

From Conflict to Connection

How to Navigate Difficult Conversations in the Workplace

SCORE Los Angeles



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My Life's Passion:

Helping Organizations Create More Inclusive Environments





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This Webinar Is For You If...

- You've ever stayed silent during a difficult conversation because you didn't know how to respond.
- You want to feel more confident and equipped when having difficult conversations.
- You're a leader or team member seeking practical tools to handle conflict without escalating it.
- You believe in the power of dialogue to build bridges, not walls.

This Webinar Is For You If...(cont'd)

- You want to become a better ally, listener, and advocate.
- You're ready to move from avoidance and anxiety to action and connection in tough conversations.
- You're committed to creating a more inclusive, respectful workplace where everyone feels heard and valued.

Agenda

- Identify your conflict resolution style
- Understand the different conflict resolution styles
- Learn the traits of an effective facilitator
- Identify questions that help individuals process the situation
- Learn how to be an effective listener
- Learn how to respond when conflict comes your way
- Go through illustrative examples
- Key takeaways | Q&A



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Eliminate Distractions



LET'S
DO
THIS



How I Approach Conflict

In a **Conflict Situation** I Tend to:

1. Remove myself from the situation.
2. Give in to maintain the relationship.
3. Find a workable solution, even though it may not be the best solution.
4. Keep defending my position until my goal is achieved.
5. Keep working until we all get what we want.



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Understanding the Different Styles

1. Remove myself from the situation

Avoider

- Would rather not address the conflict at all.
- More comfortable ignoring or delaying issues; even repressing their own feelings and needs.
- Avoidance is a **lose-lose style** because the conflict goes unaddressed.
- In the end, teamwork and productivity are negatively affected.

Avoidance Example

At a local bank, a manager and a loan officer disagree about how to attract more clients.

The manager wants to work with local groups to raise the bank's profile, but the loan officer thinks it's a waste of time and resources.

Instead of talking it out, they both avoid the issue.

Soon, the manager stops mentioning new ideas, and the loan officer pulls back from team discussions.

They still work together, but the unspoken tension hurts teamwork and delays decisions about future outreach.

2. Give in to maintain the relationship

Accommodator

- More comfortable giving in to the other person's needs, sacrificing their own goals.
- Considered a ***lose-win style***.
- Appears cooperative, but it can be detrimental in the long run because it does not produce a win for all parties.

Accommodation Example

During a board meeting, members discuss how to use extra funding.

One board member wants to support a shelter, while another suggests funding job-readiness programs.

Even though the first board member feels strongly about helping the shelter, they choose to go along with the job program to keep the peace and move the discussion along.

3. Find a workable solution, even though it may not be the best solution

Compromiser

- The goal is to find a quick solution.
- You know you can't get all, but at least, you win some.
- Considered a ***semi-win/semi-lose style***.
- Go-to approach for situations “*when all else fails.*”

Compromising Example

Two department heads at a retail company disagree on how to use a bonus.

One wants to improve in-store digital kiosks, while the other wants to upgrade the supply chain.

To avoid delays, they agree to split the funds—half for customer upgrades and half for operations.

4. Keep defending their position until the goal is achieved

Competitor

- Tries to win the argument at all costs – usually at the expense of the other person.
- Considered a ***win-lose style*** – one person gets what they want while the other loses.
- Tends to produce short-term victories.
- In the end, it damages productivity because it hurts people's relationships.

Competition Example



At a high school planning meeting, two teachers clash over how to use resources.

One wants to update textbooks and focus on core academics.

The other pushes for investing in digital tools and technology.

However, the first teacher dominates the discussion, talks over the other, and insists on their own plan.

In the end, the decision reflects only one viewpoint, with no real discussion or compromise.

5. Keep working until both parties get what they want.

Cooperator

- They try to find a solution that meets everyone's needs.
- The issues are fully explored, everyone states their needs, and people work together to find creative solutions in which **everyone benefits**.
- This is a true *win-win style*.

Cooperation Example

A volunteer and a case manager disagree on how to help a homeless family when shelters are full.

One wants to send them to a faith-based shelter; the other suggests paying for a motel stay.

To prevent further arguing, their team leader calls a meeting so they can all talk through the options and agree on a plan.

In the end, they decide to use a motel for a few nights while looking for a longer-term solution.

Please Note

Depending on the situation, individuals can adopt different conflict resolution styles even if they have a preferred approach.

Context is Key

- A **compromising style** might be better when a **QUICK RESOLUTION** is necessary.
- In situations where one party has more authority, adopting an **accommodating** style might foster goodwill or de-escalate tension.
- If preserving the relationship is the primary goal, individuals may prioritize an **accommodating or avoiding style** over competition.

Traits of an Effective Facilitator



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1) Are Self-Aware



- They know how they approach conflict.
- They understand what values, attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudices they bring to the situation.
- They recognize how their own cultural or social orientation impacts how they handle conflict.

2) Have Good Observational Skills



- They can see the individual's current state of mind.
- They recognize what is not being said.
- **They understand the importance of paying attention to nonverbal signals.**

3) Distinguish Between **Intent** and **Impact**



- Yes, they may have been offended.
- But they always consider: Was that the speaker's intent?
- **They understand that many individuals are not aware that their comments are offensive.**

4) Listen and Respond Compassionately



- Even when someone has an adversarial or defensive posture.
- **They always respond in a way that builds community and invites a dialogue.**

5) Understand the Perspective of the “Other”



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- How did they get to their current situation?
- How does their past affect who they are today?
- What have they experienced?
- **Remember! You are not seeing the entire video. You only see snippets, and there is a lot that is missing.**

6) Stay in the Situation



They have the emotional intelligence to stay in the situation even if they are scared, angry, or hurt.

Of these six traits, which one would be more challenging for you?

1. Developing self-awareness
2. Using your observational skills
3. Remembering the difference between **intent** and **impact**
4. Responding compassionately
5. Recognizing the perspective of the “other”
6. Staying in the situation

Helping Individuals Process the Situation



Observational Questions

- *What I heard you say was....*

Questions about
what you observed

- *What I just heard is that.....*

Reflective Questions



Questions to help individuals reflect/share their situation

- *What hurt you about what happened?*
- *How did it affect you when it happened?*
- *How did it feel?*
- *How does it affect you now? In the workplace? In your relationship?*

CTA Questions



Questions about what needs to happen for the situation to be resolved

- If you could say something to **Mary**, what would you say?
- If you could tell Mary what you need to **move forward with this project**, what would you say?

***Listening is the most useful tool in
interpersonal and intercultural conflict
resolution.***

Stella Ting-Toomey and Tenzin Dorjee
Institute of Intercultural Communication



Listen with your ears

To hear the words, the tone, and the pitch



Listen with your mind

To understand
To analyze, and
To broaden your perspective



Listen with your eyes

To see the facial expression
To read the body language, and
To look at the “window of the soul”



Listen with your heart

To feel the emotions
To empathize
To respond accurately



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To Be an Effective Listener, you Need to *Listen with Ting*



How to Respond Calmly When Conflict Comes Your Way

Strategies for an Effective Resolution

1)

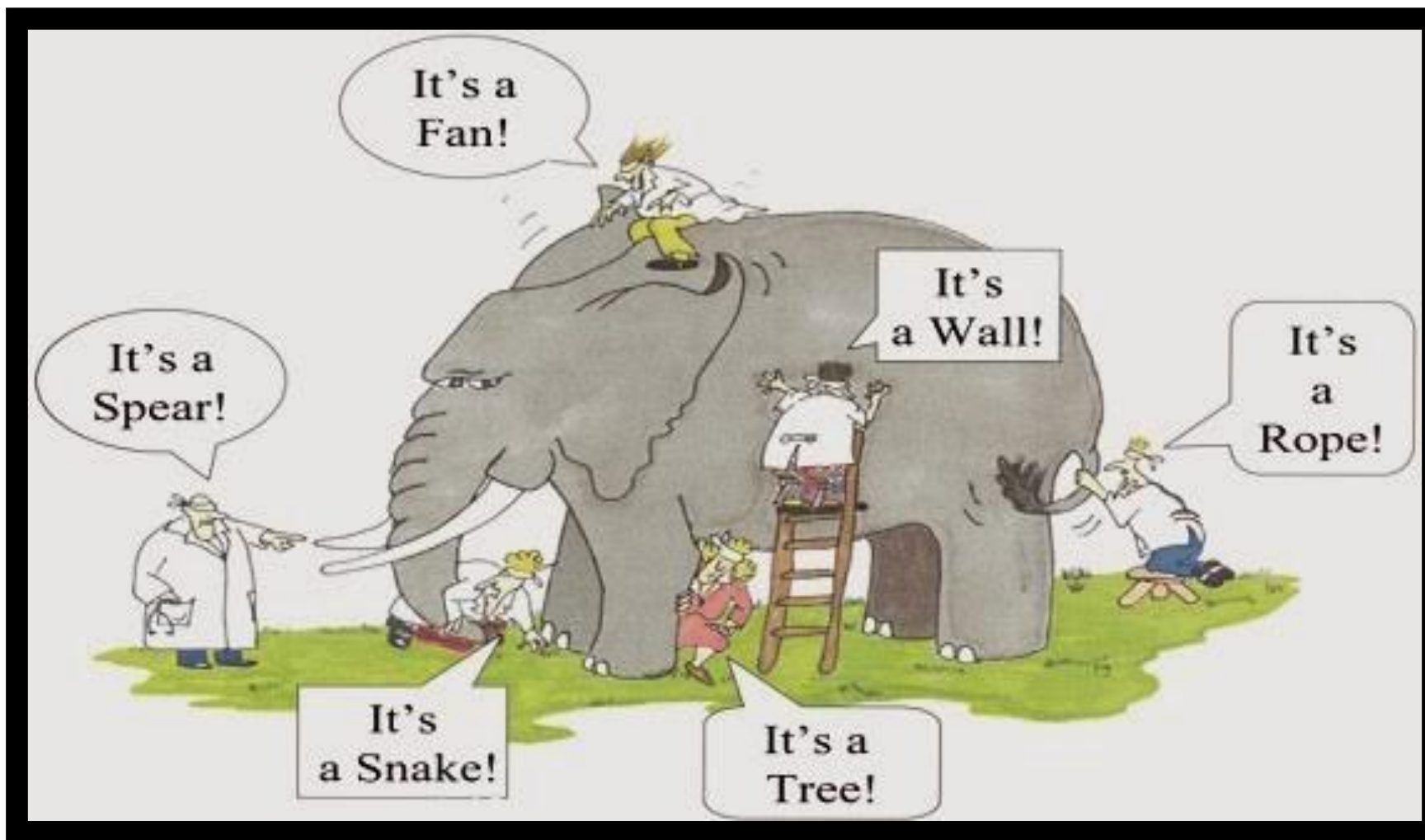


2)
Remind Yourself:
This is Not About Me





3) Understand You May Be Experiencing the “Last- Drop-In-The-Bucket Syndrome”

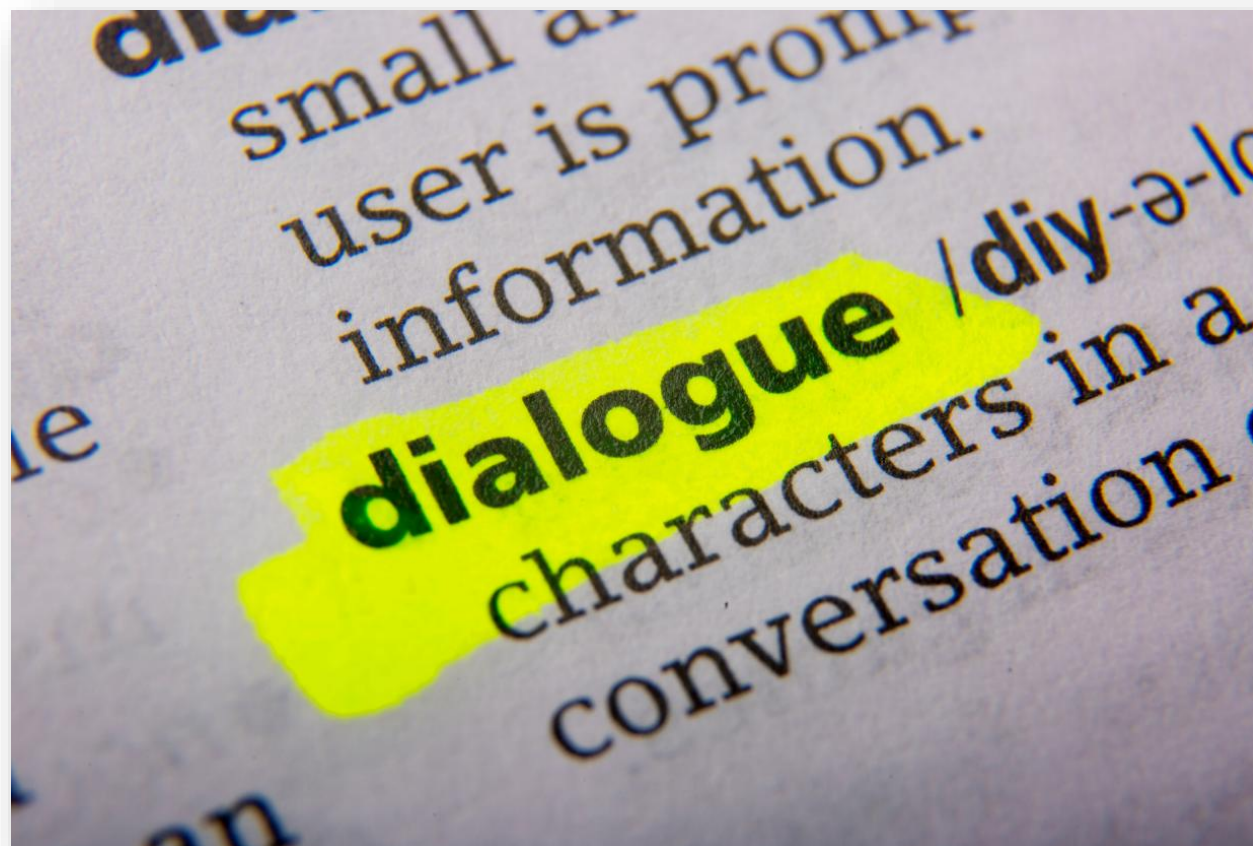


4) Think of the “*Blind Men and the Elephant*” Parable



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5)
Get Out of **Debate**
Mode And Get Ready
to **Dialogue**



6) Follow the Principles of Facilitating Difficult Conversations





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7) Take Steps to Address the situation



Pathway to Facilitating a Difficult Conversation



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Pathway to Facilitating a Difficult Conversation



Client, Colleague, Customer, etc.



Angry

Hurt

Upset

Pathway to Facilitating a Difficult Conversation



Center Yourself

- Take a deep breath
- Not about me
- I don't know the whole story
- Get ready to engage in a dialogue and not a debate
- Listen with TING

Pathway to Facilitating a Difficult Conversation



**Spend Time Understanding
the Situation – from their perspective**



3 Types of Questions
Observational
Reflective
CTA

Pathway to Facilitating a Difficult Conversation



3 Rs

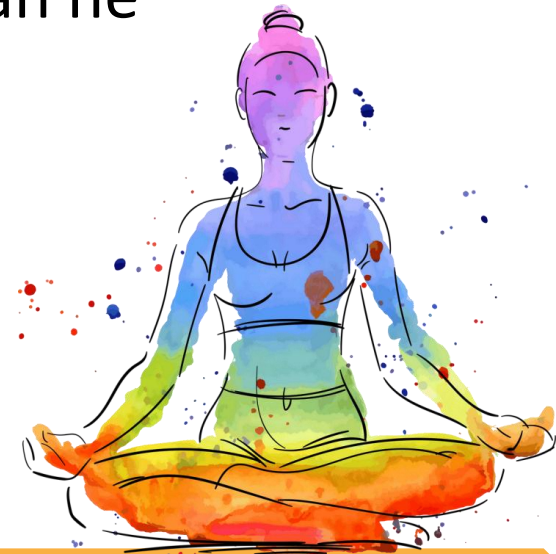
- **Resolution**
- **Referral**
- **Resources**

Example

Upset Client

YOU ARE A RACIST!!!!

(after learning he won't receive the loan he expects).



Example

- *I can see you are _____ (upset, angry, hurt...)*
- *First of all, I am sorry for that. My intent was not to _____ (upset, anger, hurt) you.*
- *I would like to **learn more** about your situation to see if I am able to come up with a viable solution for you.*
- *For that to happen, I need to **gather some additional information** from you.*
- *Can you **provide me with details of the situation?***



Example



- *This is the fourth financial institution I have contacted this week to apply for a loan, and I keep getting denied.*
- *My wife is seven months pregnant, and my little boy is turning three next week.*
- *I really don't want to celebrate his birthday as a homeless family.*
- *My wife has just been diagnosed with gestational diabetes.*
- *This stress is too much for her.....*

Example

- **Observational Question:**
 - *What I heard you say is that _____.*
 - *Is this accurate? Did I leave anything out?*
- **Reflective Question:**
 - *How is this impacting you and your family?*



Keep asking questions. This is an opportunity for you to gain a deeper understanding of what the individual has had to face. **Everyone has a story.**

Example



This is correct!

Or

Not quite.....



After You Ascertained the Situation – CTA Questions

What would you like to see happen?

What do you need?

Example



I am in need of some financial assistance so I can make my mortgage payments.

Now that you fully understand the situation

RESOLUTION | REFERRAL | RESOURCES



- If a loan is a possibility, great!
- If a loan is NOT a possibility:
 - Is there a different type of financial assistance they would qualify for?
 - Are there any community resources, programs, or partnerships you could refer them to?
 - Is there anything else you can think of to provide some hope and restore his dignity?
- **Always aim for providing hope and restoring dignity.**

Example 2

Conversation Between a Frustrated Employee and a Team Leader

Scenario: A mid-level employee feels excluded from a major project they were passionate about and confronts their team leader during a one-on-one meeting.

Frustrated Employee:

I don't understand why I wasn't included in the GreenTech project!

I've been working here for years, and I feel like my contributions don't even matter anymore.

Is it because I'm not one of the "favorites" around here?

Team Leader:

I can see this situation is really upsetting for you.

Thank you for sharing how you feel—it's important to me that we have an honest and open conversation about this.

I'm sorry if my actions have made you feel undervalued; that was never my intent.

Can you help me understand more about your perspective?

What about the GreenTech project makes it feel especially significant for you?

Frustrated Employee:

This project aligns perfectly with my skills in sustainable engineering!

I've been trying to show my dedication by volunteering for similar initiatives, but I keep getting overlooked. It feels like no matter how hard I work I'm not seen as a key contributor to this team.

Team Leader:

I hear you. It sounds like you're passionate about sustainability and have been putting in significant effort to make an impact in that area. It's clear this project means a lot to you.

Is there anything else about your experiences or our team dynamics that you think I should know? I want to make sure I fully understand where you're coming from.

Frustrated Employee:

I guess I also feel like communication is lacking. Decisions are made without asking for input, and it feels like only certain people's voices matter.

Team Leader:

Thank you for bringing that up. Your perspective is incredibly valuable, and I want to ensure everyone on the team feels heard and has opportunities to contribute meaningfully.

Let's discuss how we can address this moving forward. What would you like to see change, either with communication or how project assignments are handled?

Frustrated Employee:

I'd like to have more input on project decisions, and I want a chance to be involved in future initiatives related to sustainability.

Team Leader:

That sounds fair and doable. Here's what I propose:

1. I'll review the process for assigning projects and ensure it's more transparent.
2. Let's schedule a follow-up in two weeks to revisit this conversation and check progress.
3. I'd also like to invite you to a brainstorming session next month for an upcoming sustainability project—your expertise could be invaluable.

Would this help address some of the concerns you've raised?

Frustrated Employee:

Yes, that would make me feel more involved and appreciated. Thank you for taking this seriously.

Team Leader:

I'm glad we had this conversation, and I appreciate your honesty. My goal is for every team member to feel valued and have opportunities to shine. Let's keep this dialogue going so we can create an even stronger, more inclusive team dynamic.



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Looking at the Team Leader's Strategies



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