



# Managing Difficult Conversations in the Workplace



Managing Ourselves  
When We Are With  
People Whose  
Behaviors We Find  
Frustrating

# Learning Objectives

Increase

Increase confidence and competence in conducting difficult discussions with others

Identify

Identify areas that might cause hesitation to have these conversation

Develop

Develop plan to utilize skills presented in working with others

# Wanted: Difficult Conversations

- Topic?
- How did you feel during the conversation?
- How did you feel after?



# Difficult Conversation Topics:

- Aren't meeting job expectations
- Refuse to cooperate/collaborate
- Disregard policies
- Think they know best
- Spread rumors/gossip
- Don't do their share of work
- Put a negative spin on everything
- Expect failure
- Create hostile work relationships
- Make others look bad

# Emotional Intelligence



# Emotional Intelligence

Refers to the capacity for:

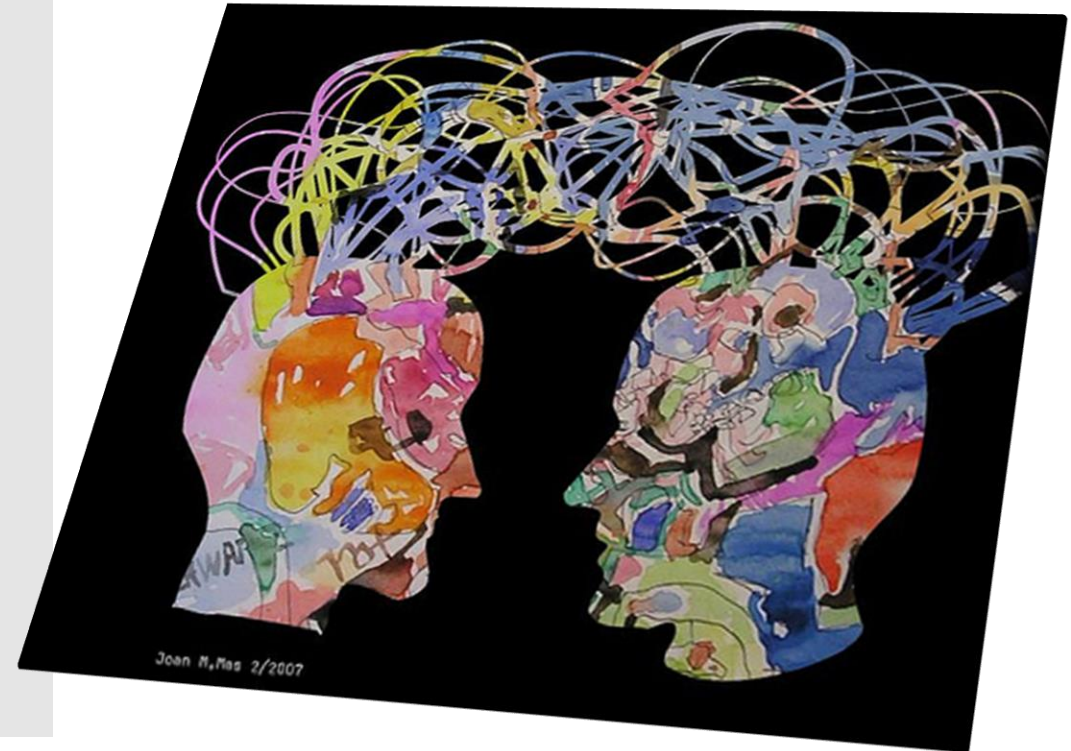
- **Recognizing** our own feeling,
- **Managing** emotions well,
- **Understanding** emotions of others,
- **Connecting** in our relationships.”

~ Goleman, 1995



# Emotions are contagious

- The brain has an 'open loop' system.
- We are 'wired' to pick up subtle clues from one another.
- Resonance is contagious...so is dissonance.



EI Domains

Self Awareness



# Start with Self Reflection

- Have I been avoiding this conversation? Why?
- Am I feeling angry?
- Have we been butting heads?
- Am I discouraged?
- Would I like to get back at the other person?
- Could my judgment be clouded?
- Am I being objective or subjective?

# EI Domains

Self Awareness

Self Management

# EI Domains

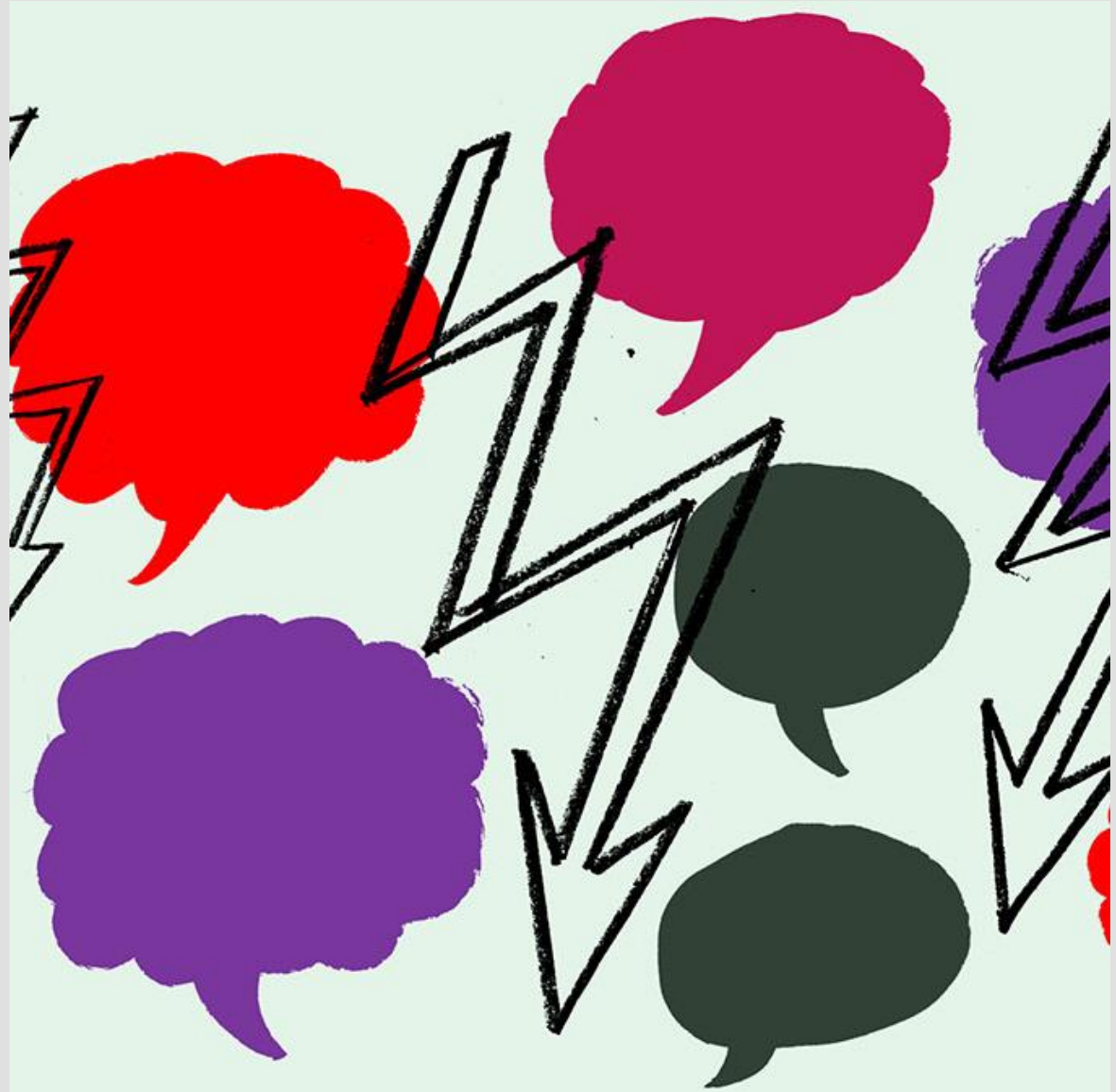
Self Awareness

Self Management

Social Awareness

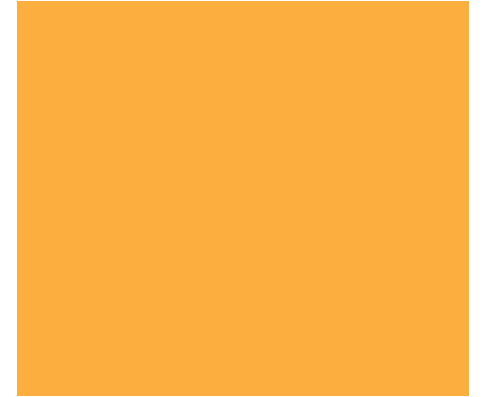
Relationship Management

# 11 Tips for Handling Difficult Conversations at Work



# 1. Determine The Purpose Of The Conversation

- Consider two key issues:
- **Purpose (reason)** – why you need to have the conversation
- **Outcome (resolution)** – what you hope to achieve.



## 2. Reframe The Conversation In Your Mind

- If you think it will be difficult, dreading it is unavoidable.
- We must, as effective team members, act in a respectful and trustworthy manner.





## Extinguish Inflammatory Thinking:

- What am I saying to myself?!
- Is it helping me?
- What are the facts?
- “Is there a baby in the back-seat?”
- What’s reasonable & realistic?
- Believe that EVERYONE is flawed so what’s the point to getting indignant!

# 3. Understand Your Fears

- Sometimes we are worried that the other person will react badly – as well they might.
- By preparing well you will drastically reduce the chances of things going wrong. Relax!





## 4. Choose An Appropriate Setting

- Where you meet sets the tone for the conversation.
- Make sure it's private and out of earshot of other colleagues.
- No one who is not directly involved or affected by the situation should know what's happening.



# 5. Plan, But Do Not Script

- Plan and practice what you're going to say in advance so that you get the point across fairly without being condescending or accusatory.
- You don't need a script but preparing answers to possible questions or objections will keep you cool, calm and collected in the moment.



## 6. Listen To Their Side Of The Story

- Make sure not to dismiss their point of view.
- Giving them the opportunity to talk and paying attention when they do will allow them to be less defensive.
- Help create a dialogue of open communication.



# 7. Give Them Time And Space

- Give the person plenty of time to consider what you're saying by speaking slowly and pausing regularly.
- Will end up with fewer indignant excuses and more reasonable, thought-out responses.



## 8. Specific and Objective – “Own It”

- Only use your own observations as a backup during a difficult conversation.
- The more objective, specific facts you have, the easier it is to state your case.



## 9. Avoid Emotional Language

- Don't focus on how you 'feel' or express personal disappointment.
- This adds unnecessary emotional drama to an already charged conversation.
- Remain as neutral as you can to create the best outcome for everyone involved.



## 10. Create A Plan For Progress

- **Where** do I want the relationship to go and **how** do we get there?
- Remember – Collaboration!



# 11. Reflect and Learn

“Handling a difficult conversation well is not just a skill, it is an act of courage.”

- After a difficult conversation, it's worthwhile to reflect and consider what went well and what didn't.
- Think about why you had certain reactions, and what you might have said differently.







# Constructive Conversation Tips





1.

Focus on specific  
problem, not some  
obscure personality  
trait.

Performance Gap:  
Vague/Judgmental  
Vs. Specific/Factual

***“You never do what you promise to do!”***

Desired:

*You assured me you would have your part of our project done today.*

**However,**

Actual:

*You came to the meeting and did not have anything to present to the leadership.*



2.

Gain agreement that *the behavior* is a problem and has impact and consequences on the relationship.

# Impact And Consequences

- **IMPACT** is the various ways the behavior is negatively affecting the relationship
  - Helps gain a better understanding of the problem.
  - provides good reasons why the issue must be solved.

# Impact And Consequences

- **CONSEQUENCES** are the negative outcomes the behavior may cause us to experience if the problem isn't satisfactorily resolved.
- Don't mistake these as threats.
- Consequences are logical, predictable outcomes.



3.

Identify specific strategies that will lead to concrete change in behavior in a collaborative way.

# 3 Key Questions



- What specifically **can** you/I do?
- **Will** you/I do that?
- Any Obstacles?





4.

**Follow up** to ensure that the new behavior is honored, and the relationship is improving.



# Principles to Remember

## Do:

- Take regular breaks during the day.
- Slow down the pace of the conversation.
- Find ways to be constructive by suggesting other solutions or alternatives.




# Principles to Remember

## Don't:

- Label the discussion as a “difficult conversation.”
- Bother writing a script for how you want the discussion to go.
- Ignore the other person's point of view.



Questions?



Thanks for your Participation  
and Attention. Enjoy the rest  
of the Conference!

John Amato, M.Ed.

Familylinks, Inc.

[jamato@familylinks.org](mailto:jamato@familylinks.org)