

Decision Points for Conducting a Difficult Conversation

Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome.

~ Booker T. Washington

Bringing up an issue that bothers you is not easy. Many people would rather avoid it altogether. But not you. Otherwise, you wouldn't be in this course. So at what point do you decide to engage the other person? By reviewing this checklist and determining what applies to your situation, you can decide if it's time to have this conversation.

1. This issue has been going on for too long.
2. Other people have tried to address this but without success.
3. There has been a history of tension between us.
4. The problem has not been resolved.
5. I'm negatively impacted by this situation.
6. My colleagues are also adversely affected by this situation.
7. This situation is stressful for me.
8. I think about it when I'm away from the office.
9. I feel out of control at this point.
10. I feel like I've tried everything I can and don't know what else to do.

Exercise: Your Situation

As you review the statements on the previous page, think about a situation that applies. Consider your interactions with this person and answer the following questions. This will assist you in analyzing the situation and help you prepare to bring up a difficult issue.

1. What happened that caused disagreement or tension between you?
2. How did you react to it? What behavior did you demonstrate?
3. How did they react? What behavior did they demonstrate?
4. What have you tried so far to reconcile with them?
5. Remember when you got along just fine. What did you appreciate about them? What abilities/competencies do they have?
6. Do you have the will to bring up this issue? When will you do it?
7. As we review various approaches in this course, write notes here about how you will address this situation.

Prevent Difficult Conversations Through Greater Understanding

As you learn more skills and techniques for conducting tough conversations, you'll gain the confidence to have the conversation. Remember the consequences of avoiding it.

The question is – how can you prevent this predicament from happening? Sometimes you can't. But sometimes you can by controlling your emotions so they don't control you. As you know, you're the only person you can control. We can get provoked by what people say or do. Our emotions can get hijacked.

The good news is there are ways to deal with this. Based on the neuroscience of the brain, the emotional center known as the *amygdala* is our fight or flight center. *Amygdala* means the shape of an almond in Greek. It takes about 6 seconds for the neural impulse to go from the *amygdala* to the frontal cortex of the brain, which is the logical, rational side. Therefore, it's important to breathe deeply to allow for that time. Remember the advice to take a deep breath during a difficult situation.

The first sign that our emotions are getting hijacked is in the body – we feel it somatically. Where do you feel it first: neck; stomach; shoulders; somewhere else? Pay attention to what your body tells you, and then decide how to react. The "PRC" method below offers an approach to managing those emotions.

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R ... efect

C ... hoose

- ❖ Take a few seconds to **pause** and breathe to collect your thoughts.
- ❖ **Reflect** on why you're getting annoyed about what's being said or done by the other person. Think about what hot buttons get pushed for you. What patterns can you detect? If you understand why you get provoked, you'll know how to handle a similar situation. You can even be proactive by anticipating a situation and heading it off before it escalates.
- ❖ **Choose** the best reaction that will move the situation toward resolution. Think level-headed, leave your ego at the door, and consider what's best for everyone, as well as what's best for the organization.

Objective: To Explore Questions That Check Assumptions and Increase Understanding

Think about the situation you described previously - when you disagreed with someone. Undoubtedly, you formed several assumptions about their intentions and where they were coming from.

Answer the following questions to dive deeper into analyzing your situation:

1. What did the person actually say or do?
2. What was the impact on me?
3. What does my reaction indicate about how I'm feeling and what buttons are pushed?
4. What assumption(s) am I making about what the person intended?
5. What did we both do to contribute to this situation?
6. If I check my assumptions with them to see if there's any validity, how do I think they'll respond?
7. How can I move from my assumptions and the feelings that arise to being curious and inquisitive about where they're coming from?
8. What questions can I ask to uncover their true interests as well as our common ground?
9. How can I encourage us to focus on the future and turn those assumptions into actions that promote constructive results?