

Challenging Conversations

Holly Weeks



6 Basic Types of Difficult Conversation

- I have bad news for you
- You're challenging my power
- I can't go there
- You win/I lose
- What's going on here?
- I'm being attacked!

Takeaway Learnings

Tough conversations fall apart in recognizable ways

Good strategies and tactics can bring them into balance

- Break patterns of thinking and acting that don't work
- Change—unilaterally—what we're *trying* to do
- Focus on strategies with good track records
- Expand our inventory of tactics that *do* work

Three Major Pitfalls

Combat anxiety

Tough conversations will be battles with winners and losers

Emotional aspects

**Personalities intertwined with issues
Intense, unspoken reactions**

Hard to read

**Breakdown between what one side means
and what the other side hears
Different expectations on all sides**

Conflict Conversations

- **What is the culture of conflict management in organizations you have observed?**
- **As a rule, how are conflicts in those organizations acknowledged and discussed?**
- **Is the approach consistent? Successful?**
- **Why or why not?**

Values and Principles

Preserve reputation and relationships

What people think of us
How we work together

Authenticity

“Be yourself...but with more skill”

3-way respect

Respect for your counterpart
Self-respect
Respect for the conversation itself

Good balance

Balance within
Balance between

Rethink what to do: Strategy

Assume you will be taken by surprise

Assume things will go wrong

Think through

- **preferred outcome**
- **preferred working relationship + interferences**
- **mock interview**

Mock Interview

Mock Interview Prep

What's the problem?

What would my counterpart say the problem is?

What's my preferred outcome?

("Where do I want to get in this conversation?")

What's my preferred working relationship with my counterpart? ("How do I want this relationship to be?")

What's interfering with my preferred working relationship?

Performance Review

Preferred outcome?

“I want Ernesto to recognize that he needs to put more into group projects and agree to my decision that he be taken off the supply chain software project.”
It would have been much better if Carl had scrutinized a preferred outcome like that and said to herself, “I don’t think that’s going to happen.”

Preferred working relationship + interferences

In a difficult conversation, it is much easier—and more effective—to talk about a good thing you want, and what’s interfering with it now, than to talk about what’s wrong with your counterpart.

Self-respect + Respect for the Counterpart & the Conversation + Balance

Before the conversation with Ernesto began, Carl could have made his best assessment of Ernesto’s point of view. If he had asked himself, “What is Ernesto likely to think the problem is here? Are he and I going to be on the same page?”

If he had looked straight at the interests he knew Ernesto had, Carl might have said to himself, or to Abby, his CEO, “We’re hitting Ernesto with a stick here. Can we give him a carrot, too?” And certainly they could have come up with the carrot.

Difficult Conversations

How can one plan strategy for a difficult conversation with a counterpart whose perspective on the problem the strategist does not know?

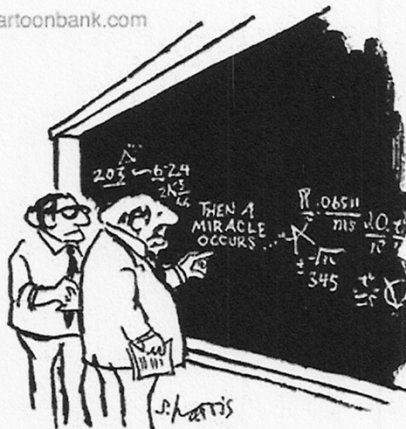
[Marta and Hugh]

First, even if it makes you uneasy, do your best assessment of the counterpart's point of view in this conversation. What is your counterpart likely to think the problem is here? Are you and the counterpart on the same page? If your answer is, "I don't know," you can ask.

Marta could say to Hugh, "I've been thinking about how what I said to Coleman looked to you, and I realize that I don't know. I don't know how you see it." Or on his side, Hugh could say the equivalent to Marta.

Rethink what to do: Tactics

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"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

Tactics: What's wrong with what we do?

What *we* do:

- Avoid confrontation
- Find our own emotions in the way
- Swing from pole to pole
- Stick to one old standby

Tactics: What's wrong with what [we] do?

What *they* do:

An arsenal of “thwarting ploys”

- to get us to back off
- to come out on top
- to get out of the conversation altogether

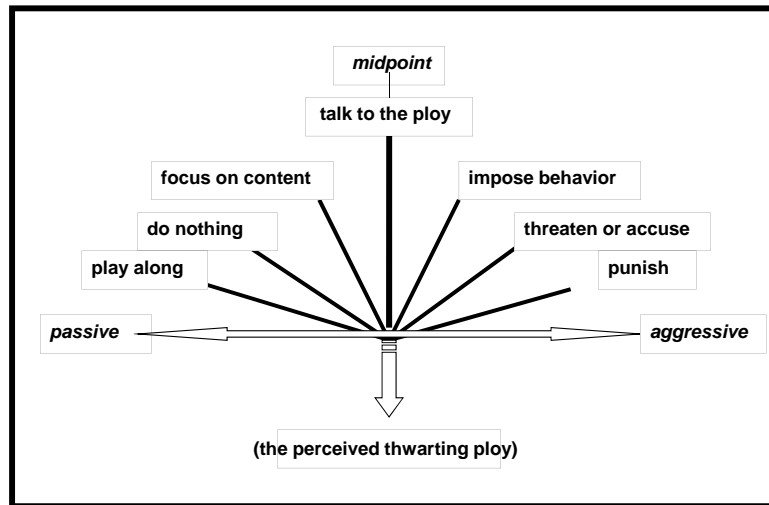
Difficult Conversations

- **Thinking of difficult conversations at work, in hindsight, what habits, styles, blind spots, or weaknesses might have limited the counterparts and their ability to get the outcomes they wanted?**
- **What characteristics of difficult conversations are hardest for the people you know?**

Rethink what to do: Tactics

- **Immunize against thwarting ploys**
- **Find middle ground between extremes**
- **Change tack to disarm a difficult moment**
- **Recover from blunders and fouls**

Range of Response to Thwarting Ploys



Blueprint for Speaking Well at Tough Times

clear content

Clarity means let your words do your work for you. Say what you mean.

neutral tone

Tone is the non-verbal part of the message: the inflection, facial expression, and body language that carries emotional weight. A neutral tone helps you be heard without distortion.

temperate phrasing

When you say to yourself, "I can't say *that*," you probably can say it; you just can't say it *that way*. Some phrasing is temperate; some dissembles; some provokes your counterpart with loaded language. If your counterpart dismisses, resists, or throws back your words, he's not likely to hold onto your content.

Good Balance: 3-Way Respect

Self-respect

Balance within yourself

Hold your own; own what you do

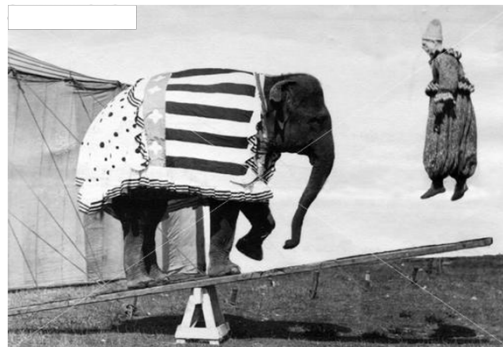


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Respect for your counterpart

Balance between the two of you

Don't count on reciprocity; bring respect unilaterally



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Respect for the conversation itself

Balance in the conversation

Where you could move; where they could move;
how to move the conversation forward



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