

A Difficult Conversation Checklist

Source: Stone, Douglas. Patton, Bruce. Heen, Sheila. *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*. New York City: Penguin Publishing Group, 1999.

Step 1: Prepare by Walking Through the Three Conversations:

- Sort Out What Happened:
 - o Where does *your* story come from (information, past experiences, rules)?
 - o Where does *their* story come from (information, past experiences, rules)?
 - o What impact has the situation had on you?
 - o What might their intentions have been?
 - o What have each of you contributed to the problem?
- Understand Emotions:
 - o Explore your emotional footprint and the bundle of emotions you experience
- Ground Your Identity:
 - o What's at stake for you?
 - o What do you need to accept to better grounded?

Step 2: Check Your Purposes and Decide Whether to Raise the Issue:

- Purposes:
 - o What do you hope to accomplish by having this conversation?
 - o Shift your stance to support, learning, sharing and problem solving.
- Deciding:
 - o Is the issue embedded in your Identity Conversation?
 - o Can you affect the problem by changing your contributions?
 - o If you do not raise the issue, what can you do to help yourself let go?

Step 3: Start from the Third Story:

- Describe the problem as the difference between your stories. Include both viewpoints as a legitimate part of the discussion.
- Share your purpose.
- Invite them to join you as a partner in sorting out the situation together.
- Ask questions.
- Listen to understand their perspective on what happened.
- Acknowledge the feelings behind the arguments and accusations.
- Paraphrase to see if you understand.

- Try to unravel how the two of you got to this place:
 - Share you own viewpoint, your past experiences, intentions, feelings.
 - Reframe. Reframe. Reframe to keep on track. (From truth to perceptions, blame to contribution, accusations to feelings and so on.)

Step 4: Problem Solving:

- Invent options that meet each side's most important concerns and interests.
- Look to standards for what should happen. Keep in mind the level of mutual caretaking. Relationships that always go one way rarely last.
- Talk about how to keep communication open as you go forward.