

When discussion gets real ...

Preparing for difficult conversations

5 questions

Ask these questions of yourself, before you express to others an opinion or criticism on your mind

1. **Is it true?** ... is it real and factual, not speculative
 2. **Is it helpful?** ... does it advance the goal of resolution
 3. **Is it respectful?** ... does it “esteem the other better than yourself” – Philippians 2:3
 4. **Is it humble?** ... does it reflect an intentional “step-down” approach
 5. **Is it kind?** ... does it “speak the truth in love” – Ephesians 4:15
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Transforming words

Examples of words that—when sincere—build bridges and break down barriers ... “step-down” approach

- “Thank you for that”
 - “Please say more about that”
 - “Help me understand ...”
 - “What I am hearing from you is ...”
 - “Would you say I am understanding you correctly?”
 - “What’s your number one suggestion for getting us to resolution on this?”
 - “Would it help if in future I were to ...?”
 - “Is there anything you can add that would be helpful for us both as we move forward?”
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Transforming actions

Behaviours—vocal and nonvocal—that lower and even remove friction

- **Listen** ... “quick to listen, slow to speak” – James 1:19
- **Acknowledge** ... “yes, I hear you on that”
- **Affirm** ... “that’s helpful, very good”
- **Apply** ... “let’s take care of that adjustment right now” or “I see where I can use that in the future”

Confronting with kindness

Tough things have to be raised—the question is, How can we best do this? Examples of attack-free, non-threatening questions that drive toward self-realisation.

- “Is that working out well for you?”
- “Have you considered a different approach?”
- “If you could go back and do one thing differently, what would it be?”
- “Do you get a sense of how that might have come across?”
- “Can you see yourself acting in a different way if this situation comes up again?”
- “Do you think we can constructively disagree on this, and move forward anyway?”

4 personal—and painful—reflections

Honest appraisal of self ... the first step before we try honest appraisal of others. A personal exercise.

1. “Is there something I said or did—or even a subtle attitude I adopted—that contributed in some way to the difficult situation facing us?”
2. “Is there something I need to repent of and apologise for?”
3. “Is there something embedded in my upbringing, character, personality, or experience that feeds into this situation? Has something from my past been triggered by this situation, that brings an unreasonable response on my part? If so, am I willing to face and deal with this component of unresolved grief or pain?”
4. “Can I identify and act on something coming out of this situation that will make me a wiser, better person from this point forward?”