

## 12 Tips for Engaging in Crucial Conversations

Resistance often indicates that change is happening and that people are beginning to deal with real and perceived consequences of moving beyond their comfort zones. Four facts often are at the heart of most conflicts:

- **Facts** about events, behaviors, and resources. Lack of information or miscommunication can lead to conflict. Keep in mind that a person's perception of the facts may be as important as the truth.
- **Methods** that we employ for achieving what we desire. The processes and approaches leaders use to deal with difficult issues can help or hinder conflict. Conflict increases when good process is ignored.
- **Goals and outcomes**, whether real or perceived, that may be incompatible with competing commitments.
- **Competing Values**. They are often the most difficult to resolve.

### COMMON ROLES PEOPLE PLAY WHEN DEALING WITH DIFFICULT ISSUES

- **Controllers** may be assertive and uncooperative, often pursuing his/her own concerns at other's expense.
- **Accommodators** may be unassertive and cooperative, the opposite of competing. When accommodating, an individual may neglect his or her own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person.
- **Avoiders** may be unassertive and uncooperative such as when the individual doesn't immediately address his/her concerns or the concerns of the other person; nor does he or she address the conflict.
- **Collaborators** may be both assertive and cooperative, the opposite of avoiding. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with the other person to find some solution that fully satisfies the concerns of both persons.
- **Compromisers** may be intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. The object is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. Compromising might mean splitting the difference or seeking a middle-ground position.

### 12 TIPS FOR ADDRESSING DIFFICULT PEOPLE AND CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS

**Listen.** Proverbs 15:32 reminds us that a wise person listens to a rebuke. Sometimes we need the "faithful wounds" of a friend (Proverbs 27:6), so listen deeply to your critics. Avoid overreacting to it.

**Talk about it.** Ask clarifying questions. Ask for examples. If the criticism stings you badly, ask a few trusted friends for their counsel. Make sure that you're dealing with the REAL problem or the right issue.

**Deal with issues as they arise.** Avoid allowing them to become much larger issues.

**Determine what kind of "loss" or change you are dealing with and how broad-based it is.** Determine if it's individual or normative. Be wary of comments like "Everyone is upset." Ask people to speak for themselves.

**Identify the power plays and the power players.** Beware of "passive" resisters. Ask, "Can I count on you to . . . ?"

**Maintain a non-anxious presence;** avoid blaming yourself.

**Don't mistake constructive opposition for active resistance.**

**Ask involved parties about their hopes.** Identify the desired outcomes for when addressing difficult issues.

**Give yourself permission** to pause, reflect, regroup, and change course if needed.

**Don't expect people to make rational choices.** Explore what people are feeling and perceiving.

**Determine if the problem is a single issue,** a pattern, or part of a larger issue or one of trust.

**Write a script for the first 30 seconds of your conversation.** How you begin a difficult conversation is critical.

Describe what happened or you're observing; note contributions; express feelings; suggest a way forward.



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