

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Tools to Tackle Tough Conversations

Agenda

- Overview of the Auditor of State's Office
- Preparing for Difficult Conversations
- Difficult Conversation Tools
- Language for Difficult Conversations
- Challenging Conversation Models
- **After the Conversation Tools and Resources:** Moving Forward to Action
- Questions



Preparing for Difficult Conversations

Laying the Groundwork for Thoughtful and Productive Dialogue

Key Principles

- Remember the **relationship** – What do you want as an outcome?
- Approach the conversation as a learning opportunity and **stay curious**.
- Anticipate **reactions** and plan your **response**.
- Choose a **model** that works for you and use it.
- Select a **question** and **phrase** that resonates and incorporate it.

When Not to Have a Difficult Conversation....

- **When you are not prepared.** These are important conversations because the stakes are high, opinions differ and emotions run strong. These are not conversations you want to have on the fly.
- **When you are emotionally triggered.** If you are in an emotional state that is not conducive to bringing your best self to that conversation, hold off.
- **When you are focused on the person rather than their behavior.** When we approach crucial conversations with a personal lens rather than focusing on the behavior that needs correcting, things can get touchy.
- **When you are in public.** Crucial conversations should be thoughtful and strategic and that includes having a plan to meet in a private place.
- **When you don't have an intention.** You must define an intention to the conversation, or the takeaway you want the other person to have.
- **When you have not thoroughly investigated the issue.** Before embarking on a crucial conversation, it is imperative you are confident in the data to support your claims.
- **When you have not notified key stakeholders.** If you believe there could be repercussions from the conversation, you should be thinking two steps ahead and notify anyone who could be affected.



Preparing for a Difficult Conversation

Clarify Your Purpose and Goal:

- What do you hope to achieve? Is your intent helpful and constructive?

Examine Assumptions vs. Reality:

- Are you assuming intent based only on impact?

Identify Emotional Triggers:

- Are past experiences or unresolved tension shaping your reaction?

Assess Your Attitude and Mindset:

- Are you entering with a desire for resolution or expecting conflict?

Consider the Other Person's Perspective:

- What might they be thinking or feeling? Approach with empathy.

Acknowledge Mutual Needs and Fears:

- Are there shared concerns that could create common ground?

Recognize Your Role in the Situation:

- How might your actions—intentional or not—have contributed?



Key Success Factors

Emotional Readiness

How are you feeling?



Acknowledge why this feels scary or hard.



Consider how the other person will feel.

Meeting Readiness

How will the other person respond?

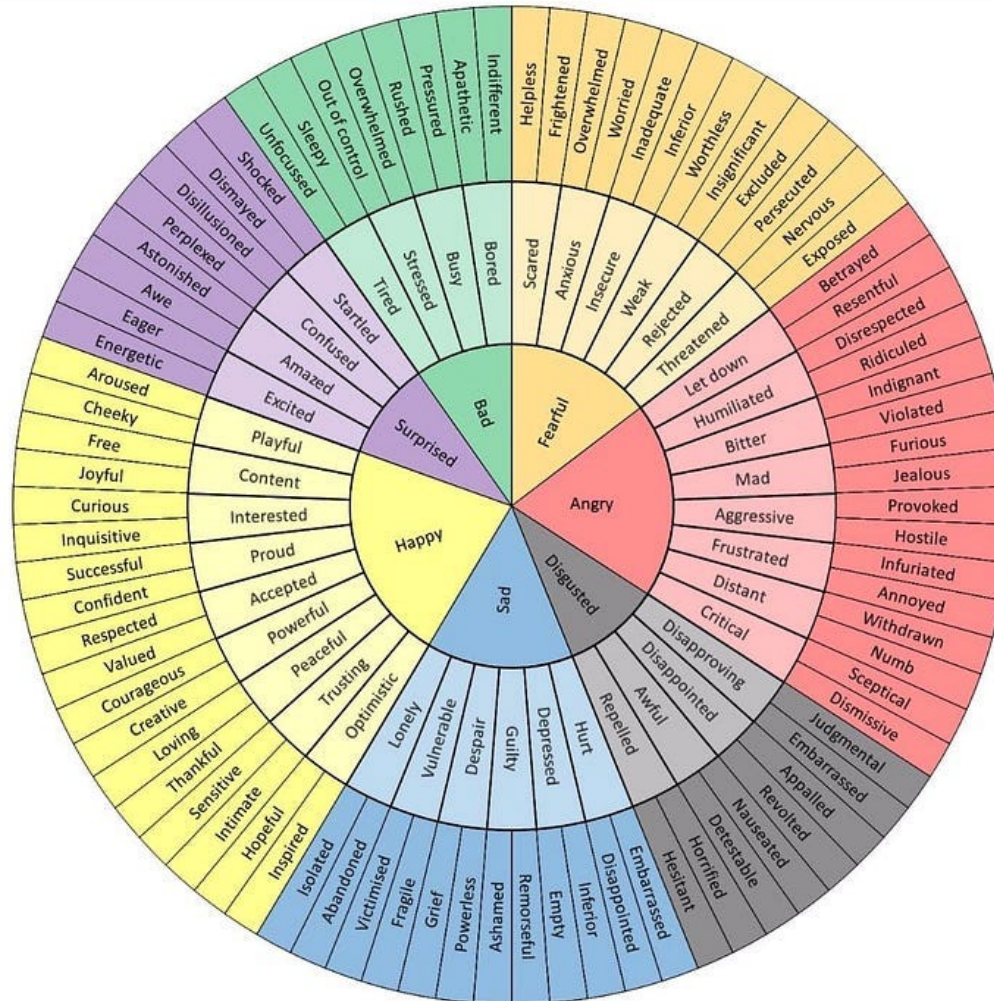


How do you know?
(Be wary of assumptions)



How will you react?

Feelings Wheel



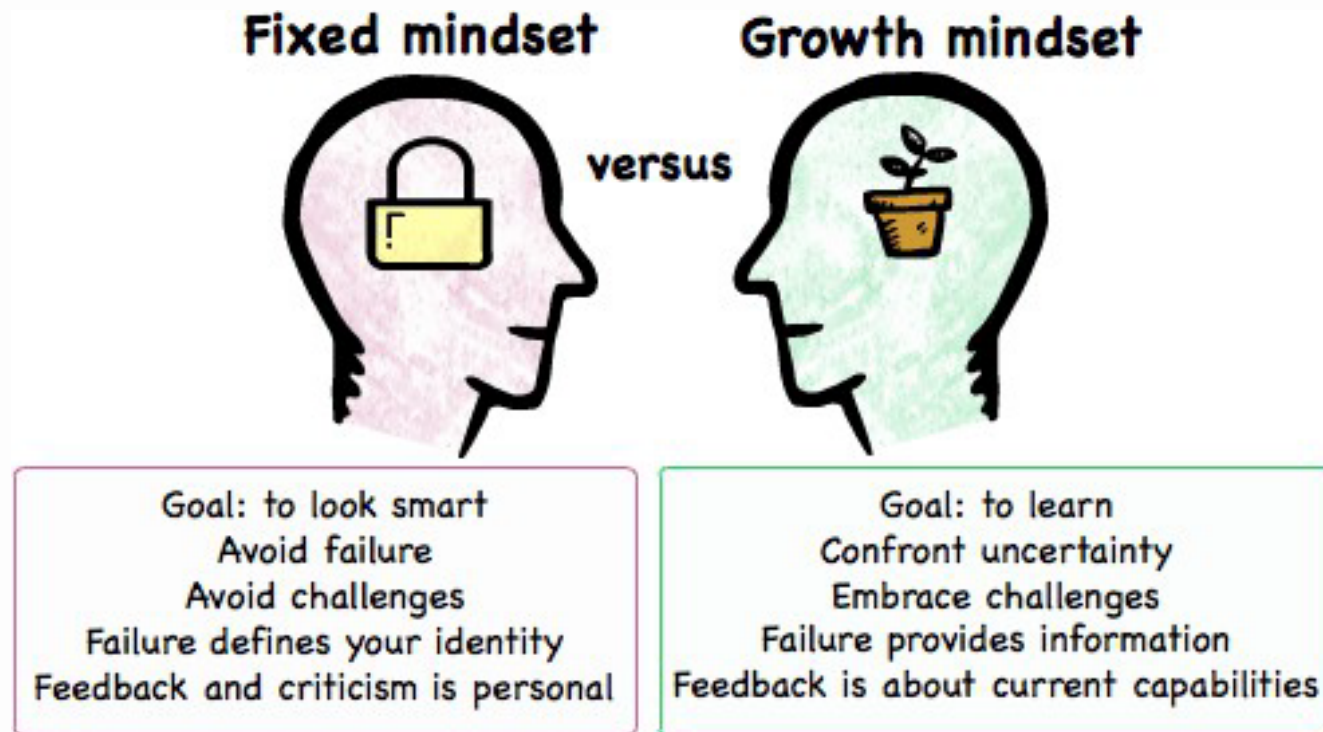
What Do I Really Want?

I find it helpful to answer this question at four levels:

1. What do I really want for **me**?
2. What do I really want for the **other person**?
3. What do I really want for the **relationship**?
4. What do I really want for the **other stakeholders**?



Approach Conversation as a “Learning Conversation”





Tools for Difficult Conversations

Fundamentals for Building Dialogue and Engagement

Two Key Conditions of Safety and Important Questions

Mutual Purpose – The Entrance Condition

- Mutual Purpose means that others perceive that you are working towards a common outcome in the conversation, that you care about their goals, interests, and values. And vice versa. You believe they care about yours.

Mutual Respect - Continuous Condition

- Mutual Respect is the continuance condition of dialogue. As people perceive that others do not respect them, the conversation immediately becomes unsafe, and dialogue comes to a screeching halt.

Crucial Questions

- Do others believe I care about their goals in this conversation?
- Do they trust my motives?
- Do others believe I respect them?
- Are others going to silence or violence?



Respect Wheel



Click [Here](#) to Access the Respect Wheel

DIVE Framework for Curious Engagement

Detach:

- Step back from your ego or agenda.

Intend:

- Choose to stay grounded, open, and compassionate.

Value:

- Recognize the other person's worth, regardless of viewpoint.

Explore

- Ask open-ended questions to understand and create a shared pool of meaning.

A Key as We Move Ahead...

PREPARE!

4 P Conversation Framework

Plan

Take time to put steps in place that will support the conversation.

Perspective

Think through and understand your viewpoints, concerns, and needs, as well as those of the other person, to help prepare for a crucial conversation.

Positivity

Approaching a crucial conversation with positive intent and energy will help to put and keep you in a productive and open mindset.

Practice

Saying the words out loud and testing different ways to open the conversation (often the hardest part!) can put you at ease and give you more confidence going into the actual conversation.

Shared Pool Of Meaning

Collective knowledge, opinions, and feelings that a group builds and freely exchanges during a dialogue.

- We All Bring Something Different.
- Dialogue Matters.
- Create Safety for Sharing.
- Better Information Means Better Decisions.
- Shared Meaning Builds Commitment.

Ask Yourself: Am I adding to the shared pool of meaning—or have I lost sight of that goal?

STATE

S

- **S**hare your facts.
- Start with the least controversial, most persuasive elements from your Path to Action.

T

- **T**ell your story.
- Explain what you are beginning to conclude.

A

- **A**sk for others' paths.
- Encourage others to share both their facts and their stories.

T

- **T**alk tentatively.
- State your story as a story – Don't disguise it as a fact.

E

- **E**ncourage testing.
- Make it safe for others to express differing or even opposing views.

AMPP

A

- **A**sk to get things rolling.
- Start by simply expressing interests in the other person's views.

M

- **M**irror to confirm feelings.
- Increase safety by respectfully acknowledging the emotions appear to be feeling.

P

- **P**araphrase to acknowledge the story.
- As others share part of their story, restate what you've heard to show not just what you understand, but also that it's safe for them to share what they're thinking.

P

- **P**riming when you're getting nowhere.
- If others continue to hold back, prime. Take your best guess what they may be thinking and feeling.

ABC'S of Response

A

AGREE when you agree. Start with an area of agreement.

B

If you agree with what has been said but the information is incomplete, **BUILD**. Point out areas of agreement and then add elements that were left out of the discussion.

C

When you don't agree, rather than suggesting he or she is wrong, suggest that you differ. **COMPARE** your two views.

Unbundle With CPR

Content

A 1-time incident. It happened and was done.

Pattern

A repeated incident. You start to see patterns of emerging behavior.

Relationship

The patterns of behavior have become consistent, and you start to question the intent of the actions.





Language for Difficult Conversations

Fundamentals for Building Dialogue and Engagement

Powerful Questions to Shift from Confrontation to Collaboration

Start with Care and Connection

- Firstly—how are you doing?
- How does that make you feel?

Understand Perspective and Challenges

- What do you think?
- What leads you to think that?
- What's the biggest challenge here for you?

Clarify Goals and Values

- What would you like to accomplish?
- What's most important to you?

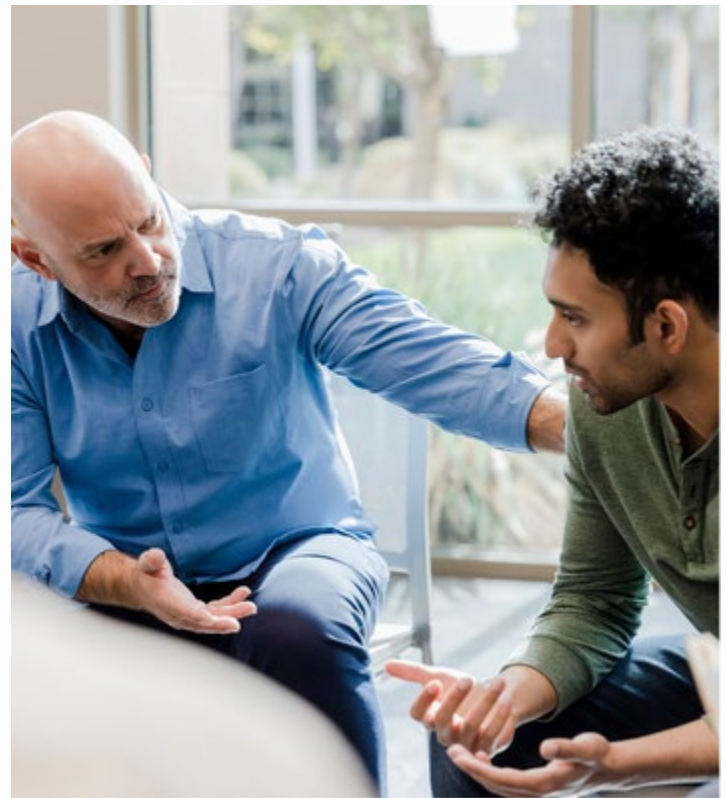
Move Toward Solutions and Partnership

- What are some options you can think of here?
- What do you suggest we do?
- How do you think I can best support you?

Phrases to Build Empathy

Show you understand the other person's emotions and perspective without judging or agreeing. These validate feelings and reduce defensiveness.

1. "It sounds like you're really frustrated about [situation]."
2. "It seems like this has been really tough for you."
3. "I can see how [situation] would make you feel [emotion]."
4. "What's been the hardest part of this for you?"
5. "It feels like you're carrying a lot with this, aren't you?"



Phrases to Build Rapport

Create trust and a sense of partnership by showing genuine care and aligning with their perspective. These foster a collaborative dynamic.

1. “I’m here to understand and help us find a way forward.”
2. “I really appreciate you sharing how you feel.”
3. “I can tell you care a lot about [shared goal/value].”
4. “I want to make sure we get this right for you.”
5. “Let’s figure this out together—what do you think?”



Phrases to Build Influence

Guide behavior subtly after trust is established, framing solutions as beneficial and collaborative. These encourage cooperation without confrontation.

1. “What if we tried [solution] to make sure [benefit]?”
2. “I think [solution] could help us achieve [shared goal]. What do you think?”
3. “How can we make this work so you feel [desired outcome]?”
4. “If we do [action], it could help [benefit]. Are you okay with that?”
5. “Let’s take a step toward [goal]. What’s one thing we can agree on?”



Phrases for Active Listening

Show you're fully focused on the person's words and emotions without interrupting or judging. These phrases encourage them to share more, reduce defensiveness, and lay the groundwork for trust.

1. "I hear you saying [paraphrase their point]. Is that right?"
2. "Can you tell me more about [specific issue]?"
3. "It sounds like [restate their emotion or issue]."
4. "Mmm-hmm" or "I see" (minimal encouragers).
5. "What happened that made you feel this way?"



Phrases for Behavioral Change

Encourage the person to adopt a desired action or mindset after trust is built through prior steps (listening, empathy, rapport, influence). These phrases frame change as collaborative and beneficial, maintaining their sense of control.

1. “Let’s take one step toward [goal]. What do you think about [specific action]?”
2. “If we try [action], it could help [benefit]. Are you open to that?”
3. “What would make you feel comfortable moving forward with [solution]?”
4. “I think [action] could get us to [desired outcome]. Can we try it?”
5. “How about we start with [small action] to work toward [goal]?”



11 De-Escalation Phrases

1. **"Can I talk to you a second?"**
A respectful alternative to "Come here."
2. **"If I can explain..."**
Invites dialogue instead of saying "You wouldn't understand."
3. **"We have established policies that..."**
Provides context rather than stating "Because those are the rules."
4. **"I am not permitted to elaborate."**
A professional way to say "it's none of your business."
5. **"Unfortunately, I cannot proceed any further."**
Offers a constructive response to "What do you want me to do about it?"
6. **"Take a deep breath or drink of water."**
More calming than telling someone to "Calm down."
7. **"Can I help you?"**
A supportive approach instead of asking "What's your problem?"
8. **"I understand you're upset, but in my opinion..."**
Avoids accusatory phrases like "You never..." or "You always..."
9. **"We need to resolve this situation, so let me say it again."**
More constructive than "I'm not going to say this again."
10. **"My action is going to help your situation; here is why..."**
Explains intentions rather than saying "I'm doing this for your own good"
11. **"Let me see if I understand your position."**
Encourages understanding instead of saying "Why don't you be reasonable."



Activity: Card Tower

- **Objective:**
 - Break into groups.
 - In your group, build the tallest freestanding tower using only the provided cards.
-
- **Rules:**
 - Work together as a team.
 - Only playing cards can be used for construction.
 - The tallest self-supporting tower wins!



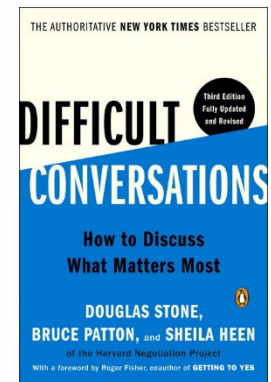


Challenging Conversation Models

Strategies for Feedback and Customer Service Challenges

Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most

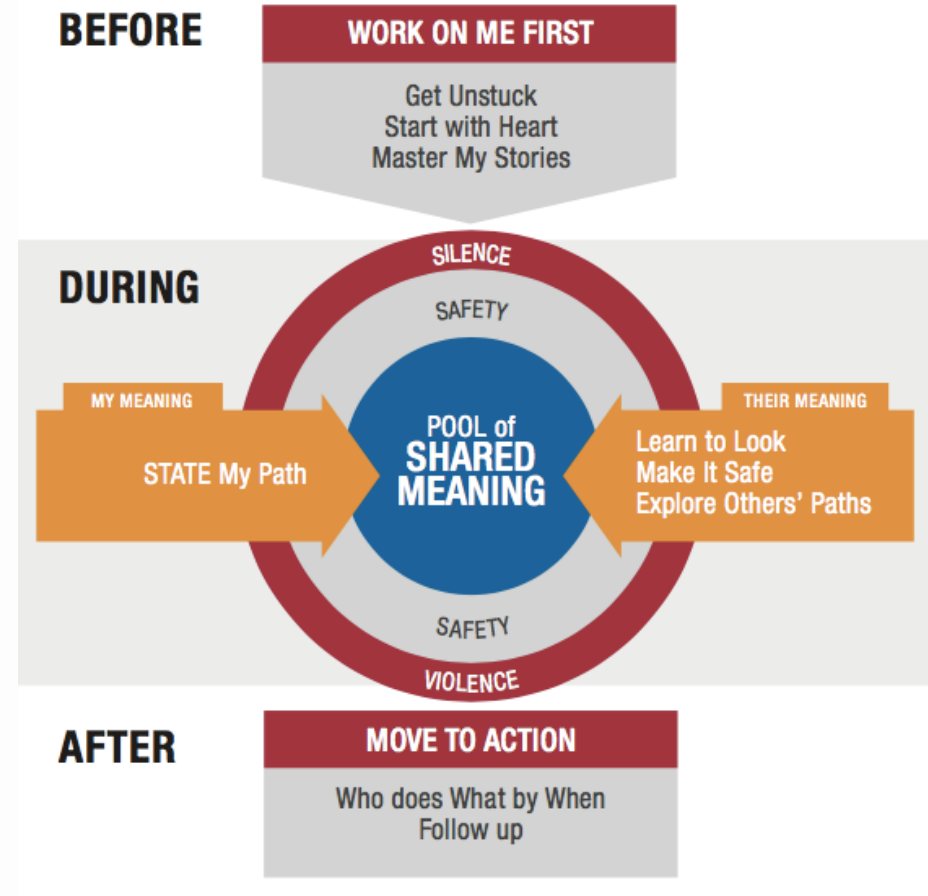
- **The "What Happened" Conversation:** This focuses on differing perceptions of the situation. People often assume their version of events is correct, leading to conflict.
 - **Shift from certainty to curiosity:** Acknowledge that both parties have valid perspectives.
 - **Avoid blame:** Focus on contributions to the problem rather than who's at fault.
 - **Clarify intentions:** Don't assume others' motives; share your own intentions clearly.
- **The Feelings Conversation:** Emotions are central to difficult conversations but often ignored.
 - **Acknowledge feelings:** Recognize and express your emotions without letting them derail the discussion.
 - **Don't suppress or overreact:** Find a balance by naming feelings (e.g., "I'm frustrated") to process them constructively.
- **The Identity Conversation:** Difficult conversations can threaten our sense of self (e.g., "Am I competent? Am I a good person?").
 - **Ground your identity:** Avoid all-or-nothing thinking (e.g., one mistake doesn't define you).
 - **Accept complexity:** Recognize that people are multifaceted, and mistakes don't negate your worth.



Crucial Conversations



While no single conversation is guaranteed to change the trajectory of a **career**, a **company**, a **relationship** or a **life** —
Any single conversation can.



De-escalation Phrase

- **“Can you tell me more about that?”**
- Shows you care and creates an empathic environment by validating the person's concerns.
- Helps them feel heard and gives insight as to what might be behind the anger.
- Focuses attention on an escalating person's thinking brain to engage cognitive capacities and shift the emotional imbalance.

De-escalation Best Practices

Be in control of yourself.

- Appear calm, centered, and self-assured even though you don't feel it. Relax facial muscles and look confident.
- Use a modulated, low monotonous tone of voice
- Do not be defensive.
- Be aware of any resources available for back up.
- Be very respectful even when firmly setting limits or calling for help.
- Do not argue or try to convince, give choices i.e. empower.

De-escalation Best Practices

Physical stance

- Always be at the same eye level.
- Allow extra physical space between you and the angry person – about four times your usual distance. Anger and agitation fill the extra space.
- Do not stand full front to the angry person. Stand at an angle so you can sidestep away if needed.
- Do not maintain constant eye contact.
- Do not point or shake your finger.
- DO NOT smile. This could look like mockery or anxiety.
- Do not touch. Cognitive dysfunction in agitated people allow for misinterpretation of physical contact as hostile or threatening.
- Keep hands out of your pockets, up and available to protect yourself.
- Do not yell or try to get loud and argue over them.

De-escalation Best Practices

General

- The highest priority is to bring the level of arousal down to baseline.
- DO NOT answer or respond to abusive questions.
- Explain limits and rules in an authoritative, firm, respectful tone.
- Give choices in which both alternatives are safe ones.
- Empathize with feelings but not with the behavior.
- Wherever possible, tap into the individual's cognitive mode. Help me understand versus how do you feel.
- Suggest alternative behaviors where appropriate e.g. "Would you like to take a break and have a cup of coffee or some water?"
- Give the consequences of inappropriate behavior without threats or anger.
- Represent external controls as institutional rather than personal.
- Trust your instincts. If you assess or feel that de-escalation is not working, STOP! You will know within 2 or 3 minutes if it's beginning to work.
- Tell the person to leave, escort him/her to the door, call for help or leave yourself and call the police.

Three Steps for Giving Feedback That Works

1. Find It

Briefly describe the behavior or issue that needs to be addressed. The key is to stay respectful and factual—no judgment or blame.

Example: “I noticed we’ve been submitting reports with missing data points.”

2. Flip It

Shift the focus to what you do want to happen. This makes the feedback constructive and future-focused rather than critical.

Example: “I’d like to start including those key metrics moving forward.”

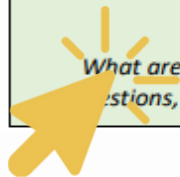
3. Elevate It

Connect the change to something bigger—like team goals, shared values, or organizational impact. This adds meaning and motivation.

Example: “That will help our team make better decisions and improve client outcomes.”

COIN

<p>C</p> <p>Connect + Give Context</p> <p><i>What was the event? What happened? How are your lived experience, values, and needs at play in the event?</i></p>	
<p>O</p> <p>Observations + Opinions</p> <p><i>What are your thoughts, assumptions, beliefs, & observations about the event? (be as specific as possible)</i></p>	
<p>I</p> <p>Impact on self/others/situation</p> <p><i>What impact has the event had on you? Identify feelings, info gaps, concerns. What is your contribution, if any?</i></p>	
<p>N</p> <p>Next Steps</p> <p><i>What are your desired results? Explore options, make questions, identify specific requests, come to agreements.</i></p>	



Click [Here](#) to Take the **COIN Communications Assessment**

Feedback Message Prep Tool

FEEDBACK MESSAGE PREP

Use this worksheet to draft your feedback message. When all elements below are included in your message, it can help ensure that feedback is clear, kind and actionable. This format works well for delivering recognition or constructive feedback.

STATE INTENT: "I'M BRINGING THIS UP BECAUSE..."

SITUATION: WHEN AND WHERE SOMETHING HAPPENED

BEHAVIOR: WHAT THE PERSON SAID OR DID

IMPACT: HOW DID THIS IMPACT THE WORK? THE TEAM?

PREPARE AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION

• How does this look to you?

• What else should I know?

• What's your perspective?

OTHER

Click [Here](#) to
Download the
**Feedback Message
Prep Resource**

The 4 Fundamentals of Principled Negotiations

The 4 Fundamentals of Principled Negotiations



PEOPLE

Separate People
from Problems



INTERESTS

Focus on Interests,
Not Positions



OPTIONS

Generate Options
For Mutual Benefit



CRITERIA

Use Objective
Criteria

Source: Getting to Yes, Roger Fisher and William Ury, of the Harvard Negotiation Project

Interest-Based Relational (IBR) Approach



Chick-fil-A's HEARD Model



Recovery Overview

THE HEARD MODEL

We all wish we could serve our Guests perfectly every time, but unfortunately, things happen. We are all human and will make mistakes, and our Guests may be unsatisfied with their experience for reasons outside of our control.

Whatever the case may be, one of the best ways to deliver Genuine Hospitality is to recover unsatisfied Guests. In these moments, we not only have an opportunity to make things right but also have an opportunity to enhance their whole experience.

There are certainly other ways to [Engage to Recover](#), but the acronym HEARD spells out ways you and your team should seek to turn a Guest's negative experience into a positive moment. The purpose of HEARD is to get to know your Guest and seek to delight them in a way that is meaningful to them.

H

Hear
to
understand

E

Empathize
to feel their
concern

A

Apologize
with
"I'm sorry"

R

Resolve
the
issue

D

Delight
the
Guest

The BLAST Model

Believe

- Trust that the customer believes their concern is real.
- Avoid questioning their honesty or intent.
- Show support and stick to the facts.

Listen

- Stay attentive and take notes.
- Reflect key points back to the customer.
- Confirm understanding and fill in any gaps.

Apologize

- Offer a sincere, emotion-based apology.
- Avoid dismissive or vague responses.
- Match the apology to how the customer feels.

Satisfy

- Act quickly to resolve the issue.
- Follow set procedures or ask how you can make it right.
- Empower advisors to make fair decisions.

Thank

- Express appreciation for their feedback.
- Stay courteous and respectful.
- Let them know their input will be shared to help improve.

The CARES Model

Communication

- Explain the process clearly at the start.
- Guide the customer step by step.
- Show confidence and ownership.

Accountability

- Set expectations and make clear commitments.
- Use reassuring statements to build trust.
- Own the outcome from start to finish.

Responsiveness

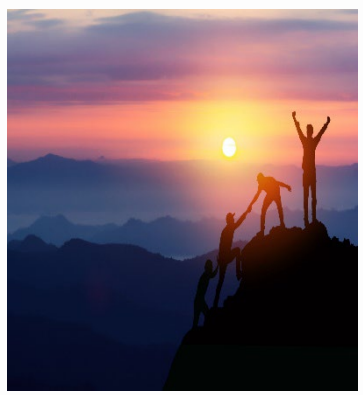
- Summarize progress throughout the call.
- Fill silences to maintain engagement.
- Keep the customer informed at every step.

Empathy

- Thank them for their patience.
- Acknowledge their time and feelings.
- Use empathy to build connection.

Solution

- Present the resolution clearly.
- Summarize what happens next.
- End with a courteous, professional close.



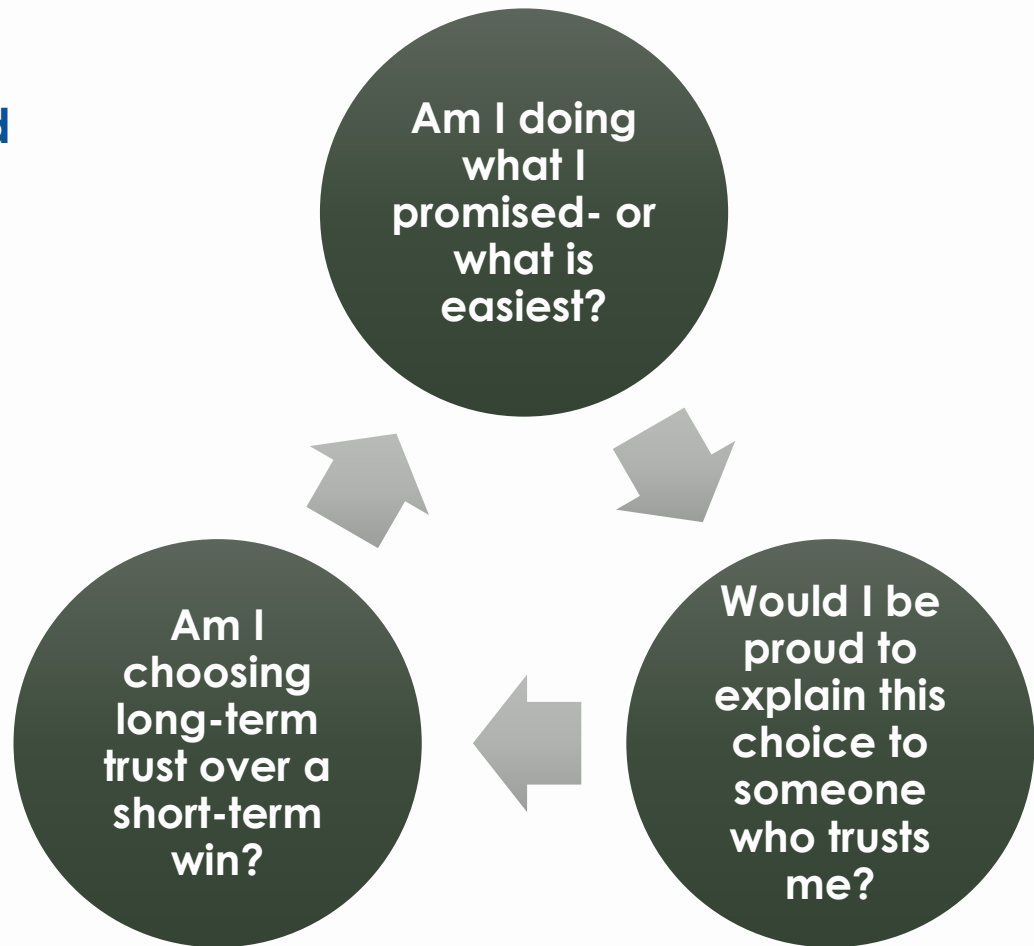
AFTER THE CONVERSATION

Moving Forward to Action

3 Question Integrity Check

“Integrity is choosing your thoughts and actions based on values rather than personal gain.”

-Chris Karcher



What Happened? –

3 Common Mistakes in Difficult Conversations

Mistake 1: Assuming You're Right

- Treats interpretations as facts
- Ignores that others may see things differently
- Fix: Shift from certainty to curiosity
- Use the “And Stance”: “My view and your view can both be valid”

Mistake 2: Assuming Intent

- Believes you know why the other did something
- Equates impact with intent (“I’m hurt, so you must’ve meant to hurt me”)
- Fix: Ask about their intent instead of assuming it
- Acknowledge their feelings, and reflect on your own motives

Mistake 3: Focus on Blame, Not Contribution

Blame shuts down learning and problem-solving

Fix: Focus on contribution, not fault

Ask: “How did we each contribute to this situation?”

Contributions aren’t the same as blame



Post-Conversation Reflection Questions

- Are there any burning issues that still require resolution?
- What have you learned from the conversation?
- What are our shared goals and objectives for the future?
- How do we want to behave towards each other in the future?
- What does a good day look like for our team?
- What individual and collective actions will we take to prevent a similar situation occurring again?
- What support do we need now to achieve our actions as well as our shared goals and objectives?
- What early warning signs do we need to tell us if we're going off track?
- What do we need our leaders to do to help us achieve our goals and objectives?
- Are we all ready to move forward together?



Resources



Click [Here](#) to Download the **Crucial Conversations Conversation Planner**

Resources

Objectives – be clear about the outcomes each of you would like to achieve

Your outcomes	Their outcomes
What do you need to achieve from this meeting? How would you like the other person to go away feeling?	What might the other person be expecting from this meeting?

Plan your conversation

Conversation plan – way in
How will you start the conversation?

Communicating effectively	
What messages do you need to get across?	What evidence/examples do you have that will help you get the message across?



Click [Here](#) to Download the **Leader Playbook**

Anticipating reactions and responses For help, refer to Ways of dealing with different responses	
Their REACTIONS What could their objectives be? What counter-arguments will they have? What domain of SCARF ® is likely to be triggered?	Your RESPONSES What counter arguments/ reactions do you have to their objections? How will you respond to their counter-arguments/reactions? What how you take their preferred domain of SCARF ® into account?

Closing the conversation	Next Steps
How will you close the conversation?	What are the next steps?

Clearing Model

CLEARING MODEL

This technology is meant to be used when you have created a disconnection with another person or group. It is important that you are willing to let go of being right and take responsibility before you attempt to use this model. The goal is to reveal yourself, own your projection and re-establish connection. For effectiveness, stick to the script.

CREATE RESOLUTION TOGETHER

- ☐ I commit to curiosity and letting go of being right
- ☐ I commit to taking 100% responsibility for the issue
- ☐ I commit to creating a win-for-all resolution

SCRIPT FOR PERSON CLEARING THE ISSUE

Ask for a clearing by affirming a meaningful relationship "I have an issue I'd like to clear with you. Is now a good time?"
"If not now, when?"

1. Something has come up I'd like to clear with you. I want to have clear open lines of communication as our relationship is important to me. Thank you for being here for this.
2. "The specific **FACTS** are..." (Recordable facts; not judgments)
3. "A **STORY** I make up about you/me/the group is..."
4. "My **FEELING** is..." (Angry, Sad, Scared, Sexual, Joyful)
5. "I specifically **WANT**..." (This is not a demand or entitlement but instead a way to be known)
6. "How I **CREATED** this disconnection with you is..."
7. **PROJECTION**: "The part of me I see in you that I have an aversion/attraction to is..."

SCRIPT FOR PERSON LISTENING TO UNDERSTAND

1. "What I hear you saying is..." (Reflect or paraphrase without interpretation)
 - Is that **RIGHT**?" (If not, reflect again)
 - Is there **MORE**?" (Ask with curiosity)
2. "Are you **CLEAR**? Have you said everything you have to say and felt everything you have to feel?" (If yes, move on. If not, go back to "Is there more?")
3. Is there a **NEXT ACTION** step? (If yes, who will do what by when?)
4. Appreciate the person for choosing to clear the issue.

If the listener has issue, it is recommended that you take at least an hour to pause and then switch roles.

Click [Here](#) to
Download the
Clearing Model

Resources

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS TOOLKIT

Tools for
Transformation

What it is

A series of articles, best practices, and tools for engaging successfully in challenging conversations

What it can do

This tool can help leaders and consultants:

- o Break patterns of procrastination and avoidance in dealing with challenging and uncomfortable relational situations.
- o Learn best practices and tools to create more successful outcomes from these conversations.

How it works

The Courageous Conversations Toolkit includes the following articles, best practices and tools:

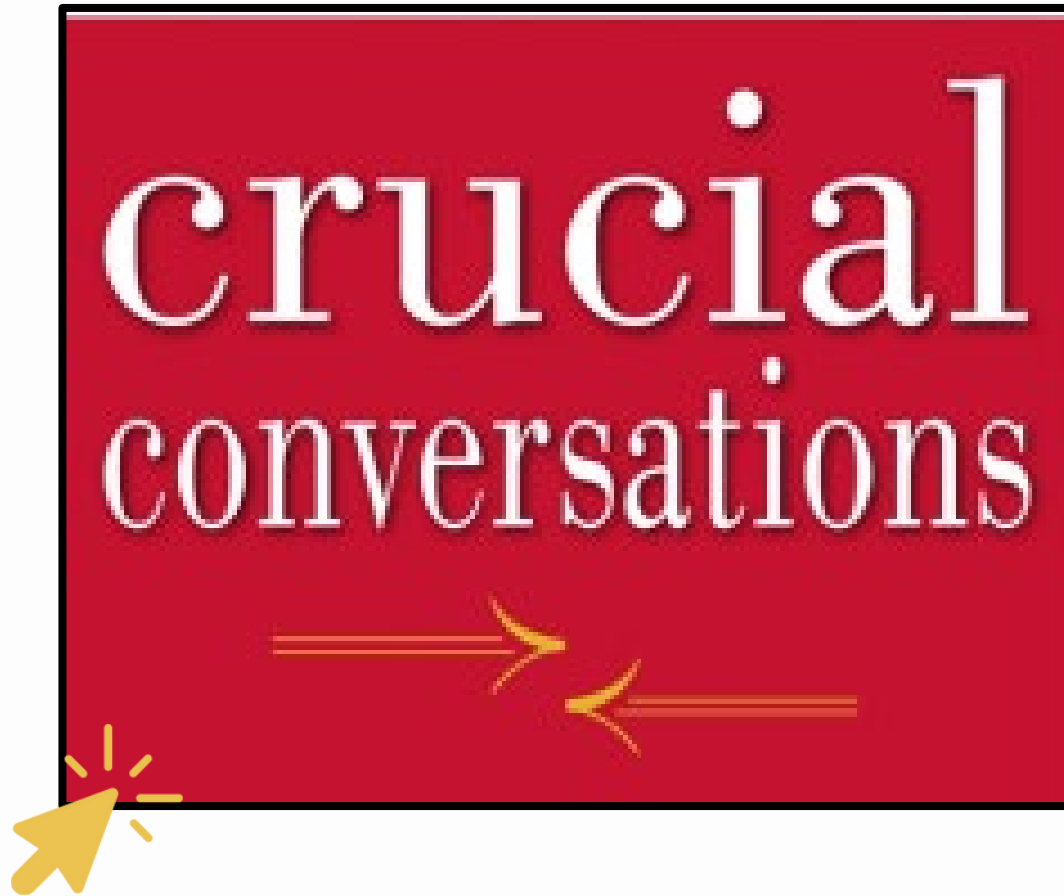
1. *Courageous Conversations: A Paradigm Shift*
2. *Do You Need One?*
3. *How To Prepare*
4. *Best Practices*

You can download the articles in this toolkit, and many other tools for transformation, at:
http://stproject.org/toolkit_tool/courageous-conversation-toolkit



Click [Here](#) to Download the **Courageous Conversations Toolkit**

Resources



Click [Here](#) to Take the **Crucial Conversations Self Assessment**

Resources

- https://www.carli.illinois.edu/sites/files/prof_devel/Managing%20Difficult%20Conversations%202022%20Austin%20Sanders.pdf
- <https://www.judyringer.com/resources/articles/we-have-to-talk-a-stepbystep-checklist-for-difficult-conversations.php>
- <https://www.epicpeople.nl/wp-content/uploads/Style-Under-Stress-test-version-4.pdf>
- <https://www.jodymichael.com/blog/when-not-to-have-a-crucial-conversation/>
- <https://cruciallearning.com/blog/crucial-conversations-skill-summary-master-my-stories/>
- https://www.carli.illinois.edu/sites/files/prof_devel/Managing%20Difficult%20Conversations%202022%20Austin%20Sanders.pdf
- <https://www.judyringer.com/resources/articles/we-have-to-talk-a-stepbystep-checklist-for-difficult-conversations.php>
- <https://www.epicpeople.nl/wp-content/uploads/Style-Under-Stress-test-version-4.pdf>
- <https://www.jodymichael.com/blog/when-not-to-have-a-crucial-conversation/>
- <https://cruciallearning.com/blog/crucial-conversations-skill-summary-master-my-stories/>
- https://www.iup.edu/teachingexcellence/files/reflective_practice/past_events/2018-19/facilitating_challenging_conversations_in_the_classroom/11-7-18-rplgm-de-escalation-powerpoint-verbal-judo.pdf
- Thompson, G. J., & Jenkins, J. B. (2013). Verbal judo: The gentle art of persuasion (Updated ed.). William Morrow.
- <https://hr.umich.edu/sites/default/files/crucial-conversations-planner.pdf>
- https://fiercelearning.com/implementationplaybooks/Uploadfile/fierce_introduction_for_leaders_.pdf
- <https://wisewords.blog/miscellaneous/think-faster-talk-smarter-book-summary-matt-abrahams/>

Resources

- <https://www.chp.edu/-/media/chp/healthcare-professionals/documents/faculty-development/managing-difficult-conversations-in-the-workplace-ppt-82917.pdf?la=en>
- <https://wisewords.blog/miscellaneous/think-faster-talk-smarter-book-summary-matt-abrahams/#:~:text=Problem:%20Start%20by%20identifying%20a%20common%20challenge%2C,that%20your%20audience%20recognises%20as%20their%20own.>
- <https://www.mountaineers.org/about/vision-leadership/board-of-directors/committees/branch-leadership-committee/outdoor-leadership-committee/resource-center/2018-leadership-conference-materials/through-the-crux-mastering-difficult-conversations>
- <https://thinkdev.org/blog/the-air-feedback-model>
- <https://thepowermoves.com/verbal-judo/>
- Abrahams, M. (2023). Think faster, talk smarter: How to speak successfully when you're put on the spot. Simon & Schuster.
- <https://www.chp.edu/-/media/chp/healthcare-professionals/documents/faculty-development/managing-difficult-conversations-in-the-workplace-ppt-82917.pdf?la=en>
- <https://sourcesofinsight.com/4-decision-making-methods/#:~:text=Command%20%E2%80%93%20decisions%20are%20made%20with,everyone%20agrees%20to%20one%20decision.>
- Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R., Switzler, A., & Maxfield, D. (2022). Crucial conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Resources

- Noll, D. E. (2017). *De-Escalate: How to calm an angry person in 90 seconds or less* [Paperback edition]. Pelican Publishing.
- Stone, D., Patton, B., & Heen, S. (2023). *Difficult conversations: How to discuss what matters most* (Rev. 3rd ed.). Penguin Books.
- <https://www.jodymichael.com/blog/master-crucial-conversations/>
- <https://prezi.com/krlvrfrjzdj0/crucial-conversations-crib/>
- <https://www.shortform.com/blog/crucial-conversations-crib/>
- <http://www.chaosmanagement.com/images/stories/pdfs/NotesCrucialConversationsbook1-07.pdf>
- <https://sourcesofinsight.com/mutual-purpose/>
- https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_curiosity_can_help_us_overcome_disconnection
- <https://www.trec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COIN-Communications-Framework-v819.pdf>
- <http://stproject.org/wp-content/uploads/toolkit-files/courageous-conversations-toolkit.pdf>
- https://www.lessonsfromliterature.org/docs/manual/Respect_Wheel.pdf
- https://amberajohnson.substack.com/p/three-steps-for-giving-feedback-that?utm_source=post-email-title&publication_id=2805516&post_id=163055126&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=182xjh&triedRedirect=true

Resources

- <https://ahaslides.com/blog/principled-negotiation>
- <https://gettingmore.com/the-model>
- <https://www.collidu.com/presentation-interest-based-relational-ibr-approach>
- <https://www.businessinsider.com/chick-fil-a-handles-angry-customers-heard-model-core-4-2023-3>
- <https://www.callcentrehelper.com/7-models-for-creating-customer-engagement-197765.htm>
- <https://gettingmore.com/the-model/>
- https://www.brilliancebrief.com/p/integrity-check-would-you-pass-the-test?_bhlid=601cc2fc0a2210e953e1826212ad5dfbc1f4bead&utm_campaign=integrity-check-would-you-pass-the-test&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_source=www.brilliancebrief.com

AOS Regional Liaisons



OHIO AUDITOR OF STATE
KEITH FABER

Questions?

For more information, please contact:

Dorinda Byers

✉ dabyers@ohioauditor.gov

📧 **General Inquiries:**

🌐 **Visit us online:** <https://ohioauditor.gov/contact.html>



📧 **Subscribe to Our Newsletter**

Stay informed about the latest updates, news, and opportunities.

📰 **Press Release Alerts**

Be the first to know about our announcements and achievements.

📄 **Office Publications**

Access valuable resources and reports.



Tools to Help

Step #1 Inquiry

- Approach with curiosity to foster connection, asking instead of judging to build understanding. Assume you know nothing and seek to understand your partner's perspective fully.

Step #2 Acknowledgment

- Demonstrate understanding by accurately summarizing the other person's argument before presenting your own.

Step #3 Advocacy

- Once your partner has expressed their viewpoint, share yours. Highlight what they may have missed without dismissing their stance.

Step #4 Problem-Solving

- Collaborate on solutions. Encourage brainstorming and build on ideas that have potential.



The 3Vs of Emotionally Engaging Customer Service

Visible

- Listen carefully and attentively.
- Use verbal nods and reflect back what the customer said.
- Show personal connection and understanding.

Validated

- Acknowledge and validate the customer's emotions.
- Reassure them they did the right thing by reaching out.
- Offer comfort when they express frustration or concern.

Valued

- Show empathy and take ownership.
- Reaffirm that you're there to help.
- Help customers feel like they have a personal advocate in the business.

The 3 Deliverables Every Customer Wants

Understand Me

- Step into the customer's world.
- Listen empathetically and see their perspective.
- Understand what they want and don't want.

Add Value for Me

- Offer helpful products or services.
- Make a positive difference, even in small ways.
- Support them in making life easier or more comfortable.

Make It Easy for Me

- Simplify the process.
- Reduce friction and effort.
- Ensure a smooth, hassle-free experience.

De-escalation Best Practices



VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Tone + Volume + Rate of speech + Inflection of voice = Verbal De-Escalation

Tone: Speak calmly to demonstrate empathy.

Volume: Monitor your volume and avoid raising your voice.

Rate of Speech: Slower can be more soothing.

Inflection: Be aware of emphasizing words or syllables as that can negatively affect the situation.

Instead Of:

"Calm down."

"I can't help you."

"I know how you feel."

"Come with me."

Say...

"I can see that you are upset..."

"I want to help, what can I do?"

"I understand that you feel..."

"May I speak with you?"



BODY LANGUAGE

Instead Of:

Standing rigidly directly in front of the person

Pointing your finger

Excessive gesturing or pacing

Faking a smile

Try...

Keeping a relaxed and alert stance off to the side of the person

Keeping your hands down, open, and visible at all times

Using slow, deliberate movements

Maintaining a neutral and attentive facial expression

The HEAT Model

Hear Them Out

- Ask open questions and let them vent.
- Use verbal nods to show you're listening.
- Stay calm and don't take it personally.

Empathize

- Use genuine, situation-specific empathy statements.
- Match your tone to the customer's emotion.
- Show you truly understand their frustration.

Apologize

- Offer a clear, sincere, and specific apology.
- Avoid half-apologies or vague statements.
- Own the issue without deflecting blame.

Take Action

- Explain how you'll resolve the issue.
- Use signposting and a confident tone.
- Reassure the customer that help is on the way.

Behavioral Change Stairway Model (BCSM)

1. **Active Listening:** Fully engage with the person by listening without interrupting. Use paraphrasing, minimal encouragers (e.g., “I see”), and mirroring to show you understand their perspective. This reduces defensiveness and opens communication.
2. **Empathy:** Demonstrate that you understand their emotions and point of view. Label their feelings (e.g., “You seem really angry”) and ask open-ended questions to validate their experience, fostering a sense of being heard.
3. **Rapport:** Build a trusting relationship by showing genuine care and aligning with their emotions. Consistent empathy and patience create a connection, making them more receptive to you.
4. **Influence:** Once trust is established, subtly guide their behavior by suggesting solutions that align with their interests (e.g., “Let’s find a way to keep everyone safe”). Frame options collaboratively to maintain their sense of control.
5. **Behavioral Change:** Achieve the desired outcome, such as de-escalation or surrender, as the person acts on your influence. This final step relies on the trust and rapport built through the previous steps.

Key Strategies for Effective Conversations

1. Start with the Right Purpose
2. Adopt a Learning Stance
3. Use the “And Stance”
4. Reframe the Conversation
5. Problem-Solve Together



Practical Steps to Prepare and Engage

1. Prepare for the Conversation
2. Start Well
3. Listen and Acknowledge
4. Share Your Perspective
5. Navigate Deadlocks



Practical Steps to Prepare and Engage

1. Prepare for the Conversation
2. Start Well
3. Listen and Acknowledge
4. Share Your Perspective
5. Navigate Deadlocks



Lego Duck Challenge

Part 1- Individual Challenge

Objective:

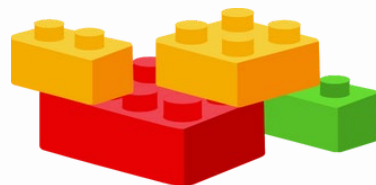
- Build the best duck you can using only your creativity and hands-on thinking.

Time:

- 60 seconds

Instructions:

- Use all 6 LEGO pieces.
- Build a duck—no planning, just “thinking with your hands.”
- When time is up, hold up your duck and observe how different each one is.



Part 2- Team Challenge

Objective:

- Work together to build as many different ducks as possible.

Time:

- 90 seconds

Instructions:

- Form a team of 4.
- As a team, collaborate to build as many different LEGO ducks as possible.
- Take a photo of each set of 4 different ducks
- Work together—no solo builds this time!

Three-Step De-Escalation Process

1. Ignore the Words

Focus on the emotions behind the angry outburst, not the specific complaints or insults.

Example: Your manager yells, "You messed up the whole report!" You don't argue about the report. You focus on their anger.

2. Read the Emotions

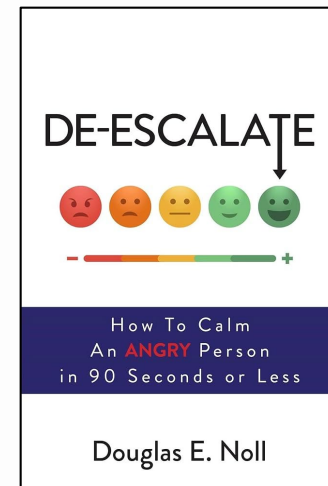
Identify and label the feelings (anger, fear, sadness, etc.) driving the behavior.

Example: Your colleague's voice shakes, and they're fidgeting—evidence of anxiety or fear.

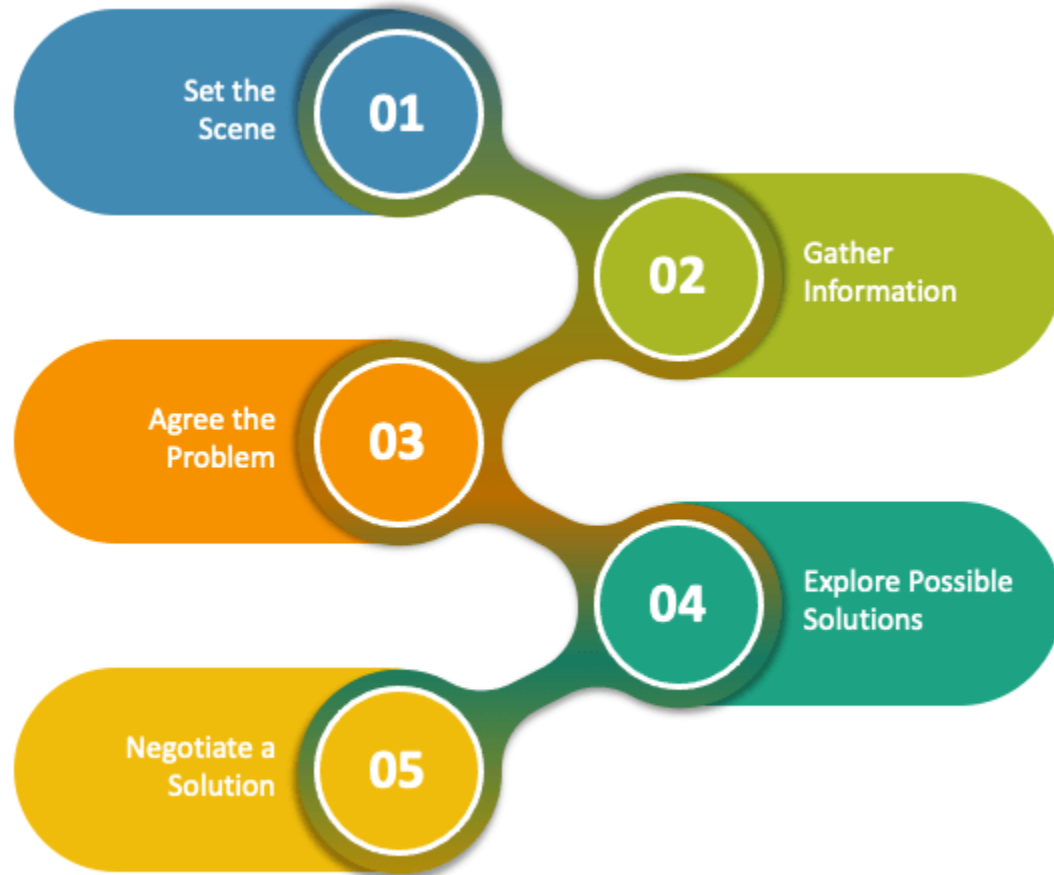
3. Reflect Back

Use affect labeling to acknowledge their emotions calmly and neutrally, building trust.

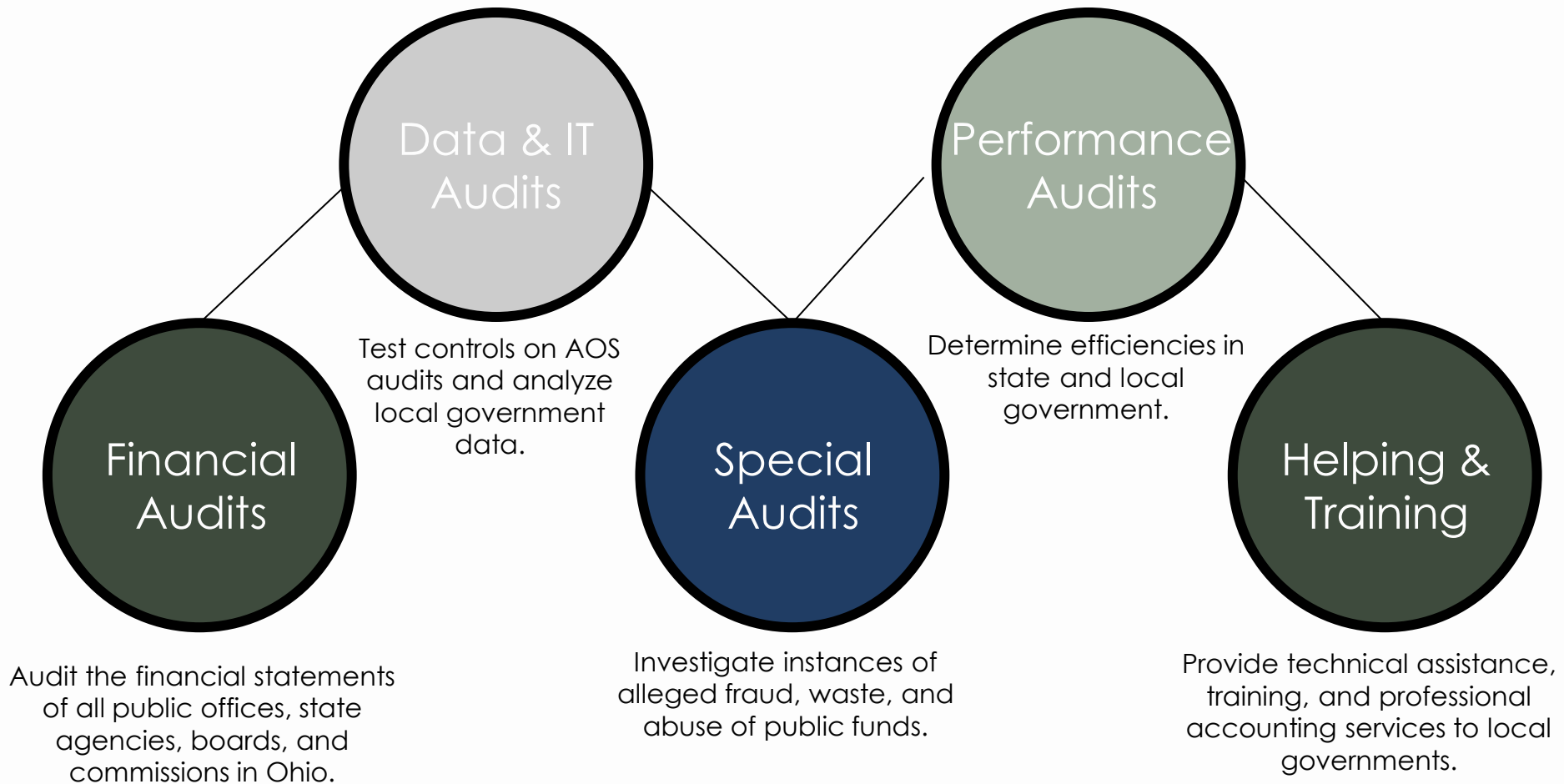
Example: Seeing their anxiety, you calmly say, "You seem really nervous about this."



Interest-Based Relational (IBR) Approach



Responsibilities of the Office



Mastering Our Stories & Your Path to Action

Skill 1: Retrace My Path to Action

- **Act:** Examine your behavior.
- **Q:** Am I in silence or violence?
- **Feel:** Identify your emotions.
- **Q:** What emotions are driving this behavior?
- **Tell Story:** Question your interpretation.
- **Q:** What story is creating these emotions?
- **See/Hear:** Get back to the facts.
- **Q:** What observable evidence supports this story?

Skill 2: Separate Fact from Story

- **Observe:** Distinguish between facts and interpretations.
- **Q:** What would a camera see or hear? What part is my assumption?

Skill 3: Watch for 3 Clever Stories

- **Victim Stories:** “Not my fault!”
- **Q:** Am I ignoring my role in the problem?
- **Villain Stories:** “All your fault!”
- **Q:** Why would a rational person do this?
- **Helpless Stories:** “Nothing I can do.”
- **Q:** What do I want—for me, for them, for us?

Skill 4: Tell the Rest of the Story

- **Create:** Focus on what's possible moving forward.
- **Q:** What can I do now to get what I really want?

What to Do When Purposes Differ?

Create a Mutual Purpose – CRIB

1

Commit to
Seek Mutual
Purpose

2

Recognize the
Purpose behind
the Strategy

3

Intent a
Mutual
Purpose

4

Brainstorm
New
Strategies

Resources



Gently talk with the child about his feelings. Tell him what you see and hear as a result of his emotions. Help him to identify the root feeling causing the behavior.



Remind the child of the positive limits and expectations you have for his behavior. Loving and simple limits help surround children with a sense of consistency, safety and trust.



Encourage the child to think about solutions to his challenges. Ask questions that promote problem-solving and healthy coping skills. Inquiries invite children to think, learn, and gain self-control.



Provide creative cues, clues, and suggestions for the child who is having difficulty. Enthusiastic, bright ideas can lead the way to better problem-solving skills.



Click [Here](#) to Access the **Flip Strategy**

Reflecting on Difficult Conversations

Can you think of a conversation that...

- You've been putting off?
- Didn't go the way you hoped?
- You had, but wish you could redo?



Take a moment to reflect:

- What was the situation?
- How did the conversation start—and how did it end?
- How did it feel?
- What impact did it have on you? On the other person?
- Was anyone else affected? How?
- How and when was it completed?
- What outcome did you hope for—and what actually happened?
- If you could go back, what advice would you give yourself?

The Getting More Model

Goals are paramount.

It's about them.

Make emotional payments.

Every situation is different.

Incremental is best.

Trade things you value unequally.

Find their standards.

Be transparent and constructive, not manipulative.

Always communicate, state the obvious, and frame the vision.

Find the real problem and make it an opportunity.

Embrace differences.

Prepare – Make a list and practice.