

The Facilitators' Exchange and the
Collaboration and Public Participation Community of Practice

DIFFICULT Conversations



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Key Message

Successfully engaging in difficult conversations, with agencies, the public, coworkers or supervisors, is an important skill to successfully manage relationships and achieve results.



What you will learn today

Tools, techniques, and strategies to help you:

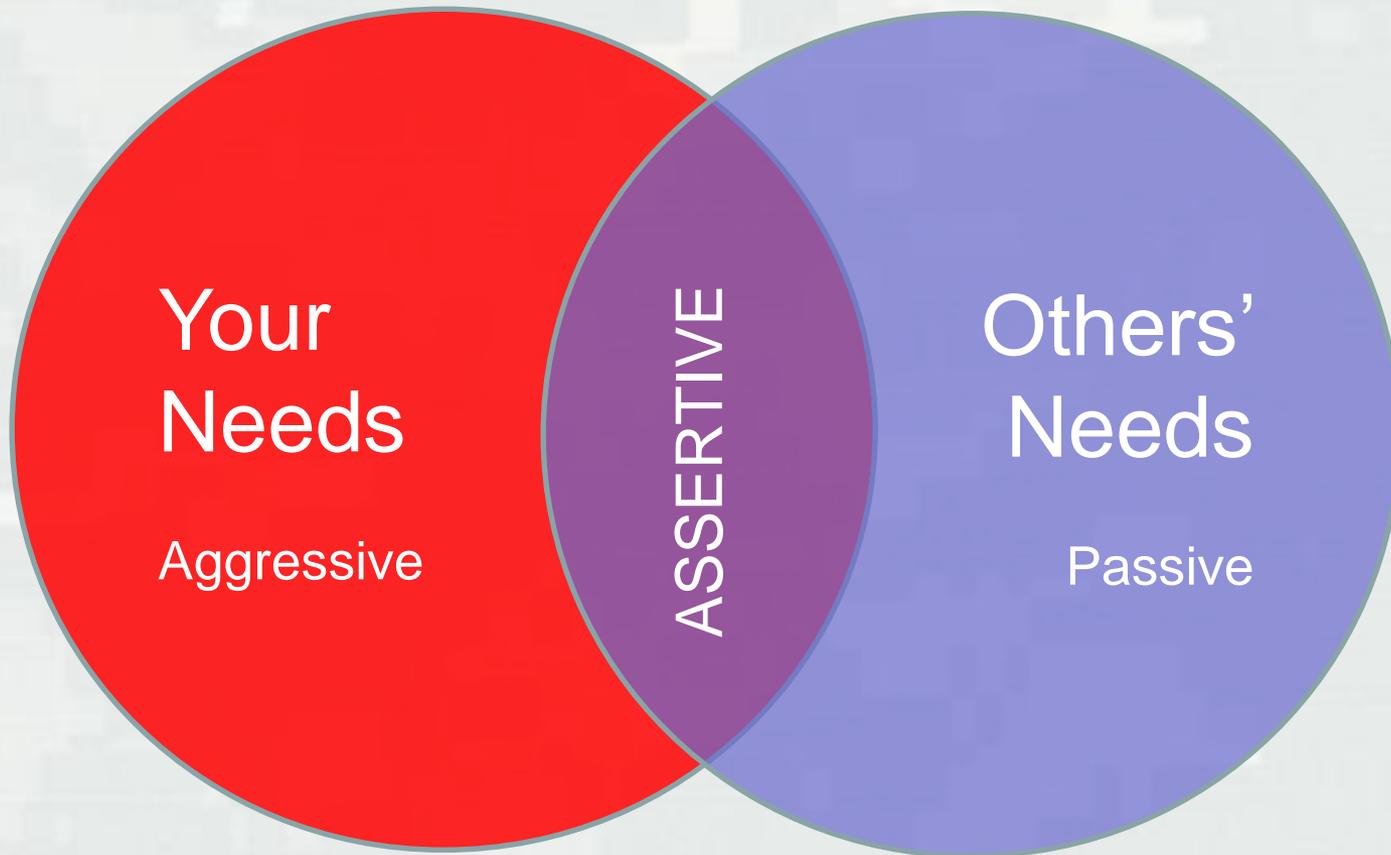
- Communicate Assertively
- Make a Request
- Discuss a Disagreement Productively
- Provide Feedback
- Deliver Bad News

GOAL:

Be comfortable with difficult conversations and move them in a productive direction.



COMMUNICATION STYLES



Verbal Styles: Passive

I've never done this before...

I'm sorry

Perhaps it was my fault, I guess.

Oh well, it isn't important.

Do you mind if I go ahead...?

I'm not really good at this



Verbal Styles: Aggressive



I'M RIGHT,
YOU'RE
WRONG

You're a lazy
employee and
you never do
any of your
work.

Yeah, yeah, that's
great but my
opinion is that...

If you don't
comply, I will
see to it that..

YOU CAN'T DO
ANYTHING
RIGHT!



Verbal Styles: Assertive

Thanks for the suggestion. I'll take that into consideration.

I think I understand what you're saying, AND I disagree.

When is a good time to talk about something that has been bothering me?

Next time, I'd really like you to...

I would be more comfortable if...



MAKING A REQUEST



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MAKING A REQUEST

DON'TS

- Make it a demand
- Use passive language that can be brushed aside

DO'S

- Use the assertive voice
- Ask if the request is fair and makes sense
- Consider how helping you helps their interests:

“WIIFT”



MAKING A REQUEST

Example:

Asking Supervisor to be considered for a Detail at HQ

Instead of, “I had better be considered for this detail.”

OR

“Maybe I could go on this detail if you have no one else in mind, that is.”

Replace with:

What would you say instead?
(TYPE IN CHAT BOX)

MAKING A REQUEST

Example:

Asking Supervisor to be considered for a Detail at HQ

Instead of, “I had better be considered for this detail.”

OR

“Maybe I could go on this detail if you have no one else in mind, that is.”

Replace with:

“I’d like to discuss this opportunity for me to do a detail at HQ. We did add it to my IDP and from what I understand, I would be working on a new policy that will have value for us here. What do you think?”

HAVING A PRODUCTIVE DISAGREEMENT



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What's the purpose of the conversation?



SHIFT the purpose of the conversation

Engaging in a conversation with the purpose of mutual learning may actually get you the change you want more so than engaging in a conversation with the purpose of changing a person's behavior or mind.

So try this:

- Learn their story
- Express your views and feelings (your story)
- Develop the 3rd story
- Problem-solve together



1. Extend an Invitation

Invite them to join you in a conversation— let them know your purpose for the discussion:

- To understand their perspective better
- To share your perspective
- To talk about how to go forward

Example phrases:

“Can you help me understand...?”

“Lets work on how we might....”

“I wonder if it’s possible to...”



2. Understand Their Story

You don't need to give up anything to hear how someone else feels or see things differently.

Move from Certainty to Curiosity

Instead of Asking:

“How can they think that?!”



Ask Yourself:

“I wonder what information they have that I don't?”

“How can they be so irrational?”



“How might they see the world such that their view makes sense?”



Listening to Understand

- There is a difference between understanding someone and agreeing with them:

“I get what you’re saying” AND “*I disagree with you*”

- Actively Listen – Repeat back what the other person is saying until the other person says “exactly”

Example phrases:

“Let me make sure I got this right...”

“So what you’re saying is...”



ACTIVE LISTENING



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hs5vkevwb8>



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What techniques are used to “actively listen”?

[TYPE IN CHAT BOX]

3. MAKE SURE THEY UNDERSTAND YOUR STORY

- State point clearly

Be Direct

- Less is more

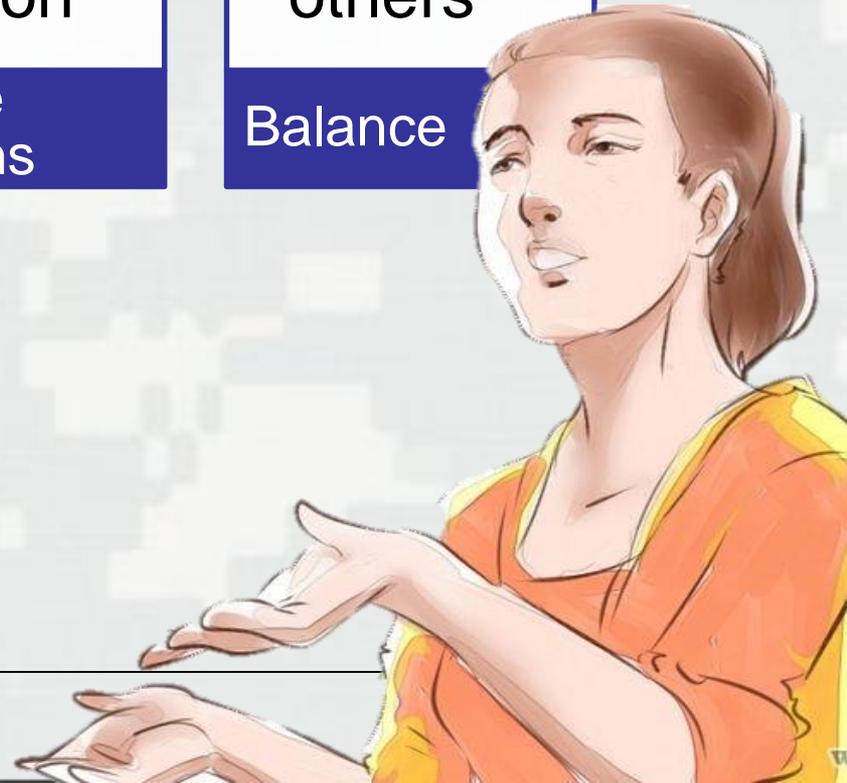
Be Brief

- Facts over opinion

Provide Reasons

- Value self equal to others

Balance



USE “I” STATEMENTS

I-statements are a method of effective communication. Using I-statements can help you express your feelings in a manner that will lessen the likelihood of provoking a negative response in your listener.

“I feel hurt when you forget to call because it seems like you don’t care.”



“I” STATEMENT

Has four parts stated in the following order:

(#1) I feel #2 when #3, because #4.

1. “I”.
2. What you feel (name the emotion)
3. The conditions/behavior that evoked your feeling(s).
4. The effect/impact the event/behavior has on you.



Examples of I-Statements

- *You are so inconsiderate leaving your clothes laying around for me to pick up!*
- *I feel* annoyed (feelings) *when* you leave your clothes on the floor instead of put in the hamper (behavior), *because* then I feel it becomes my responsibility to pick them up to keep the house neat (why).

- *I hate when you interrupt me while I'm talking. You are so rude and disrespectful to me.*
- I feel disrespected (feelings) when I am interrupted and not able to finish my thought (behavior), because it makes it seem what I have to say doesn't matter (why).

- *Working in this place is impossible, no one supports me and I have to watch this company going down the tube.*
- I find it really difficult working here when I'm told that I will not receive the support I need to do a job well because I care about the quality of our products and I care about the future of this organization.



WRITE YOUR OWN “I STATEMENT”

Situation: Another coworker breaks their promise and didn't follow through with their part of the agreement to complete the work. **How does this make you feel?**

“I” Statement: [TYPE IN CHAT BOX]

4. Create the 3rd Story

Focus on the Contribution not the Blame

1. How do we each contribute to bringing about the current situation?
2. How would an objective bystander describe the situation between us?
3. Knowing who contributed what, how can we change the situation? What can we do moving forward?



To Move Forward, First Understand Where You Are

~~“Who’s Right?”~~



“Now that we really understand each other, what’s a good way to manage this problem?”



5. Move Towards Problem Solving

1. It takes two to agree
2. Gather information and test your perceptions
 - Say what is still missing
 - Say what would persuade you
 - Ask what would persuade them
 - Ask their advice
3. Invent options
4. If you still can't agree, consider your alternatives



Give productive feedback



Scenario

You are a team lead and one of your team members has been chronically late to your weekly team meeting.



Steps to Giving Feedback

Step 1: Ask Permission to Give Feedback

- Can I give you some feedback?
- Can we talk about what just happened?
- Can I share an observation with you?
- Can I share something with you?

Response:

Ask: Can we talk about what happened at the beginning of our weekly team meeting?



Steps to Giving Feedback

Step 2: State the Purpose of the Feedback

“My intention is not to _____. My intention is _____.”

Response:

Purpose: “I’d like to talk about how we can make the most of our time together at the meetings.”

Purpose: “My intention is not to micromanage, my intention is to set expectations for how we can better work together.”



Steps to Giving Feedback

Step 3: Use the Situation-Behavior-Impact (SBI) Model

- **Situation:** Remind the person of the situation
- **Behavior:** OBJECTIVELY describe the SPECIFIC behavior
- **Impact:** Describe the impact on yourself and/or the organization

Response:

SBI: The past three team meetings (**situation**), you have walked in 10 minutes late (**observable behavior**) causing us to start the meetings over which means we do not get through all the content and be on the same page (**impact**).



For additional information:

[GovLoop: How to Have Courageous Conversations](#)
[Preparing for Courageous Conversations Presentation](#)

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Steps to Giving Feedback

Step 4: PAUSE and let them respond.

Step 5: Desired Outcome. Stop, start, change, continue the behavior and/or express appreciation.

Response:

Desired Outcome: From now on, I'd like you to arrive on time to the team meetings. Is there any reason that this is not a reasonable request?

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Steps to Giving Feedback

Your Homework: Practice giving effective feedback to someone you work with using the SBI-D Model

- Situation _____
- Behavior _____
- Impact _____
- Desired Outcome _____



Delivering Bad News



**Delivering bad news is like throwing a hand grenade.
Coated with sugar, throwing hard or soft, a hand
grenade is still going to do damage.**

**Try as you may, there's no way to throw a hand grenade
with tact or to outrun the consequences. And keeping it
to yourself is no better.**



**Choosing not to deliver a difficult message
is like hanging on to a hand grenade once
you've pulled the pin.**

**-Stone, Patton, & Heen
*Difficult Conversations***



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TIPS

- Use the Assertive Voice
- Timely and brief
- Don't measure success of conversation by whether or not receiver gets upset
- Give them space to feel however they are feeling
- Show that you care how they feel
- Be helpful going forward



Key Points

- A disagreement can become productive if you try to understand where the others are coming from.
- Showing empathy can help de-escalate conflict during a difficult conversation.
- Use the following to successfully engage in difficult conversations to manage relationships, diffuse conflict, and produce results:
 - Assertive Voice
 - Active Listening
 - “I” Statements
 - SBI-D Model for Feedback



Interested in Learning More?

Check out these additional resources:

- *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*
- *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*
- *Thanks for the Feedback*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SggjK0Gm3l4>)
- *GovLoop: How to Have Courageous Conversations*
<https://www.govloop.com/community/blog/how-to-have-courageous-conversations/>

