

Managing Difficult Conversations in the Workplace (Part 1)

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No conflicts of interest

Objectives

Think about difficult conversations differently

Be better able to:

- Prepare
- Get started
- Stay centered

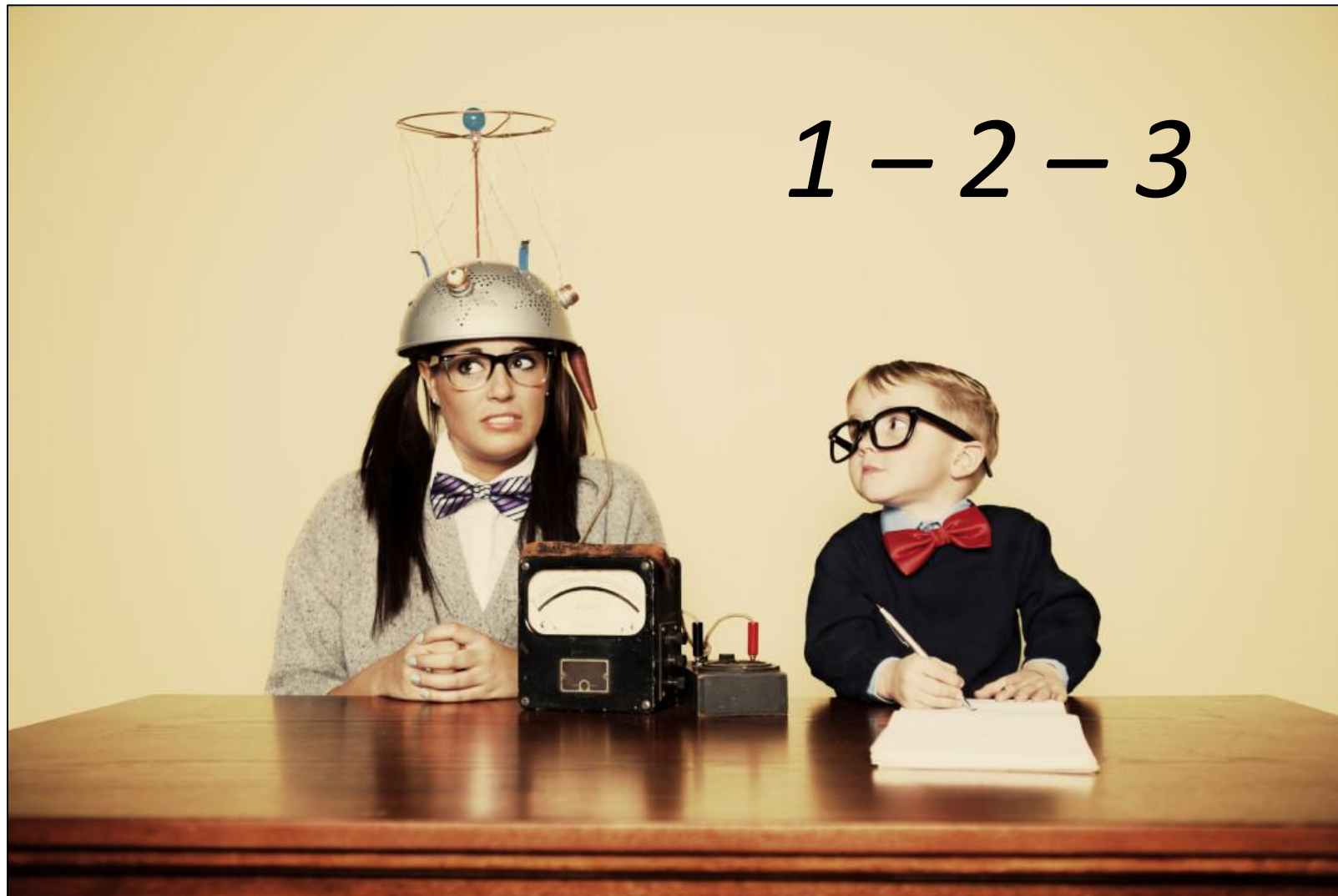
Consider some Do's and Don'ts

Thanks to
Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen, The Harvard Negotiation Project;
Michael Dues, University of Arizona, Holly Weeks, Holly Weeks Communications, Boston

Caveats

- One-to-one conversations
- Workplace interactions
- Initiator role
- Western cultural norms

1 - 2 - 3





How many of you can think of a conversation that...

...you have been putting off?

...didn't go as you hoped?

...you had but would like to re-do?

**I WISH
LIFE HAD
A REWIND
BUTTON.**

Reflect



- What is (was) the situation?
- What did you want to happen as a result of the conversation?
- What was the outcome? For you? For the other? For the problem at hand?

Why are they difficult?



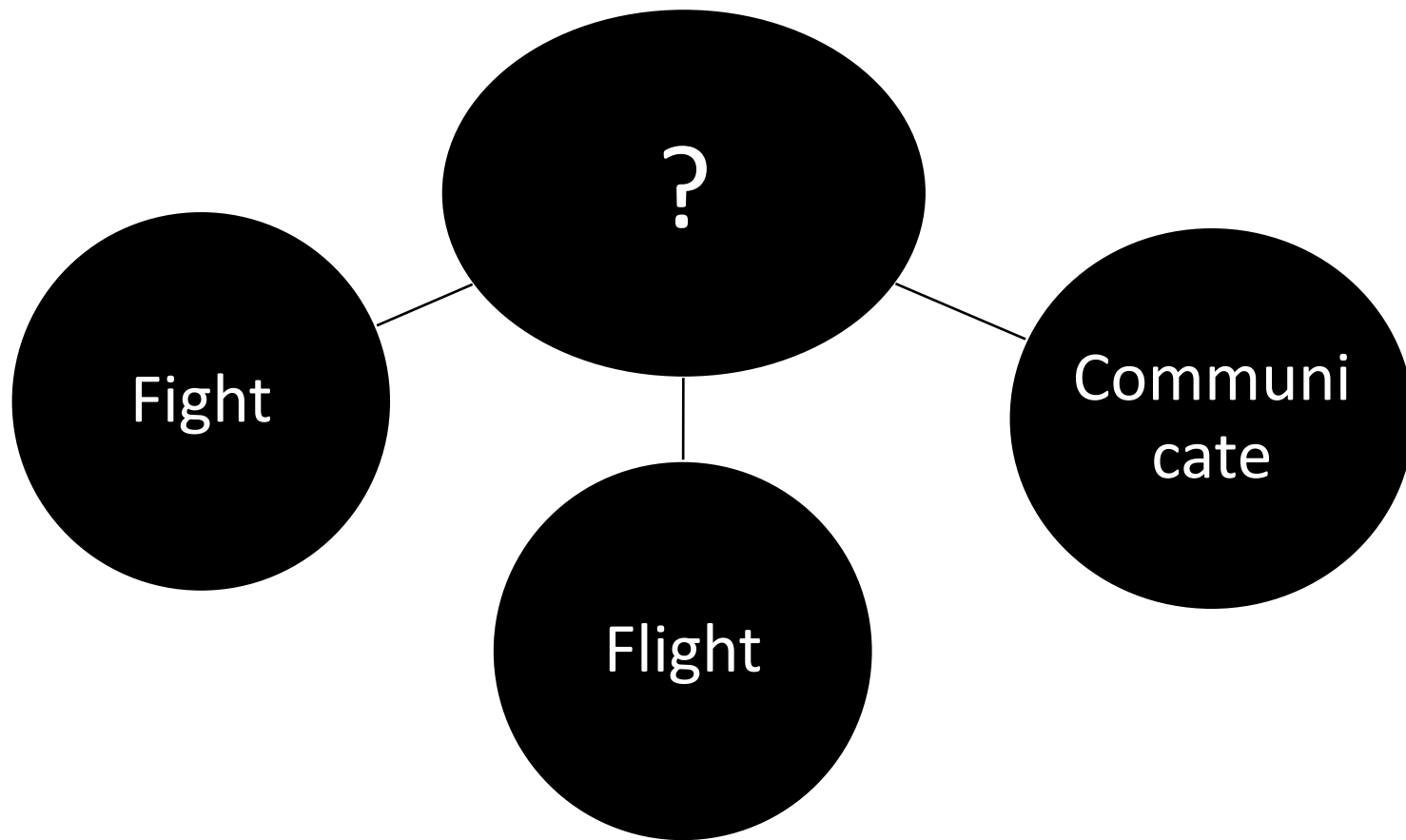


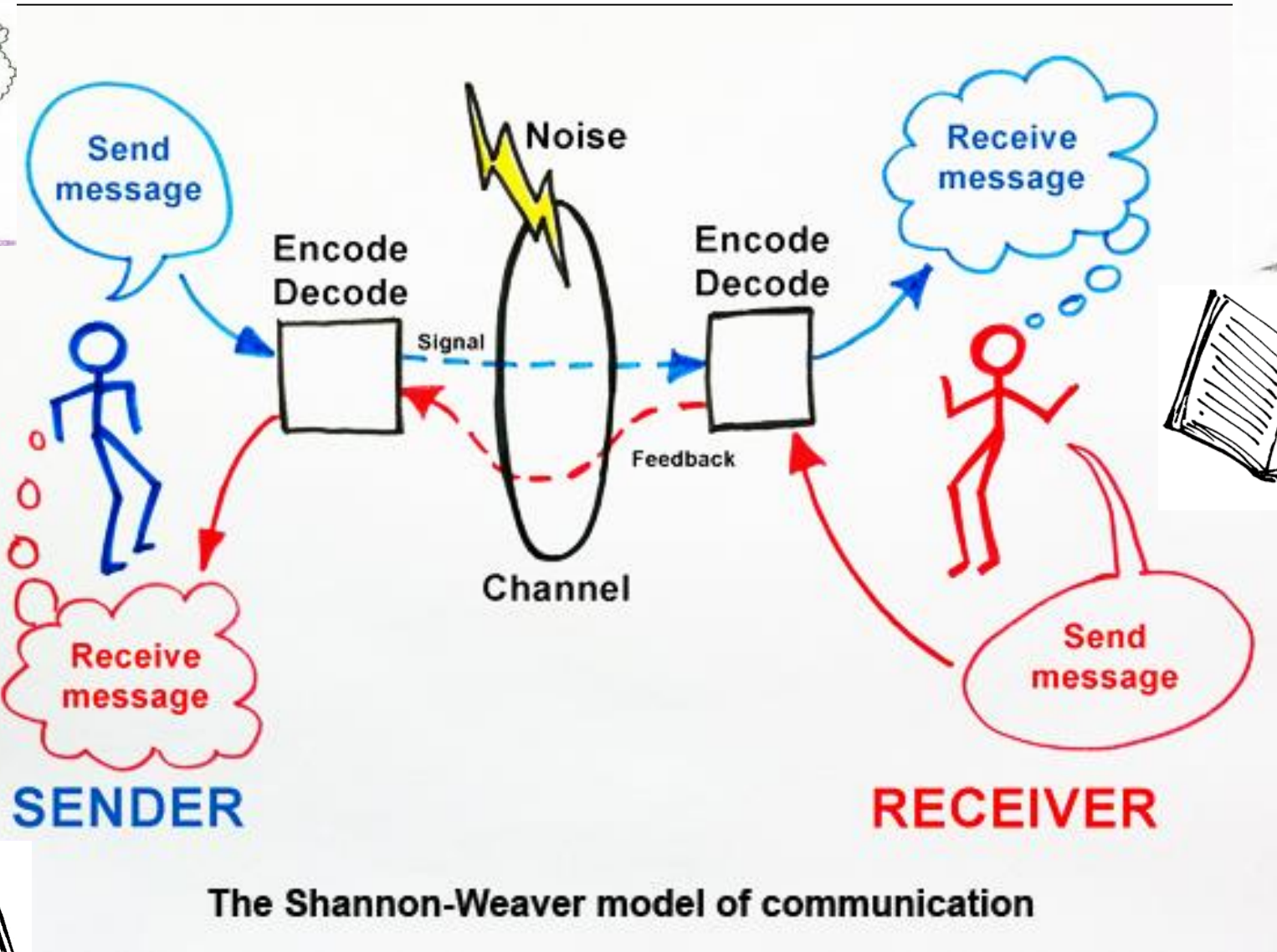
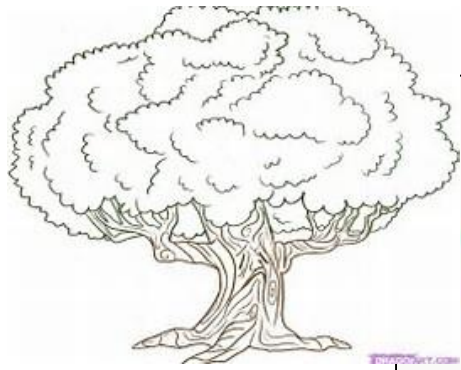
Sense-making

- We assign our own perceptions, interpretations, self-image, values and importance to our experiences.
- If we perceive something we value is at stake, this triggers uncomfortable emotions and stress.
- We are not well-practiced at communicating in times of high emotion

Difficult conversations are about *something important* and thus *have feelings at their core*. Otherwise, they would not be difficult!







Work-related conversations that you might put off having

- Discussing concerns about someone's performance or attitude
- Addressing micro-aggressions or stereotyping behavior \
- Confronting someone "in the moment"
- Holding someone accountable if they do not follow through
- Discussing a pattern of problematic behavior
- Feeling discounted, disrespected
- Trying to find out where you stand with someone who is hard to read
- Asking for assistance, admitting failure
- Apologizing

Our purpose tends to be:

.. more like delivering a message to

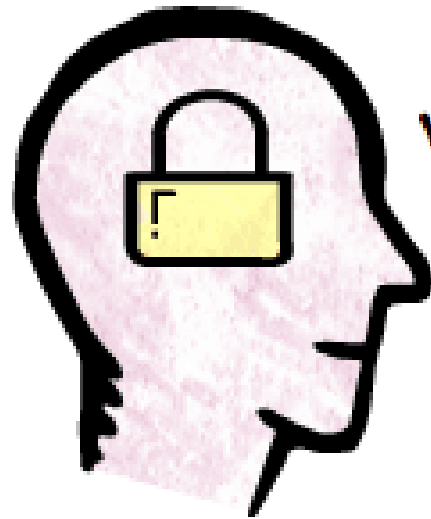
- Persuade I am right; Prove a point
- Let them know what they did wrong
- Assign blame
- Give them a piece of our mind
- Get them to do what we want; what we think is right

This can invite resistance, reaction, disconnection, and get things “stuck”.

- Creates Win-Lose Right-Wrong Bad-Good

Instead, approach as a “Learning Conversation “

Fixed mindset



versus

Growth mindset



Goal: to look smart
Avoid failure
Avoid challenges
Failure defines your identity
Feedback and criticism is personal

Goal: to learn
Confront uncertainty
Embrace challenges
Failure provides information
Feedback is about current capabilities

There is much you *really* don't know

Awareness

Perspective

Goals

Context

Self-Identity

Intentions

Feelings

Pressures

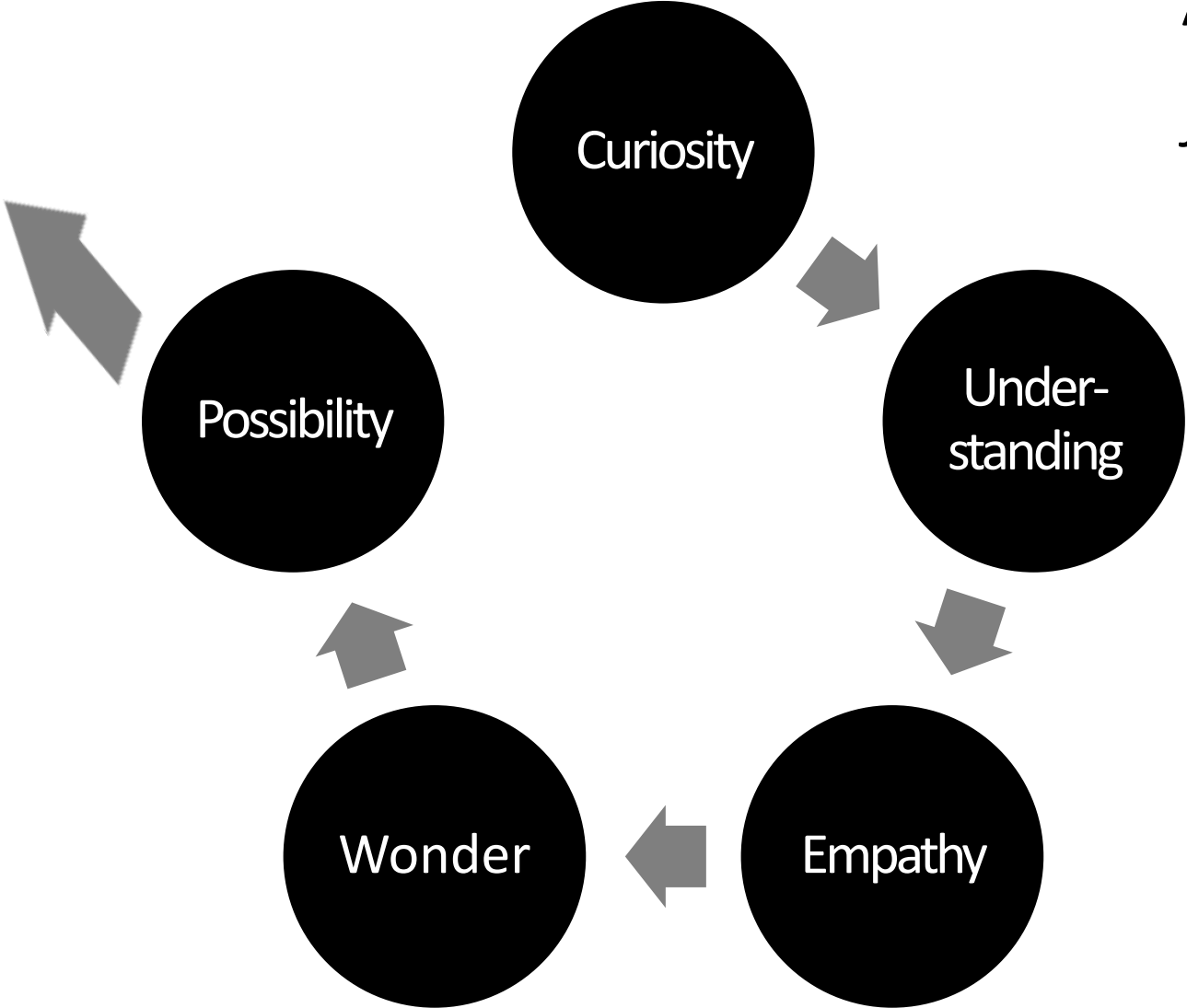
Plans

Changes purpose to shared understanding:

- Explore how each of us understand the situation and why
- Share other's the impact, seek to understand other's intent
- Learn of my impact; share my intent
- Understand how we both contributed to the situation
- Understand larger context contributors
- Acknowledge feelings without judgement or attribution
- Respect self, respect other, respect situation

Increases possibility of joint problem solving

Seek to understand



Avoid judgement

Maintain connection

To prepare:

- Name your feelings; why do you have them? Appropriate to situation?
- Recognize there is more to learn about “what happened”.
- Avoid assigning “Right” and “Wrong”, pointing blame. Think “Win-Win”.
- Focus on what is important ; not what is accurate.
- Don’t assume you know the other’s intentions.
- Recognize ways you have contributed to the problem by action or inaction.
- Consider the risks to having the conversation, and the consequences to not having the conversation.
- Don’t decide upon a solution – you don’t know enough yet.
- Plan your opening well; but do NOT script the encounter.

Get to kindness*

1. Brainstorm as many things as possible that the two of you have in common – at least 10.
2. **WRITE THEM DOWN.**
3. **SAY THEM OUT LOUD.**
4. Repeat #3 until Something Cool Happens.

Getting started

- Make plans / ask permission to talk with other
- Use “I” statements
 - I wanted to talk with you about _____ because__ (why is it important)__
 - Describe observable behavior “I saw, noticed, heard....”
 - Name feelings / states of mind “I was confused, surprised, uncertain”
 - Share your thoughts as a hypothesis. And I wondered if _____
- “How do you see the situation?” Show you understand. Validate both perspectives.
- Listen, listen, listen

Case scenarios: Getting started

- What's going on?
- How is the situation affecting you?
- What is your desired outcome? What do you hope to accomplish/ remedy?
- How are you feeling about the other person?
- What do you need to better understand?
- How might you initiate a conversation?
- **Write down the specific words you would use.**

Discussion

During:

- Don't take *anything* personally.
- Refocus on purpose if side-tracked.
- Recenter as needed.
- Respect self, respect other, respect situation
- Remain calm, tempered and open
- Observe your feelings. Separating feelings from actions.
- Be sincere. This is not a strategy to manipulate the other.
- See as part of longer dialogue.

Do	Don't
Appreciate complexity	Oversimplify
Practice, think through issues, prepare self	Over rehearse
Take responsibility for your part (only)	“Own” the problem
Be mindful of time and place	Put it off
Share emotions (if safe) (helps us listen more)	Dismiss other's emotions
Enter w good energy, intention	Complain, judge, make excuses
Respect self, other, issue	Judge or blame
Return to purpose if side-tracked	Let conversation shift
Let go of any planned solution	Push, control, force
Listen fully	Think of response, rebuttal while other is talking
Maintain neutral tone, phrase temperately, calm	Act out high emotion
Communicate clearly – help rephrase as needed	Assume other understands without checking in
Avoid small talk	Say things like “Don't take this the wrong way, but.. “

What if:

- Refuses to listen
- Refuses to reason
- Lies
- Uses power over you
- Backs you into a corner
- You say something you wish you hadn't
- You Lose face
- You get emotional, defensive
- You blank out

We can change the direction and outcome UNILATERALLY