

THE COACH APPROACH TO DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

A Webinar for The State of Pennsylvania Systems of Care
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Difficult Conversations Overview

“Anytime we feel vulnerable or our self-esteem is implicated, when the issues at stake are important and the outcome uncertain, when we care deeply about what is being discussed or about the people with whom we are discussing it, there is potential for us to experience the conversation as difficult”

(Stone Patten Heen “Difficult Conversations”)

Coach Approach Mindset

- ❑ **We have deep respect for each individual's own learning and development – their “who-ness”**
- ❑ **We meet the person where they are and support them in growing**
- ❑ **Our intention is always to help the person be stronger, more independent, more in choice**
- ❑ **We are aware of our own biases and what we think the person should do, and we hold those lightly**

Coach Approach Skills

Presence and Centering

Listening

Clarifying

Asking Good Questions

Feedback

Creating Accountability

Modeling Behavior

Setting the Context: SCARF & VUCA

Status

Certainty

Autonomy

Relatedness

Fairness

- ❑ Volatility
- ❑ Uncertainty
- ❑ Complexity
- ❑ Ambiguity

The role of the leader is to help their people thrive in the VUCA world, even though our minds are wired for SCARF!

Creating a Psychologically Safe Culture

(Amy Edmondson)



A Coach Approach to Creating Psychological Safety means

- ❑ We are present, focused, and listening to understand building **status** and **relatedness**
- ❑ We are clear in our expectations, **building certainty**
- ❑ We ask questions to build critical thinking skills, helping the person build **autonomy**
- ❑ We offer mostly positive feedback, building **certainty** and **relatedness**
- ❑ When we communicate we intend to be clear and transparent building **certainty, status, and fairness**

Question

Can you remember a time when you had a difficult conversation and it went really well?

What made it go well?

What makes these conversations difficult for us?

- ❑ We aren't clear or confident in taking a stand for what's important to us
- ❑ SCARF tells us we tend to assume the worst and make situations "about us" to protect ourselves
- ❑ We are meaning-making beings - always wanting to create a coherent story about what is happening
- ❑ We often don't differentiate between "our story" and "the truth": "I know why he/she did x"
- ❑ We have conflicting values between telling the truth and protecting ourselves or others

Types of Difficult Conversations

Type of Conversation	Potential Traps
“What Happened” or “What’s Happening”	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. We imagine our version of the truth is correct2. We invent the intentions of others3. We look to blame and punish others
Feelings	<p>“Missing feelings can be like an opera without music – you might get the plot but you’re missing the point”</p> <p>You can and should talk about feelings even in a professional setting. Feelings are not “too personal”</p>
Identity	<p>What does/might this event say about me as a person?</p>

Shifting Difficult Conversations into Learning Conversations

Avoid These:

- ❑ Blaming and Judging (looking backward)
- ❑ Assuming bad intentions
- ❑ Dodging Feelings
- ❑ Quick-Fix band-aids
- ❑ “Deliver the Message”



Instead:

- ❑ Seek Contribution and Understanding (looking forward)
- ❑ Be Curious about intention and share impacts
- ❑ Acknowledge Feelings
- ❑ Think both for short-term and long-term solutions
- ❑ “Have the Conversation”

Learning Conversations and The Coach Approach

Presence to connect to your conversations

Listening to discover information, feelings, notions of threats to SCARF

Clarifying to make sure intention is clear in communication

Asking Good Questions that support others in their development

Hold Mutual Accountability by sharing commitment to success

You are having a conversation, there is no “coach” and “coachee”, instead just people trying to understand and manage a situation together.

Remember – you are learning too!

Difficult Conversation Challenges

- ❑ The stakes seem so high that we don't have the conversation (it will go away by itself, it's my fault, I'm scared, he/she won't like me)
- ❑ We play it over and over in our minds and get stressed
- ❑ We are unclear in our own minds as to the next step
- ❑ Our frustration builds up and we get angry (Leadership and Self-Deception)

So have the conversations...

1. Sooner rather than later
2. When you are emotionally calm and present

Difficult Conversation Elements

(4 I's – Intention, Incident, Impact, Invention – Rockwood Leadership Institute)

1. Prepare yourself – getting present and holding your assumptions lightly. Set your intention for the outcomes you're looking for. (managing emotions)
2. Prepare the conversation – intentionally choose the time and space, and ask permission for a conversation
3. Get the other person's self-assessment (if appropriate)
4. Share what you observed, describing objective, observable actions (don't linger on this part)
5. Share the impacts of those actions as appropriate (could include feelings and senses of identity)
6. Ask for input/perspective and discuss the "go forward"
7. Offer support in the go forward (if appropriate)

Difficult Conversation Example

(I need to learn Spanish)

1. Prepare yourself
2. “Hi Sweetie, can we talk about Peru over dinner?”
3. “How do you think your Spanish was in Peru?”
4. “I noticed you had to look at your phone a lot in order to translate what my parents said.”
5. “I got frustrated having to be the translator all the time, so there were times I got exhausted and didn’t want to do it anymore.”
6. It’s important to me that you learn Spanish so you can have a better relationship with my parents. You can decide how you do that
7. If you’d like, I am more than happy to help you, teach you, and practice with you

Coach Approach Feedback as Learning Conversations

First, be clear that the intent of feedback is always to help people be more effective - “I am telling you this because I want you to (continue to) be successful”

1. How do you think that went?
 2. What did you notice?
 3. This is what I saw/noticed....
 4. Here’s the impact of that...
5. What are you thinking now that we’re talking about this?
 6. Here’s what I’m thinking...
7. These are my requests – “next time could you please....”
“what can you commit to?”
8. Do you have any requests for me? How can I support you?

Question

]How do you prepare yourself before having a potentially difficult conversation?

Final Tips

You are putting something on the table to discuss together, not to be the harbinger of a hard truth

Begin your conversation in a firm but not aggressive way

Be clear about what are facts and what are assumptions : Facts are “Rules of the game” to operate within, assumptions can be shared with a curiosity about other perspectives