Your Critical Conversation: It Starts with You

What makes a conversation “critical” or “difficult”? What are the characteristics?

What is the nature of your critical conversation? With whom do you need to have this conversation? Why is it particularly challenging, critical or difficult for you? Jot a sentence or two.

Our Human Nature

Thinking about your situation and what has occurred to this point, what has been your natural and perhaps less than flattering reaction?

- What is the stimulus that has led to the situation? This is something that was said or done (likely by the other person) that you cannot change.

- What have you believed about this situation and about the other person? Is it pretty or flattering? Perhaps not? Describe it here. Be honest with yourself.

- How has this situation caused you to feel and behave? Describe emotions and actions.

Adopting a More Proactive Response

- What is the stimulus that has led to the situation? This is something that was said or done (likely by the other person) that you cannot change.

- What is a different interpretation you might give to the situation or about the other person? Are you totally blameless? Is the other person bad or completely at fault? Is the situation as hopeless as you initially believed? Describe a different interpretation that you might adopt.

- If this different interpretation is possible, would you feel and behave differently? Would you feel less upset or hopeless and more able to handle a critical conversation? Describe the feelings you might have and actions you might take that are more proactive.
Encourage Dialogue (Script and Example)

1. **Ask to speak to the individual** – I’d like to talk with you about a concern I have” or “Can we discuss a concern that I have? I’d like to discuss what happened yesterday.”

   Script for your situation:

2. **Describe the situation that concerns you in specific, objective terms. Be polite. Do not make it personal.** – “At the end of the day, you dropped a number of files on my desk and expected me to complete them before I left. Yet, I told you last week that I needed to leave early yesterday so I could see a friend from out of town and go to the game. You seem to have forgotten this.”

   Script for your situation:

3. **Explain the tangible effects that the situation is having on you, on your productivity and time, on the work environment, etc.** – “As a result, I stayed late to complete the work and had to call my friend and tell him I’d have to miss seeing him and the game. I was so disappointed. This isn’t the first time this has happened either. It makes me feel that you don’t respect me or my time.”

   Script for your situation:

4. **Show that you understand that the other person is also concerned about the situation.** – “I know you didn’t intend to inconvenience me. I also know there is a ton of work to do. I’m as concerned as you are about meeting customer needs. I also realize things have been stressful lately.”

   Script for your situation:

5. **Suggest specific, objective options on how the situation might be resolved.** – “I’d like you to submit your requests earlier in the day so that I don’t have to stay late to complete them. I’d also like you to make a note on your calendar when I’ve requested to leave early or to not work late. If there are any projects at the end of the day, perhaps I can come in early to do them.”

   Script for your situation:

6. **Express your desire to achieve a “win-win” solution and invite the other person’s input on how to solve the problem.** –

   General example: “I like working here and would really like to work things out. I would like to hear your ideas on how we can resolve this issue.”

   Script for your situation:
Key Listening Techniques

Attending Behavior – indicates readiness to listen and focus completely.

Examples: Sit squarely Open posture Eye contact Lean forward

Passive Listening – listener’s gestures and nonverbal cues for the speaker to continue talking.

“Say-More” Responses – listener’s verbal cues to let the speaker know that they are being heard.

“Could you please say more about that?”

Paraphrasing – listener’s summary of their interpretation of the facts they have ‘absorbed’ from the speaker’s words.

“You are saying that __________.”

Reflect Feelings – listener’s feedback of the spoken or unspoken emotional content of the speaker’s message.

“You feel __________ about ______________.”

Emotion Content

Techniques to Avoid:

• Advising
• Probing
• Interpreting
• Evaluating
Watch for Triggers

Trigger: Statement or action by others that make us feel diminished, offended, threatened, stereotyped, discounted, or attacked. Triggers often leave us feeling psychologically threatened.

Solution: Encourage conversation that:

- Is _______; and
- ________________ threats and defensiveness

Our Natural Instincts

Fight

Flight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flight Responses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leave</td>
<td>Attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>Argue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>Debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignore</td>
<td>Shock and confusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deflect</td>
<td>Label</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give in</td>
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Positive Responses to Triggers

Recognize the trigger (in yourself and others)

Avoid the typical response:

Adopt a different response:

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Managing Critical Conversations – Dan Griffith – IUPUI Staff Conference, 5/26/17
Avoiding and/or Responding to Defensiveness

Avoid judgment and labels. Be clear/concise and use factual description instead.

- Say, “These documents are out of order.”
- Instead of, “This is sloppy work” or “you are lazy.”

Avoid exaggeration and words that express absolutes like “always” and “never”

- Say, “You were 10 minutes late today. That’s the third time this week.”
- Instead of, “You are never on time.”

Own your feelings/reactions by using “I” statements instead of “You” statements

- Say, “I get angry when you break your promises.”
- Instead of, “You make me angry.”

Don’t place guilt

- Say, “I think completing the task by last Monday was doable.”
- Instead of, “You shoulda’ been able to get this done by last Monday.”

Make requests, not demands

- Say, “Would you please complete this task today?”
- Instead of, “Do it now!”

Use tentative language

- Say, “I could be mistaken about this,” or “Perhaps there is another explanation.”
- Instead of, “I know this is what happened,” or “There is no other explanation to explain your behavior.”

Encourage testing

- Say, “If you have a different perspective, I’d love to hear it,” or “Please tell me if I haven’t got this right.”
- Instead of: failing to invite the other person’s perspective or explanation

Contrast to address misunderstandings about your motives or goals

- Say, “I don’t want you to think that I’m accusing you of being lazy . . . I do want to discuss the three absences in the past week and how I can help you.”
- Instead of: “I am not saying you are lazy!”

Apologize when appropriate

- Say, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to snap at you. I know you are just as frustrated as I am”
- Instead of: Nothing
Reframe Positions as Interests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positional Statement</th>
<th>Interests Expressed</th>
<th>Reframe as Interests:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I refuse to attend any more evening meetings.</td>
<td>Security, respect, appreciation, etc.</td>
<td>You are concerned about going out into the parking lot by yourself late at night. You want us to have more respect for your personal life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Positional Statement from the Other Person

Interests Expressed (choose the appropriate interests listed from below or select others) Reframe as Interests:

Examples of Interests:
- Love
- Security
- Freedom
- Relaxation
- Consideration
- Order
- Respect
- Control
- Appreciation
- Self-esteem
- Privacy
- Fun
- Power
- Friendship
- Competence
- Comfort
- Trust
- Physical needs
- Safety
- Approval
- Excitement
- Acceptance
- Understanding

Engage in Problem-Solving and Agree on a Solution

**Define the Problem**

Recognize – Agree that the issue needs resolution

Label – Agree on a statement of the problem

Analyze – Come to agreement on the root causes that require correction

**Engage in Decision-Making**

Explore options – brainstorm all possible solutions that may solve the problem. Be sure to brainstorm before evaluating options suggested. Avoid harsh criticism.

Decide – Agree on a resolution that meets both your needs

Implement – Translate the solution into a permanent reality. Be sure to make concrete commitments: Who – Will Do What – By When – How Will You Follow Up?