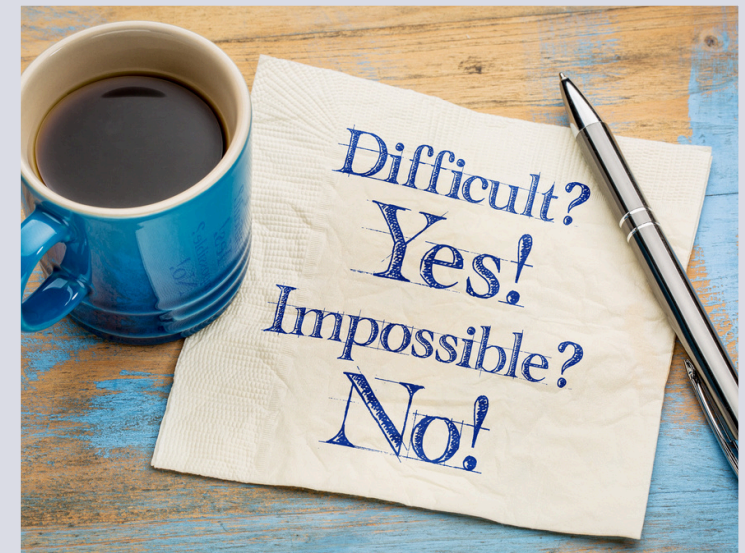




Difficult Conversations In The Workplace



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Goals For Today

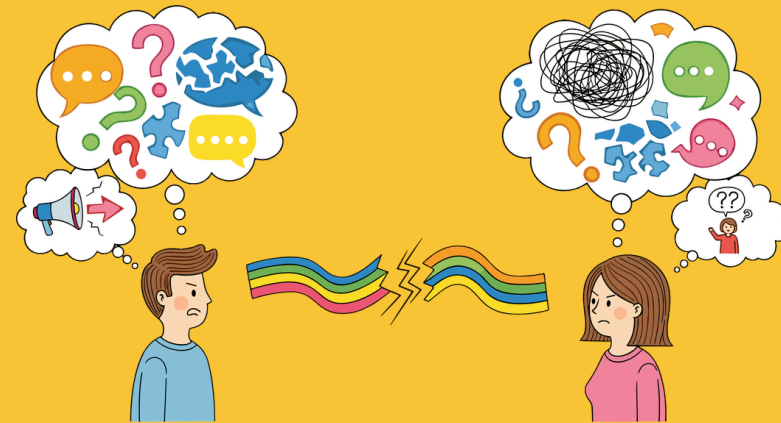


- Practical frameworks for difficult conversations
- How to Prepare
- **Three Strategies**
 - Framing
 - Intention Check
 - Interest Check



Two basic types of difficult conversations:

1. Problem solving
2. News sharing



Three basic elements of a difficult conversation:

1. Opinions vary
2. High stakes
3. Emotions are strong



- The most complicated person you might deal with is the one looking back at you in the mirror everyday.
- Differences bring strength to teams. Complexity in people is a good thing.
- Our emotional state dictates how we give and receive information.
- Most conflict stems from an unmet psychological need.
- Go into every interaction expecting the person to be human.
- We have ingrained patterns in how we deal with conflict. ***Changing that takes awareness and practice.***

What is your natural response to a difficult conversation?



FIGHT

Fight - argue, debate



FLIGHT

Flight - Avoid, close off



FREEZE

Freeze - shut-down, go blank

Depending on the person and circumstance our response may differ.

Identify a contrasting response

FIGHT →
FLIGHT →
FREEZE →

4 Communication Styles

Connect:

- Be open, curious, and honest
- Try not to sugarcoat or use the compliment sandwich
- Stay neutral in tone
- With aggressive or passive-aggressive, try not to meet it with the same tone.
- After discussion, offer solutions in a thoughtful, constructive way.

Passive (Submissive)

Passive Aggressive (Manipulative)

Aggressive

Assertive



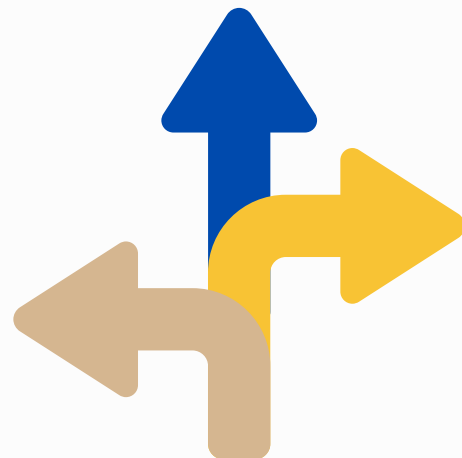
Preparing for the conversation:

- **Is it needed?**
 - Will a simple chat, casual mention suffice?
 - Is this my role, my responsibility?
 - **Is there a company policy, vision, or mission statement around the behavior?**
 - What would be the outcome if I chose not to address the issue?
- **Do you have the necessary information, or are you acting on assumptions or story associations?**
 - Be curious
 - Challenge assumptions
- **Is the timing right?**
 - Set the timing and environment to maximize the chance of a productive outcome.
- **Prepare yourself mentally and emotionally**
 - Am I in the right frame of mind?

Create a Frame

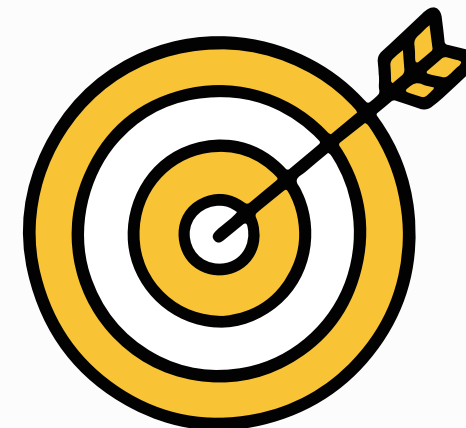
Set a direction

- Be clear about why you are there. Keeps the conversation on topic, sets boundaries and expectations, and provides clarity.
- Separate the person from the problem. Unified detachment.
- It's assertive and neutral:
 - "I want to speak with you about our team meeting yesterday..."
 - "I'd like to discuss the email that you sent regarding..."



Begin with the end in mind

- What outcome are you after/what do you want to accomplish?
- Tell the person up front how you'd like the conversation to end and how you'd like to feel...
 - "...I'd like for us to finish this conversation with a better understanding of..."
 - "...I'd like to resolve this so that there are no misunderstandings..."
 - "...I'd like for us to be on the same page..."



Get agreement

- Get their commitment:
 - Does that sound good to you?
 - Can we agree on that?
- State if there may be need for follow-up.
 - "If needed, we'll schedule another quick talk to follow-up."



Intention Check

- Action
- Intention
- Listen & reiterate
- Describe the effect or next action



Describe the action:

- “In the meeting yesterday, you became heated when discussing the project assignment...”
- “The other day you sent an email to () and cc’d me...”
- “Several assignments have been late, or needed revision, and I’d us to talk about it...”

Ask about their intention

- “I’d like to know where you are coming from...”
- “Is there a reason why you didn’t come to me with this idea/concern...”
- “I’d like to understand what you meant by that...”
- “Is there a misunderstanding or confusion around the task, the timeline...?”

Listen and reiterate

“I want to get the gist of (capture) what you’re saying and how you’re feeling...”
“Okay, just so I’m understanding what you're saying...”
“So, you’re saying...”

Describe the effect or action

- “When you made the comments, it made () feel...”
- “That type of ()”
- “When you emailed...”
- “When....happens it puts the rest of the team behind...”
- “What does a good fix look like for you?”
- “In the future, let’s try this approach...”

Position to Interest Check

Conflict involves disagreement when people have different ideas – or positions – about how something should be handled.

- Positions are ‘above-the-line’ – surface level
- Issues are the problem itself
- Separate the person from the problem

Interests are what is not being said and are below the surface

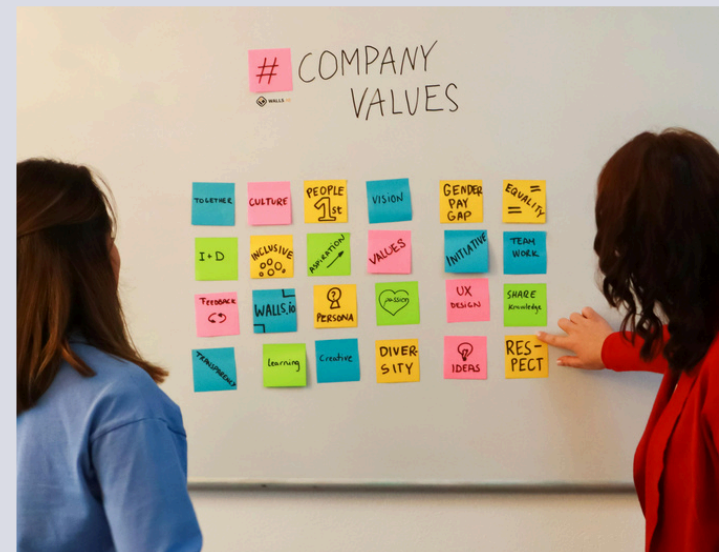
- Most conflict arises because of an **unmet need**, a feeling of injustice/unfairness, story associations, and assumptions.
- Focus on finding the ‘below-the-line’ interests.

Discover a person’s interest by asking questions:

- What are your concerns about?
- What is really important to you about...?
- What is it about this particular...that you are struggling with?
- Why do you feel it needs to be this way...?
- What is your main goal with...?
- What does a fair option look like to you?

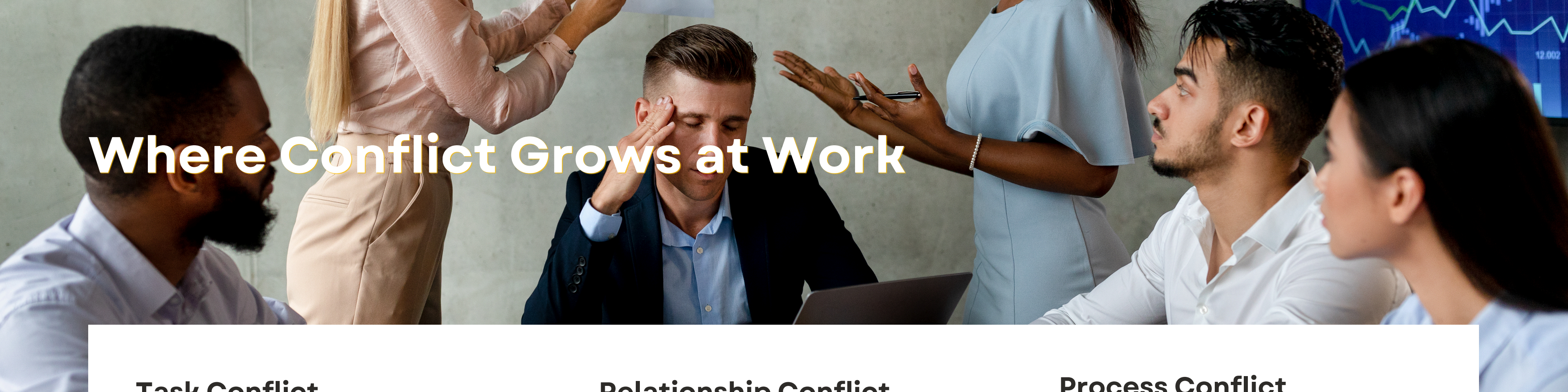


Types of Conflict



Personal

- **Pseudo** Conflict - difference of opinion or a misunderstanding
- **Fact** conflict- disagreement on facts
- **Value** conflict - difference in values
- **Policy** conflict - which approach is best when addressing a certain problem
- **Ego** conflict - disagreements get personal
- **Meta** conflict - arguments about arguing



Where Conflict Grows at Work

Task Conflict

Conflict because of **what**.

Task conflict is around the task the content, and decisions made in group or team - as well different ideas on how to approach and accomplish a task

Relationship Conflict

Conflict because of **who**.

The conflict between co-workers due to differing attitudes, personal styles, belief systems, and preferences.... Relationship conflict can be the most destructive in teams and underpins task conflict because of personal feelings and negative emotions.

Process Conflict

Conflict because of **how**. Process conflict is the how --- it's tension around the delegation and logistics of a task or project - -as responsibility and strategy linked to the task and relationship conflict

Status Conflict

Conflict because of **who** is **where**.

Status conflict arises from who is where—who is at the top of the social hierarchy—which leads to power struggles over decision-making and resources.

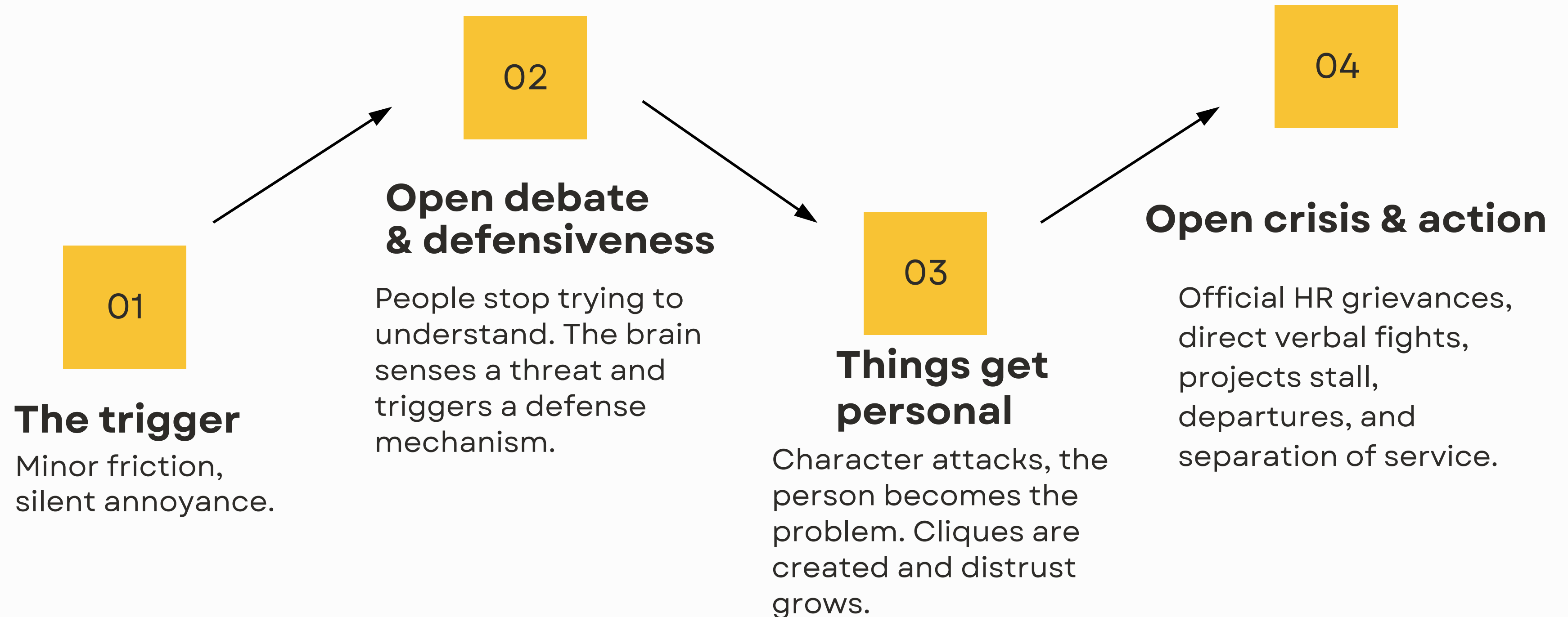
Organizational Conflict

Conflict because of **structure**.

Organizational conflict emerges within an organization as a whole, often tied to a lack of communication, loss of trust, lack of a shared vision, and differing values.

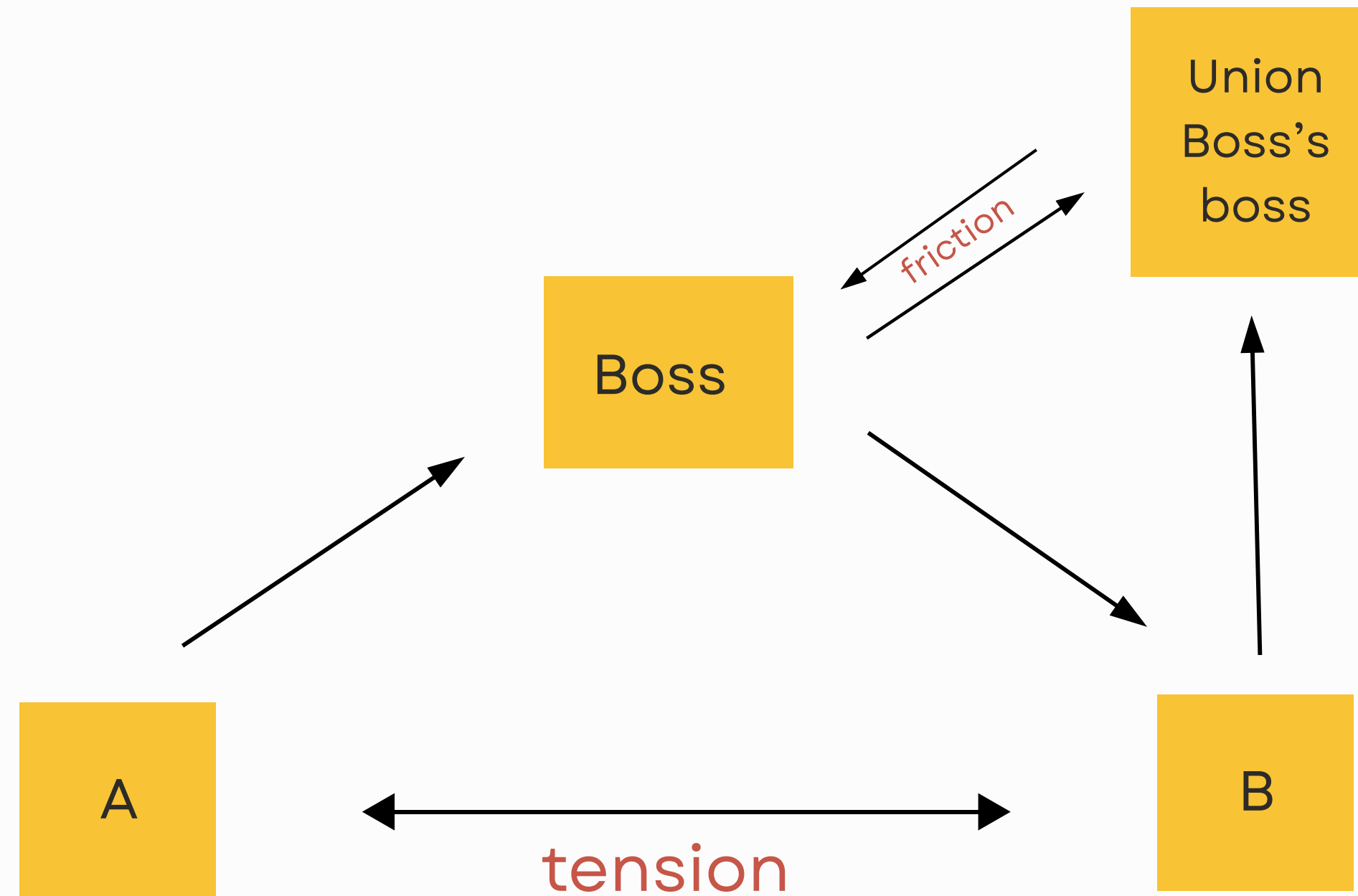


How Conflict Escalates





Triangulation



Closing and Reflection



Key Takeaways:

- Manage your own emotions, mindsets, and assumptions first.
- Be curious, ask questions.
- Address issues early, as they arise.



Actionable Steps:

- Practice preparation & framing.
- Start with one technique this week.
- Regularly reflect and adjust as challenges evolve.

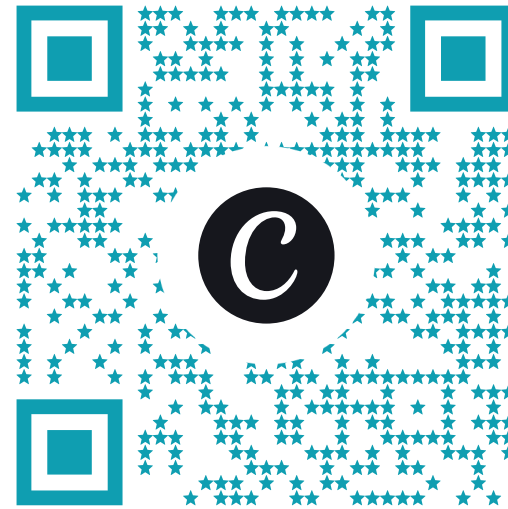


Final Note:

Say it with control.
Say it with confidence.
Say it to connect.



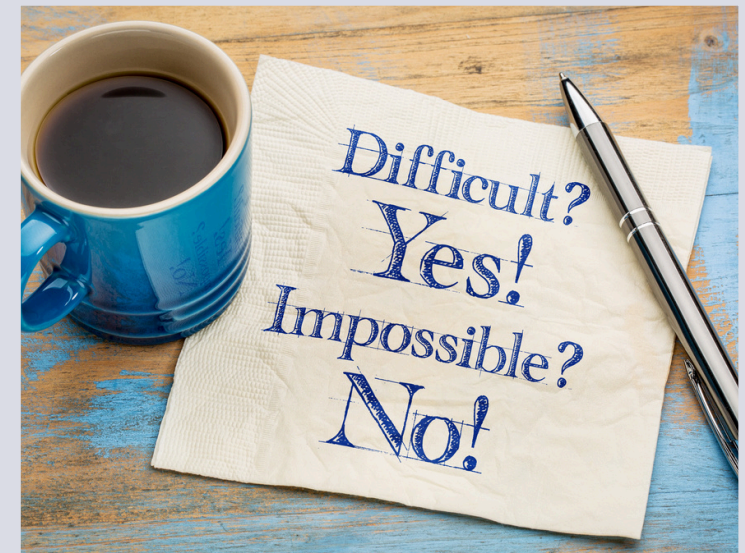
Thank you!



Scan for the Canva presentation link.



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Expanded material



Skills for difficult conversations

1. **Practice unified detachment** - This is an approach that focuses on reframing the problem or issue, so that instead of having one person working against the other, both work together against the problem. For example, when a teacher and a parent are discussing a student's poor behaviour, it can be easy for each to blame the other. But by remembering that both the teacher and the parent want the student to behave so they can get the most out of their education, it becomes easier to work together.
2. **Don't try to "win" the conversation** - Your goal is to solve the problem or share the information – both outcomes require both parties to work together. Trying to win turns the conversation into an argument and leaves you in a position where nothing is resolved positively.
3. **Help the other party feel safe, reassure** them of your intentions, and be sure to maintain a respectful approach. This also means being aware of how involved your emotions are and what your triggers are so that you can avoid or at least moderate them. Keep this in mind throughout the conversation.
4. **Remember to get curious** - Think about your attitude and preconceptions about the person you are dealing with and about the situation. Could they be affecting your approach? Your feelings going into a difficult conversation will exist – what matters is being aware of them and not letting them control your behaviour or your reactions.
5. **Choose the right time and place to have the conversation** - Selecting a time that is not already emotionally charged will help facilitate the conversation. Give the person you are talking to advance notice (if possible) so they can prepare and you can have a productive discussion. Often, choosing a neutral place to meet can help facilitate open discussion – meeting in your office can create additional power imbalance, hindering the discussion.
6. **Practice mindful breathing** - This can help centre and relax your mind and body. Box breathing is a common exercise, but there are many others around. Experiment with what works best for you. Box breathing involves you paying close attention to how you breathe. First, make sure you are seated comfortably. Close your eyes to help facilitate your concentration on your breath. Next, breathe in for a count of four, then hold that breath for a count of four. Breathe out for a count of four, and keep your lungs depleted for a count of four. Repeat this cycle ten times and you will feel your pulse slow and along with that, your mind. A four-count is not critical – choose a count that works for you.



Help with framing & opening:

1. **Open the conversation safely.** Stay away from things like “We need to talk” or “Come see me,” as that can often raise alarm in the person you intend to talk to. Openings like “I have a question for you” or “Can we talk about something that will help us both out?” can go a long way to easing the mind of the person on the receiving end.
2. **Set the tone.** While it’s true that you are leading the conversation, it is best to manage it with casual discussion and genuine openness. The attitude and emotions you convey at the start will largely determine how the conversation goes. Opening aggressively will make an argument more likely. Beginning quietly and awkwardly will lead to silences and stilted conversation.
3. **Point to a company policy, vision / mission or, when/if necessary, your role for the conversation.** This helps depersonalize the conversation. For example, “As you know we have company policies around....and a vision statement...and we are all required to...” A teacher can say, “As a teacher, I sometimes have to ask difficult questions of parents.”
4. **Be direct and respectful.** It’s not always the easiest, but it is the fairest for all involved. Make sure your tone conveys genuine interest in resolving the issue rather than placing blame.
5. **Be clear about why you are there,** to yourself and to the other person. You are both there for a reason, so be sure you both know what that reason is. Be sure to explain the situation that made the difficult conversation necessary, whether you are trying to solve a problem or deliver bad news. Name it explicitly. It is critical that all participants are clear on the purpose of the conversation in order for it to have a positive conclusion.

Communication Styles

Passive (Submissive)

- Not expressing feelings or needs; ignoring your own personal needs and rights and allowing others to do so
- Deferring to others for decision-making in order to avoid tension or conflict
- Often leads to misunderstanding, built-up anger, or resentment
- Can be a safer communication option when a conflict may escalate
- Examples include statements like: “I’m okay with whatever you want to do”; body language includes failing to make eye contact or looking down.

Submissive communicators avoid conflict at all costs. Behave as if other people's needs are more important. They are apologetic and yielding, allow others to make decisions, and can also develop a victim mentality because of it.

Communication Styles

Passive Aggressive (Manipulative)

- Appearing passive/agreeable on the surface, but subtly acts out in covert antisocial ways
- Exerting control over others by using sarcasm and indirect communication, or avoiding the conversation
- Subtle but deliberate remarks to induce guilt or sow seeds of doubt
- Backhanded compliments or saying something hurtful in a 'joking' manner.
- Quick to make a judgment or conclusion

Examples include passive statements and body language followed by giving the "silent treatment", spreading rumors, and sabotaging another person's efforts. "Backhanded" compliments or saying something hurtful in a 'joking' manner.

Communication Styles

Aggressive

- Expressing feelings, needs, and ideas at the expense of others; ignoring others' rights in order to support your own
- Controlling, defensive, or even hostile when confronted by others
- Limited consideration for the rights, needs, or feelings of others. Often alienates and hurts others
- Can help meet your needs quickly

Examples include statements like “this is what we’re doing,” or “get over it”; body language includes crossing arms, eye-rolling, or finger pointing.

Assertive

- Clear, concise, and ethical. Direct, honest communication of thoughts and feelings
- Respecting the feelings, ideas, and needs of others while also asserting your own
- May not be effective when interacting with individuals who threaten your personal safety
- Sometimes people misinterpret assertive behavior as aggressive
- Keep tone neutral

Examples include “I” statements like “I feel...when you...and I need for you to do...”; body language includes eye contact, straight posture, and relaxed gestures.



How to Connect

Assertive

- Be open, honest
- Try not to sugarcoat
- Stay neutral in tone
- Offer your own solutions in a thoughtful, constructive way

Passive

- Be gentle
- Encouraging
- Ask for input & opinion

Aggressive

- Try not to meet aggressive with aggressive
- Stay patient, calm
- Express needs/opinions neutrally
- Encourage the person to listen & wait to speak

Passive-Aggressive

- Try not to meet this style with the same
- Discuss 1-1 "where is this coming from"? Give concrete examples; frame the conversation in an assertive style.
- Recognize contributions but hold accountable
- Try not to feed into it by patronizing or demeaning
- Guide by rephrasing in the positive.

In the absence of early & clear communication

People make assumptions

- Unrealistic expectations
- Story associations
- Misunderstandings
- Confusion around roles
- Unmet needs
- Hurt feelings
- Low morale
- Toxic work culture

