IPMA-HR
Managing Difficult Conversations

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Workshop Outcomes

You will be able to:

• describe why difficult (conflict) conversations are so hard
• define the three components of “tangled” conversations
• name various sources and escalators of anxiety and conflict
• describe some of the dynamics of conflict
• Describe and apply some key strategies to promote constructive and productive conversations
Today’s Agenda

1. Workshop Set-Up
2. Conversations About Conflict
3. “Tangled” Conversations
4. Self-Mediation Process
5. Small Group Discussion
6. Key Points & Questions
CONFLICT

Okay,

So What is it?
CONFLICT Conversations

What Causes Conflict and Why?

What Makes Engaging in Conflict Conversations So Difficult?
Causes of Conflict

- Unmet **WANTS and NEEDS**
  - Physical - tired, hungry, stress
  - Emotional - recognition, affiliation, affection
- Colliding **VALUES**
  - Beliefs that frame our words and behavior
  - Applied to life elements (time, money, work, health, relationships, politics)
- Different **PERCEPTIONS**
  - Each of us has different “lenses” and orientations
  - Filter info based on values, experiences
Causes of Conflict

- **KNOWLEDGE and INFORMATION gaps**
  - Power, oppression, alienation
- Unchecked **ASSUMPTIONS**
- Vague or different **EXPECTATIONS**
  - Mine vs. Yours
  - Today vs. Tomorrow
- Differences in **CULTURE & UPBRINGING**
  - Age, gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, SES
- **AVOIDANCE & INABILITY** to deal
Conflict? Moi?

Two minute Self-Reflection Self-Assessment
Escalating Reflexes

What behaviors illustrate that conflict is present?
## Discovering our Escalating Reflexes

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<tr>
<th>INTENTIONAL BEHAVIORS</th>
<th>UNINTENTIONAL</th>
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<td>Avoiding</td>
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<td>Withholding information</td>
<td>Body Posture</td>
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<td>Not responding to requests</td>
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<td>Silent treatment</td>
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<td>Getting others to take sides</td>
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<td>Shouting</td>
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<td>Hostile Gestures</td>
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Distancing Behaviors
“Walk-aways”

- Avoiding
- Withdrawing
- Withholding information
- Not responding to requests
- Silent treatment
Coercive Behaviors
“Power-plays”

- Threatening
- Pre-empting
- Getting others to take sides
- Shouting
- Hostile Gestures
Difficult Conversations, Tangled Conversations:
Three Conversations in One!

The “What Happened?” Conversation

The Identity Conversation

The Feelings Conversation

Theory-based model from Patton, Heen & Fisher
The “What Happened?” Conversation

• The Truth Assumption
  – Whose Truth vs. Whose Perception?

• The Intention Invention
  – What we believe affects how we think, behave

• The Blame Frame
  – Energy spent on assigning blame, defending
  – Acknowledge how all contribute
The Feelings Conversation

- Suppress Assumption
  - Don’t talk about it and it’ll go away
- Facts Only Assumption
  - Emotions cloud the issues
- Unprofessional Assumption
  - Feelings have no place at work
The Identity Conversation

• **Three Core Identities**
  - Am I Competent?
  - Am I a Good Person?
  - Am I Worthy?

• **Three Things to Accept or Own**
  - You will make mistakes
  - Your intentions are complex
  - You have contributed to the problem
Self-Mediation Process

STEP 1: Find a time to talk
STEP 2: Plan the Context
STEP 3: Talk it Through
STEP 4: Reach Agreement
STEP 5: Reflect on Situation
STEP 1: Find a Time to Talk

- The Approach
- The Issue Statement
- The Request
- The “Sale” (if needed)
  - Acknowledge objection
  - Illustrate the benefit
  - Repeat request
- The “Cardinal Rules” (if needed)
  - Do not distance or coerce
- The Time and Place
STEP 2: Plan the Context

- Timing
- Duration
- Location
  - Neutral, private, no distractions
- Physical Comforts
- Confidentiality
- Interruptions
  - Use preventions
STEP 3: Talk it Through

• **Opening**
  - Express appreciation, optimism
  - Reminders on the Cardinal Rules
  - State the issue (facts, feelings)
  - Invite other(s) to share

• **Dialogue Tasks**
  - Use “I” statements
  - Use Inquiry Techniques
  - Validate and reward conciliatory gestures

• **Breakthrough**
  - Shift from “you vs. me” to “us vs. problem”
STEP 4: Reach an Agreement

• **Balanced**
  - Concessions and gains

• **Behaviorally specific**
  - Who, what, when, how long
  - How will I know? What will I see?

• **Written** (if needed)
STEP 5: Reflect on Situation

Questions for Reflection

• What was the cause of our conflict?
• Have we eliminated it so other conflicts won’t emerge?
• How did we each behave?
• How can we reduce our resistance to conflict?
• What did we do to resolve the conflict?
• Were our resolution methods effective? Why?
Coaching Conversations

Three Tools of a coaching conversation:

- Inquiry
- Engagement & Advocacy

Four Types of coaching conversations...

Adapted from Straus & Layton/Interaction Associates
REFLECT
LOW INQUIRY -- LOW ADVOCACY

- Listen to other(s), repeating or “parroting” information
- Ask questions to clarify more than to probe
- Don’t present pathway for decision making, allows other(s) to express issues, concerns
FACILITATE
HIGH INQUIRY -- LOW ADVOCACY

• Ask clarifying, deep probing questions
• Encourage other(s) to put all relevant information out in open
• Do not offer solutions -- allow other(s) to discover answer(s) based on evidence they surface
GUIDE
HIGH INQUIRY -- HIGH ADVOCACY

- Ask deep probing questions
- As other(s) relate information, use the information to advocate for specific path for problem solving
DIRECT
LOW INQUIRY -- HIGH ADVOCACY

- Ask clarifying questions to form understanding, context
- Share your experience and expertise as other(s) may lack knowledge or info, may be new task and/or at a loss as to what to do
Inquiry Techniques

- Bracket
- Paraphrase
- Check Perceptions
- Ask Probing Questions
Engagement & Advocacy

- Acknowledge the situation
- Validate
- Empathize
- State your position
- Outline data & explain reasoning
- Check for understanding
- Encourage inquiry & alternate points of view
Time to Plan & Practice!
Key Things to Remember
Key Things to Remember

- Conflict is inevitable
- Numerous factors contribute to conflict
- Numerous factors can escalate conflict
- Self-awareness and self-management are critical
- Conversations are complex
- The more you use the tools, the better you get!
Some excellent resources:

- *Difficult Conversations* (Patton, Heen & Fisher)
- *Conflict Resolution* (Dana)
- *Getting to Yes* (Fisher, Patton & Ury)
- *How to Make Meetings Work* (Doyle)
- *How to Make Collaboration Work* (Straus & Layton)
- *Getting the Love You Want* (Hendrix & Hunt)
Questions?
Insights?
Contact Information

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