Difficult Conversations:
How to Say What “Someone” Has To

Presenter
Patricia Pippert, P² Enterprises
What types of difficult conversations have you had to address in the past?

• With peers?
• With members?
• With the Board?
• With volunteers?
• With committee chairs?
What types of difficult conversations have you had to address in the past?

- A project idea of theirs is not going to be implemented . . .
- There’s going to be a membership dues increase . . .
- We don’t have money in the budget for . . .
- Someone not showing up consistently for Board Meetings . . .
Why Do We Avoid These Conversations?

• We hope they (problems) will go away
• We hope they (people) may go away
• Amount of time and energy it will take
• Avoid confrontation, hurt feelings
• Don’t want to look “in the mirror”
• “Somebody else should handle”
• Afraid to get the opposite of the desired result
Long-Term Consequences

• Small problem becomes a big one
• Situation keeps getting worse/escalates
• How do we look to others when we’re not addressing the issues?
• Contagious, other people copy behavior or create other performance issues
• High blood pressure
TOOL 1: Identify the Outcome You Want

- Saving face?
- Keeping the peace?
- Avoiding conflict?
- Being right?
- Looking good?
- Winning?
- Others?
TOOL 1: Identify the Outcome You Want

1. What outcome do you really want?

2. What behaviors on your part would move you closer to that result?
TOOL 2: Recognize Natural Tendencies

- FLIGHT
  - Withdrawing
  - Avoiding
  - Masking

- FIGHT
  - Controlling
  - Labeling
  - Attacking

Pool of Shared Information
TOOL 2: Recognize Natural Tendencies

- “Fight”: Verbally or physically attack, harsh sarcasm (“snarky”), labels

- “Flight”: Leave the room, check out of the conversation, get “curvy” or evasive with their comments
Suggested Steps:

1. State the specific behavior you noticed using “I” messages
2. State the impact of the behavior on the productivity of the work group
3. Ask your employee for their thoughts on the matter; engage them in the dialogue

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ABA BAR LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
TOOL 3: Focus on Specific Performance and its Outcomes

Why is it important to be specific . . .
• when you’ve seen substandard or inappropriate behavior?
• when you’ve seen above-standard behavior?

What are activities that require you to be specific?
TOOL 3: Focus on Specific Performance and its Outcomes

1. Sally, a staff member of yours, has been attending the Board Meetings with you for the past few months. Usually she contributes to the meeting by offering valuable opinions. When walking back to your department with her, you say, “Your people skills sure didn’t work in that meeting today.”

2. You call Jessica, one of your volunteers, into your office and say, “I was so proud of you that I told Mike about the wonderful job you did!”

3. Larry Singer notes that Barb has come up with a number of new ideas. He calls Barb into his office and says, “Your idea about setting up a tracking system for new requests is working very well and has increased the speed by which we respond to our members.”
TOOL 4: Questioning Skills

The basic purpose of asking questions is to:

- Amplify . . .
- Clarify . . .
- Guide and direct . . .
TOOL 4: Questioning Skills

- Open-ended
- Hypothetical
- Echo
- Closed-ended
Tool 5: Use Active Listening

LISTENING FLAWS
• Anticipatory listening
• Jumping to conclusions
• Judging, evaluating, disagreeing, agreeing
• Composing our next thought
• Inattention or partial attention

ACTIVE LISTENING TIPS
• Maintain eye contact
• Stop the multi-tasking!!
• Turn off the “voices in your head”
• Paraphrase (content and emotions)
• Ask questions
• Demonstrate open/receptive body language
• Take notes
Tool 5: Use Active Listening

“You feel ______ (identify the emotion you hear) ______
angry, frustrated, excited, sad, irritated, misunderstood, hesitant, embarrassed, upset, discouraged, disrespected, confused, etc.

about ______ (the content or topic being discussed) ______.

As I get it, you feel . . .
You seem . . .
I sense you’re feeling . . .
You sound a little . . .
What I’m hearing is . . .
Tool 5: Use Active Listening

1. “I solve one problem and before I blink another one pops up. What’s the use?”

2. “They always get the easy jobs and you save the hard ones for me.”

3. “My hands are tied. Unless I get the resources and the help I need, I can’t do the job.”

4. “I think I understand how you want me to follow up with the member.”

5. “It doesn’t make sense to process new members the same old way. But if that’s how we’ve always done it around here, I’m sure there is a good reason.”
What’s Your Next Step?
### Difficult Conversations

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<th>Why do we avoid these conversations (i.e., what do we think is the benefit to us to avoid them? What are we afraid of or nervous about?)</th>
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<th>What are the long-term consequences of avoiding these conversations?</th>
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### Tool 1: Identify the Outcome You Want

To get a complete picture of the situation so we can achieve positive results, we need to encourage a true give-and-take of information (also known as “dialogue”). So we need to examine all the motivating factors that may be blocking us from engaging in that true give-and-take. Some possible motivating factors are:

| ______________________ | ______________________ | ______________________ |
|_______________________|_______________________|_______________________|

As you enter a difficult conversation, think about the results you really want (for both the task and the relationship) and then commit to behaving in ways that will help you get to those results.

*Thinking back to a conversation that you recently avoided or are still avoiding, what outcome did you initially want?*

*Thinking more long-term, what outcome do you REALLY want?*

*What behaviors on your part would move you closer to that result?*
Tool 2: Recognize Your Natural Tendencies

The following questions explore how you typically respond when you’re in the middle of difficult conversations. Think of a particular individual or conversation (at work or at home). How do you typically approach risky conversations with that individual or in that setting.

T F 1. At times I avoid situations that might bring me into contact with people I’m having problems with.
T F 2. I have put off returning phone calls or e-mails because I simply didn’t want to deal with the person who sent them.
T F 3. Sometimes when people bring up a touchy or awkward issue, I try to change the subject.
T F 4. When it comes to dealing with awkward or stressful subjects, sometimes I hold back rather than give my full and candid opinion.
T F 5. Rather than tell people exactly what I think, sometimes I rely on jokes, sarcasm, or snide remarks to let them know I’m frustrated.
T F 6. When I’ve got something tough to bring up, sometimes I offer weak or insincere compliments to soften the blow.
T F 7. In order to get my point across, I sometimes exaggerate my side of the argument.
T F 8. If I seem to be losing control of a conversation, I might cut people off or change the subject in order to bring it back to where I think it should be.
T F 9. When others make points that seem stupid to me, I sometimes let them know it without holding back at all.
T F 10. When I’m stunned by a comment, sometimes I say things that others might take as forceful or attacking – comments such as “Give me a break!” or “That’s ridiculous!”
T F 11. Sometimes when things get heated, I move from arguing against others’ points to saying things that might hurt them personally.
T F 12. If I get into a heated discussion, I’ve been known to be tough on the other person. In fact, they might feel a fit insulted or hurt.

FLIGHT

Withdrawing
Avoiding
Masking

POOL OF SHARED INFORMATION

Controlling
Labeling
Attacking

FIGHT

Masking
Avoiding
Withdrawing

Controlling
Labeling
Attacking

Crucial Conversations, 2002, Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler
Tool 3: Focus on Specific Performance and its Outcomes

Suggested Steps:

1. State the specific behavior you noticed using “I” messages
2. State the impact of the behavior on the productivity of the team, group, association
3. Ask the individual for their thoughts on the matter; engage them in the dialogue.

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Why is it important to be specific . . .

- when you’ve seen substandard or inappropriate behavior?
- when you’ve seen above-standard behavior?

What are situations at work that require you to be specific?

Directions: Rewrite these statements so that they focus on specific performance and impact.

1. Sally, a staff member of yours, has been attending the Board Meetings with you for the past few months. Usually she contributes to the meeting by offering valuable opinions. When walking out of the meeting, you say, “Your people skills sure didn’t work in that meeting today.”

2. You call Jessica, one of your volunteers, into your office and say, “I was so proud of you that I told Mike about the wonderful job you did!”

3. Larry Singer notes that Barb has come up with a number of new ideas. He calls Barb into his office and says, “Your idea about setting up a tracking system for new requests is working very well and has increased the speed by which we respond to our members.”
Tool 4: Ask Questions to Invite Dialogue

The basic purpose of asking questions is to:

• __________________ when you need more information
• __________________ when you are unclear or unsure about something said
• __________________ when person digresses; needs to verbalize their thoughts

Types of Questions

<table>
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<th>1. Open-Ended Questions</th>
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<td>They give you:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
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<th>2. Hypothetical Questions</th>
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<th>4. Closed-Ended Questions</th>
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Sam works for you as a financial analyst. Sam recently came to your association from a financial institution. In the interview process and through his resume, Sam clearly appeared to be capable of performing the role. However, over the past several weeks you’ve noticed a number of errors in his work and a lack of “deep dive” analysis that you would expect from an analyst at his level. You’re concerned, not only with what financial impact this could have on your association, but with the repercussions should committee chairs, members, or Board members notice these errors before you’ve had a chance to fix things. What question(s) would you ask that might amplify, clarify, or control and guide?
Tool 5: Use Active Listening Skills

The Listening Quiz

1. ________________________________________________

2(a) ______________________  (b) ______________________

3. ________________________________________________

4. ________________________________________________

5. ________________________________________________

Score:     _____

Tips for More Effective Listening

1. __________________________  5.  ____________________________

2. __________________________  6.  ____________________________

3. __________________________  7.  ____________________________

4. __________________________

Suggested steps—

“You feel _ (identify the emotion you hear) _ about _ (the topic being discussed) _.”

angry, frustrated, excited, sad, irritated,

misunderstood, hesitant, embarrassed, upset,

discouraged, disrespected, confused, etc.

As I get it, you feel . . . You sound a little . . . You seem . . .

What I’m hearing is . . . I sense you’re feeling . . . It sounds like you’re . . .

1. “I solve one problem and before I blink another one pops up. What’s the use?”

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