance) - Once you've identified which aspects of your identity are most important to you or seem most vulnerable, you can begin to complexify your self-image. No one is *always* anything. We each exhibit a constellation of qualities, positive and negative, and constantly grapple with how to respond to the complicated situations life presents.

Three things to accept about yourself – As you move away from all-or-nothing identity and toward a more complex view of who you are, you'll notice that it is easier to accept certain parts of yourself that have given you trouble in the past. There are three characteristics that are particularly important to accept about yourself in difficult conversations:

1. You Will Make Mistakes – generally competent people who take the possibility of mistakes in stride are seen as confident, secure, and “big enough” not to have to be perfect, whereas those who resist acknowledging even the possibility of a mistake are seen as insecure and *lacking* confidence.
2. Your Intentions Are Complex
3. You Have Contributed to the Problem – assess and take responsibility for what you have contributed to the problem.

During the Conversation: Learn to Regain Your Balance

You will get knocked over in the conversation but the real question is whether you are able to get back on your feet & keep the conversation moving in a productive direction. Four things you can do are:

1. Let Go of Trying to Control Their Reaction
2. Prepare for Their Response – if any of the issues involve identity issues then prepare for them in advance.
3. Imagine That It's Three Months or Ten Years from Now
4. Take a break – if you are just too close to the problem and too overwhelmed by your internal identity quake to engage effectively in the conversation. Ask for some time to think about what you've heard: Get some air.

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Their Identity Is Also Implicated

Raising Identity Issues Explicitly – sometimes your identity issues will be important to you, but not terribly relevant to the person you are talking to or the relationship. Identify the issue in your own mind and recognize that it's something for you to work out on your own.

Find the Courage to Ask for Help if you can't work it out on your own. By trusting a friend enough to ask, you offer them an extraordinary opportunity to do something important for someone they care about.

Create a Learning Conversation

7. What's Your Purpose? When to Raise It and When to Let Go

To Raise or Not to Raise: How to Decide?

- How do I know I've made the right choice? Hold as your goal to think clearly as you take on the task of making a considered choice.
- Work through the Three Conversations. Get a better handle on your feelings, key identity issues, and possible distortions or gaps in your perceptions.

Three Kinds of Conversations That Don't Make Sense

- Is the Real Conflict Inside You?
- Is there a better way to address the issue than talking about it? What's called for may be a change in your behavior. Sometimes actions are better than words.
- Do You Have Purposes That Make Sense

Remember, You Can't Change Other People. We can't make these things happen. We can't change someone's mind or force them to change their behavior. Changes in attitude and behavior rarely come about because of arguments, facts, and attempts to persuade. The paradox is that trying to change someone rarely results in change.

On the other hand, engaging someone in a conversation where mutual learning is the goal often results in change. They are more likely to change if they think we understand them and if they feel heard and respected. They are more likely to change if they feel *free* not to.

Don't Focus on Short-Term Relief at Long-Term Cost. Negotiating with yourself to shift your purposes can lower the threshold of how risky the conversation is likely to be and improve the odds of a constructive outcome.

Don't Hit-and-Run – if you're going to talk, talk. You can't do it on the fly.





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Letting Go

Letting go takes time, and it is rarely a simple journey. It's not easy to find a place where you can set free the pain, or shame, you carry from your experiences.

Adopt Some Liberating Assumptions – a good place to start is in the identity conversation, challenging some of the common assumptions that can get in the way of letting go and being at peace with our choices. Four liberating assumptions are:

1. It's Not My Responsibility to Make Things Better; It's My Responsibility to Do My Best
2. They Have Limitations Too and they may not have the capacity to be different.
3. This Conflict Is Not Who I Am. Fight for what is right and fair, not because you need the conflict to survive.
4. Letting Go Doesn't Mean I No Longer Care. Letting go of the emotions and identity issues wrapped up in a difficult conversation can be one of the most challenging things you do. Letting go, at heart, is about how to handle with skill and grace *not* having a difficult conversation.

If You Raise It: Three Purposes that Work

The gold standard here is working for mutual understanding. Not necessarily mutual agreement. Keep the following three purposes front and center in your consciousness.

1. Learning Their Story
2. Expressing Your Views and Feelings
3. Problem-Solving Together

Stance and purpose go hand in hand. These three purposes accommodate the fact that you and the other person see the world differently, and that each of you have powerful feelings about what is going on, and that you each have your own identity issues to work through.

8. Getting Started: Begin from the Third Story

The most stressful moment of a difficult conversation is often the beginning. What you say at the outset can put you squarely on the road toward understanding and problem- solving.

Why Our Typical Openings Don't Help

We Begin Inside Our Own Story. We describe the problem from our own perspective and, in doing so, trigger just the kinds of reactions we hope to avoid.

We Trigger Their Identity Conversation from the Start. Our story communicates a judgment about them. We trigger the other person's Identity Conversation from the outset, and there's no room in our agenda for their story. By leaving their story out, we implicitly set up a trade-off between their version of events and our version, between our feelings and theirs.





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Step One: Begin from the Third Story

In addition to your story and the other person's story, every difficult conversation has an invisible Third Story.

Think Like a Mediator – describe the problem between the parties in a way that rings true for both sides simultaneously.

Not Right or Wrong, Not Better or Worse - Just Different. The key is learning to describe the gap – or difference – between your story and the other person's story.

The Third Story captures the difference and allows both sides to buy into the same description of the problem: each feels that their story is acknowledged as a legitimate part of the discussion. You don't have to know the other person's story to include it in initiating the conversation this way. All you have to do is acknowledge that it's there: that there are probably lots of things you don't understand about their perspective, and that one of the reasons you want to talk is that you want to learn more about their view. Most conversations can be initiated from the Third Conversation to include both perspectives and invite joint exploration. Keeping communication open and understanding the feelings and perspectives involved sends an important message that even when we disagree, we care about each other.

If they start the conversation, you can still step to the Third Story. You take whatever the other person says and use it as their half of a description from the Third Story.

Step Two: Extend an Invitation

- Offer a simple invitation: I've described the problem in a way that we can each accept. Now I want to propose mutual understanding, and problem-solving as purposes, check to see if this makes sense to you, and invite you to join me in the conversation.
- Describe Your Purposes – let them know up front that your goal for the discussion is to understand their perspective better, share your own, and talk about how to go forward together makes the conversation significantly less mysterious and threatening.
- Invite, Don't Impose
- Make Them Your Partner in Figuring It Out. Offer a genuine role in managing the problem.
- Be Persistent

A Map for Going Forward: Third Story, Their Story, Your Story

What to Talk About: The Three Conversations. Explore where each story comes from. Share the impact on you. Take responsibility for your contribution. Describe feelings.

How to Talk About It: Listening, Expression, and Problem-Solving

9. Learning: Listen from the Inside Out

We all have a deep desire to feel heard, and to know that others care enough to listen. Listening well is one of the most powerful skills you can bring to a difficult conversation.

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The Stance of Curiosity: How to Listen from the Inside Out

Forget the Words, Focus on Authenticity – authenticity is the heart of good listening. It means that you are listening because you are curious and because you care, not just because you are supposed to.

The Commentator in Your Head: Become More Aware of Your Internal Voice – listen to yourself and pay attention to your own internal voice – what you are thinking but not saying – is the first step in listening authentically.

Don't Turn It Off, Turn It Up – turn up your internal voice and get to know the kinds of things it says. Only when you are fully aware of your own thoughts can you begin to manage them and focus on the other person.

- Managing Your Internal Voice – get it into a learning mode.
- Negotiate Your Way to Curiosity – if you hold as one of your primary purposes understanding the other person, it motivates your internal voice to ask questions.
- Don't Listen: Talk – at times, to be able to listen, you first need to talk. Let the other person know that you want to listen and that you care what they have to say but that you can't listen right now.

Three Skills: Inquiry, Paraphrasing, and Acknowledgment

Inquire to Learn

- Don't Make Statements Disguised as Questions
- Don't Use Questions to Cross-Examine
- Ask Open-Ended Questions that give the other person latitude in how to answer.
- Ask for More Concrete Information – to be explicit about their reasoning and their vision.
- Ask Questions About the Three Conversations
- Make it safe for them Not to Answer

Paraphrase for clarity

- Check Your Understanding
- Show That You've Heard

Acknowledge Their Feelings

- Answer the Invisible Questions
- How to Acknowledge: an acknowledgement is any indication that you are struggling to understand the emotional content of what the other person is saying.
- Order Matters: Acknowledge Before Problem-Solving
- Acknowledging Is Not Agreeing – we can acknowledge the power and importance of the feelings, while disagreeing with the substance of what is being said.

A Final Thought: Empathy Is a Journey, Not a Destination

The deepest form of understanding another person is empathy. Empathy involves a shift from my observing how you seem on the outside, from my imagining what it feels like to be you on the inside, with your set of experiences and background and looking out at the world through your eyes.





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10. Expression: Speak for Yourself with Clarity and Power; Orators Need Not Apply – you just need to be able to express what you see and why you see it that way, how you feel, and maybe who you are.

You're Entitled (Yes, You)

No More, But No Less – we all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Recognizing your entitlement can help you find your voice in a conversation and the courage to stand up for yourself when you feel frightened or powerless. Beware Self-Sabotage

Failure to Express Yourself Keeps You Out of the Relationship. When we fail to share what's most important to us, we detach ourselves from others and damage our relationships. Expressing yourself can be difficult and trying, but it gives the relationship a chance to change and become stronger.

Feel Entitled, Feel Encouraged, But Don't Feel Obligated

Speak the Heart of the Matter

- Start with What Matters Most. We say the least important things, sometimes over and over again, and wonder why the other person doesn't realize what we really think and how we really feel.
- Say What You Mean: Don't Make Them Guess
- Don't Rely on Subtext
- Avoid Easing In: (When you try to soften a message by delivering it indirectly through hints and leading questions.) State your thoughts straight out, while also indicating that you are interested in whether the other person sees the situation differently and if so, how. Then if you disagree, you can directly talk about how to test or otherwise reconcile or deal with your different views.
- Don't make Your Story Simplistic: Use the "me-me" And. The And Stance recognizes that each of various perceptions, feelings, and assumptions is important to talk about.

Telling Your Story with clarity: Three Guidelines

1. Don't Present Your Conclusions as The Truth
2. Share Where Your Conclusions Come From. Share your conclusions and opinions as *your* conclusions and opinions and not as the truth. Share what's beneath your conclusions – the information you have and how you have interpreted it.
3. Don't Exaggerate with "Always" and "Never": Give Them Room to Change. The key is to communicate your feelings in a way that invites and encourages the recipient to consider new ways of behaving, rather than suggesting they're a jerk and it's too bad there's nothing they can do about it.





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Help Them Understand You

- Recognize that different people take in information at different speeds and in different ways.
- Ask Them to Paraphrase Back – helps you check your understanding and helps them know you've heard.
- Ask How They See It Differently - and Why

11. Problem-Solving: Take the Lead

Skills for Leading the Conversation – if your conversations are going to get anywhere, you're going to have to take the lead. There are a set of powerful moves you can make during the conversation – reframing, listening, and naming the dynamic – that can keep the conversation on track, whether the other person is being cooperative or not.

Reframe, Reframe, Reframe

You Can Reframe Anything

The "You-Me" And

It's Always the Right Time to Listen

You can't move the conversation in a more positive direction until the other person feels heard and understood. And they won't feel heard and understood until you've listened.

Be Persistent About Listening- you can use listening to direct the conversation.

Name the Dynamic: Make the Trouble Explicit

Now What? Begin to Problem-Solve

Often simply sorting out the Three Conversations and bringing to light the heart of the matter for each person clears up the issues between you. At the end of the day, you still need to decide how to go forward together, and you may not agree how to do that.

It Takes Two to Agree - difficult conversations require a certain amount of compromise and mutual accommodation to the other's needs.

- Gather Information and Test Your Perceptions
- Propose Crafting a Test
- Say What Is Still Missing
- Say What Would Persuade You
- Ask What (If Anything) Would Persuade Them
- Ask Their Advice
- Invent Options
- Ask What Standards Should Apply
- The Principle of Mutual Care Taking
- If You Still Can't Agree, Consider Your Alternatives





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It Takes Time

12. Putting It All Together

- ✓ Step One: Prepare by Walking Through the Three Conversations
- ✓ Step Two: Check Your Purposes and Decide Whether to Raise It
- ✓ Step Three: Start from the Third Story
- ✓ Step Four: Explore Their Story and Yours
- ✓ Step Five: Problem-Solving

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