
Conversations that Make a Difference

<http://mayogenuine.com/blog/conversations-that-make-a-difference/>

Here is my 12 Step Program for conducting a difficult, stressful, or frightening conversation in a way that will create new possibilities for relationship and action.

1. Get yourself centered. <http://tiny.cc/2center>
2. Make sure the other person is willing to talk. Use my Conversation Contract™. <http://tiny.cc/concontract>
3. Help the other person feel safe. “We’re friends and colleagues now and we’ll still be friends and colleagues after this conversation.” Easy on the relationship, rigorous on the topic.
4. Get a firm agreement on facts before delving into opinions. Be conscientious about distinguishing facts from opinions. “The client reported several misspellings in the report,” is a fact. “Your work is sloppy,” is an opinion.
5. Remember, “*Seek first to understand, then to be understood,*” is Covey’s fifth habit.
 - a. Listen before you speak. Encouraging the other person to talk first is also a way to get his or her concerns out of his or her head to make room in there for what you have to say.
 - b. Ask questions to clarify how it looks to him or her. Stop behaving as though you know what they think; be genuinely curious. <http://tiny.cc/morecurious>
 - c. Repeat key points back to him or her to show that you are listening and to verify that you have heard correctly. You do not need to agree with the person’s point of view, but it is helpful to let him or her know you understand and you accept that he or she sees that way right now.

6. Take responsibility for your own reactions.

It is not responsible to assert, “You are forcing me to double-check all of your reports.” It is more useful to explain, “When I hear a client complain I feel obligated to double-check all of your reports.” See the difference? The first is the voice of a victim making an accusation, one who has reached a firm conclusion about the location of the problem: it’s the other guy. The second is a person making a choice on limited information, one who is eager to consider alternatives.

The simple shortcut from victim to choice is to start sentences with “I” rather than “you.”

7. Establish the level of trust: sincerity, capacity, competence, consistency, and care. “I know that you can see when a project is suffering from scope creep and that you will let me know about it.”

<http://tiny.cc/2trust>

8. Explicitly agree on the shared commitment or values e.g., “We both want to preserve the company’s reputation with clients and develop the next generation of project managers”

9. Point-out what you see as missing or not working. Reach an agreement on the facts of the situation and its threat to our shared commitment.

10. Explore and create together possible actions to move closer to circumstances consistent with your shared values. Don’t get stuck on your favorite course of action. It is not a solution until both sides take action to make it work.

11. Make requests and promises.

12. Establish a structure of accountability for monitoring the agreed actions. <http://tiny.cc/2truth>

These steps are in sequence, like bricks in a wall. If you are having trouble completing a step, return to the previous step. That is, if you cannot agree on the relevant shared values, talk about trust. If you cannot talk about trust, talk about safety. If you cannot talk about safety, get in touch with your center. Get centered even if you need to take a break and leave the room.