



MANAGING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS: KEEPING YOUR COOL IN HEATED CONVERSATIONS

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Managing Difficult Conversations

Keeping your Cool in Heated Conversations

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Noushig is responsible for oversight and operational leadership for the New England market working closely with associates and trustees. Noushig develops significant programs to meet customers key strategic objectives and works directly with the company's operations teams to lead the hospitality and service excellence training programs geared to providing an unmatched resident experience. She possesses a diverse background in luxury residential leadership, hospitality management training and standards development, food and beverage, and real estate.

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Laura is Founder/Owner of Stance, Organizational Development Partner. Her focus is on leader, team, and system development for people taking a stand to transform the ways in which their work is accomplished to build a collective force of engaged, invested individuals. Drawing upon research-based practices and experience, Laura partners with leaders and their teams to co-develop high-functioning organizations that are cohesive, productive, and positioned to make meaningful impact.

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There ain't no good guy.
 There ain't no bad guy.
 There's only you and me and we just disagree.
 - Dave Mason, "We Just Disagree"



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Why are you here?

Why are we here?



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Outcomes



- Tools
- Clarity
- Confidence



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Where do difficult conversations show up?

- Misaligned Expectations
- Financial Decisions
- Communication Breakdowns
- Differing Values



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Underlying Assumptions of Productive Conversations

- Conflict is natural
- Conflict represents a struggle
- Avoidance is not a solution
- Friction can be reduced
- Curiosity, Clarity defuse tension
- Goal isn't to win



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INTENT $\neq$ IMPACT

Difficult conversations get stuck on intent

Productive conversations focus on impact



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A sagittal cross-section of a human brain. The Prefrontal Cortex is labeled with a line pointing to the anterior part of the frontal lobe. The Amygdala is labeled with a line pointing to a small, almond-shaped structure in the limbic system. The text "Copyright Flickr" is visible at the bottom of the brain diagram.

Emotions & the Brain

Amygdala and Prefrontal Cortex

The logo for the New England Chapter of the Community Associations Institute, featuring a stylized graphic of three people holding hands above the text "NEW ENGLAND CHAPTER community ASSOCIATIONS INSTITUTE".

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If you want to put out someone's fire, find their trigger

- Physical
- Psychological
 - Social Judgment
 - Personal Identity
 - Fear of loss



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Handling Emotional Responses

Emotion	Trigger	I can ask...
Anger	Injustice, frustration, violation of boundaries	What part of this feels most upsetting to you? What value or principle do you feel is being stepped on?
Blame	Frustration, externalized responsibility	What impact has this had on you personally? What's in your control here that you want to act on?
Defensive	Feeling blamed, misunderstood, scrutinized	What part of this feels most uncomfortable or unfair? What might I be missing from your perspective? What's important to you in how this is handled?
Sad	Loss, disappointment, unmet emotional need	What were you hoping for that didn't happen? What feels most difficult about this right now?
Withdrawn	Overwhelm, emotional withdrawal, fear of judgment	I notice you're quiet — is something coming up for you? How do you feel about what I just shared? What's on your mind, even if it's not fully clear yet?

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You can't control the conversation, But you can control yourself

- First thought: Body scan
- First word: Breath
- First conversation: Direct, specific statement



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How you handle a difficult conversation says more about your character than the content of the conversation itself.

Difficult when you don't know where you're going.

Difficult when you don't know how to get there.



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The Arc of a Difficult Conversation



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Plan for the Difficult Conversation



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Assess the Situation

*What do I
know about
the situation?*

What is my primary concern?

What are the facts relating to the situation?

How long has it been going on?

What is going on now, or recently, that may be contributing to the issue?

What are the negative impacts the concern has caused me? Others? The business/community?

Who is involved?

Is it possible, realistic, or within my control to resolve?



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Assess the Who

*What
conditions will
create honest
dialogue?*

With whom do I need to have a conversation?

What is their communication preference?

How much time should be scheduled?

Where is the most appropriate location that allows for neutrality, open dialogue, privacy, and minimal interruptions?

How would I feel if I were on the receiving end of what I intend to say?

What objections or obstacles should I prepare for?

What are the possible reactions and outcomes?



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Assess Self

How ready am I for a difficult conversation?

What is the problem from my perspective and experience?

What emotions and thoughts come to mind when I think about the concern?

- Postpone the conversation until you have de-escalated your emotions. Though, delay or procrastination potentially escalates the situation.
- Engage when you are in a calm, receptive state of mind.

What biases or assumptions may be influencing my perception of the situation?

What is the primary goal for this conversation?



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Align Approach

What framework for productivity am I bringing to the conversation?

Planning Frameworks

- Goal Orientation
- 3 Is Framework
- PALS



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Planning Framework #1: Goal Orientation

What's **my goal** for the conversation? What value will I bring?



To understand the root of the resident's concerns; to find overlap between the resident's concerns and the board-approved plan

What's **their goal** for the conversation?



To feel their input matters to preserve the appearance and value of their property

What are **3 open-ended questions** I can ask during the conversation?

*What did you notice when the landscaping work began? * What about the recent changes feel like your property value is impacted negatively? * What kinds of input or involvement from residents would help protect property values and improve how changes like this are planned or communicated?*

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Align Approach

What framework for productivity am I bringing to the conversation?

Planning Frameworks

- Goal Orientation
 - My goal, Their Goal, 3 Questions
- **3 Is Framework**
- PALS



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Planning Framework #2: 3 Is



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Planning Framework #2: 3 Is



I've been hearing your dog barking the past two weeks, especially early in the morning around 6 and sometimes after 11 at night.

It's been waking me up and making it tough to get back to sleep, which has been frustrating during the work week.

Would you be willing to talk about how to handle this?



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Align Approach

What framework for productivity am I bringing to the conversation?

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- Goal Orientation
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 - Info, Impact, Invitation
- PALS



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Framework #3: PALS

Present the Facts

Ask for Input

Listen and Explore Options

Seek Solutions



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Present the Facts

- How will I initiate the conversation?
- How will I state its purpose?
- How will I present the situation, facts, and impact?
- What are the multiple perspectives and experiences that reinforce the need for the conversation?



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Ask for Input

- Show up curious
- What open-ended and probing questions will I ask to learn as much as I can about the situation?
- What is the reason why I'm asking?



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Listen and Explore Options

- How will I demonstrate empathy and willingness to actively listen to and acknowledge their point of view?
- How will I ensure I mitigate assumptions and biases?
- How will I promote productive two-way conversation which includes exploring possible options?



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Co-Create Solutions

- How will I ensure we mutually identify the best solution that creates a win-win outcome?
- How will I set clear expectations and actionable next steps?
- How will I follow up and follow through with the agreed-upon solution?



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Align Approach

What framework for productivity am I bringing to the conversation?

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 - **P**resent the Facts
 - **A**sk for Input
 - **L**isten and Explore Options
 - **S**eek Solutions



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The Arc of a Difficult Conversation



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Questions to Initiate Conversation

When would be a good time to talk?

I have something I'd like to discuss with you. Do you have few minutes to spare now?

I need your help with something. When could we talk?

I have some feedback I'd like to share with you, if that's OK.

Is now a good time to share some news with you?

I have concern, and am curious about it from your perspective. Would you be willing to share your viewpoint with me?

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Closing Tips

Summarize your understanding of the situation - root causes, impacts, and outcomes.

Define what success looks like and the steps needed to achieve the desired behavior change.

Create an action plan that documents these steps and the expected target dates.

Mutually commit to specific responsibilities and accountability related to follow-up and follow-through.

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The Arc of a Difficult Conversation



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QUESTIONS



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Your Feedback Matters

THANK YOU!

Please share your feedback on this session

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