

Difficult Conversations: Best Practices

To prepare before going into a difficult conversation, ask yourself some questions:

1. What is your purpose for having the conversation? What do you hope to accomplish? What would be an ideal outcome?
2. What assumptions are you making about this person's intentions? Be careful and remember - Impact does not necessarily equal intent.
3. What "buttons" of yours are being pushed? Are you more emotional than the situation warrants?
4. How is your attitude toward the conversation influencing your perception of it?
5. Is there an opponent? How might their perspective differ from yours? What is it?
6. What are your needs and fears? Are there any common concerns? Could there be?
7. How have you contributed to the problem? How have they?

Steps to a Successful Outcome

Remember to breathe, stay centered, and monitor your emotions.

Step 1: Use a soft entry.

Step 2: Introduce the problem or challenge from your perspective. If this is difficult for you - say so. If not, don't.

Step 3: Cultivate an attitude of inquiry, discovery and curiosity. Let them express their perspective - fully.

Step 4: Acknowledge their perspective.

Step 5: Problem-Solving. Now you're ready to begin building solutions. Brainstorming and continued inquiry are useful, Ask your opponent/partner what they think would work. Whatever they say, find something that you like and build on it (reframing).

If the conversation becomes adversarial, go back to **Step 3**. Asking for the other's point of view usually creates safety, and they'll be more willing to engage.

- adapted in part from the work of Judy Ringer

Suggested Resources

The Magic of Conflict, by Thomas F. Crum (www.aikiworks.com).

Difficult Conversations, by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen

Crucial Conversations, by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler (www.crucialconversations.com.)

FAQs about Conflict, by Judy Ringer. This article can be found on the Free Articles page at www.judyringer.com.