



MASTERING

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

From Conflict to Connection

How to Navigate Difficult Conversations in the
Workplace

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Checklist with Essential Questions to Consider When Conducting Difficult Conversations

- Did I actively address their concerns?**
Did I focus on understanding and validating their needs?
- Did I listen beyond their words?**
Was I attuned to unspoken emotions or underlying issues?
- Did I make them feel truly heard and understood?**
Did I acknowledge their perspective with empathy?
- Did I validate their feelings, including any pain or hurt they expressed?**
Did I respond in a way that shows I value their experiences?
- Did I offer them a safe space to share what they need?**
Was I open and receptive to their needs without judgment?
- Did I make them feel valued and deserving of attention?**
Did I demonstrate that their voice matters?
- Did I remain mindful of the intent and impact of my communication?**
Did I consider how my words and actions might be perceived?
- Did I create space for them to express their emotions freely?**
Did I allow room for honesty and vulnerability?
- Did I practice listening with TING?**
(Acronym: TING – Listening with your head (mind), heart (empathy), and ears (active listening).)
- Did I listen with compassion and patience?**
Was I fully present and nonjudgmental in the conversation?
- Did I identify key themes and emotions to provide meaningful solutions?**
Was I intentional about understanding the root of the issue?
- Did I seek to understand the context leading up to the situation?**
Did I clarify events and actions to gain a full picture?
- Did I encourage them to share the broader impact of the situation on their life and relationships?**
Did I show concern for the ripple effects of their experience?
- Did I allow them to express difficult emotions like anger, hurt, or disappointment both verbally and nonverbally?**
Was I patient and supportive as they processed their feelings?



Functional vs Dysfunctional Conflict

Conflict is an inevitable part of relationships, but it can be either a constructive force for growth or a source of harm. Understanding the difference between functional and dysfunctional conflict is key to navigating challenging conversations effectively.

In **FUNCTIONAL** conflict, individuals:

- Acknowledge that all parties' needs are valid and deserve consideration.
- Approach the issue with a cooperative mindset, seeking solutions that benefit everyone.
- Avoid pressuring others to concede or "give in."
- Focus on de-escalating tensions to address the core issues constructively.
- Keep discussions centered on the specific problem rather than veering off-topic.
- Take the time to learn about each other's needs and explore ways to meet them.

The Outcome: Relationships grow stronger, trust is built, and harmony is restored.

In **DYSFUNCTIONAL** conflict, individuals:

- Operate with an "us vs. them" mentality, believing one side must win at the other's expense.
- View the other party's success as their personal loss.
- Rely on power dynamics or dominance to achieve their desired outcome.
- Resort to personal attacks or blame, escalating the situation further.
- Distract from the issue by introducing unrelated grievances, causing the original problem to be forgotten.

The Outcome: Relationships are strained, and individuals leave with reduced self-esteem and lingering resentment.

** Adapted from *Interplay: The Process of Intercultural Communication*, by Adler, Rosenfield & Towne.

Constructive Conflict Resolution Guidelines

Both parties should:

- ✓ Agree upon a common goal of resolving the conflict so everyone wins (problem solved and face saved).
- ✓ Demonstrate respect for the other person.
- ✓ Don't attack or blame the other person.
- ✓ Listen to the other person with an open mind.
- ✓ Value and respect differences in viewpoint.
- ✓ Identify and understand your own and others' conflict style.

Steps to a Win-Win Problem Solving Approach

1. Define your needs/issue/problem. What is the real issue here?
2. Share your needs with the other party.
3. Listen to the other person's needs.
4. Together, generate possible solutions.
5. Evaluate the possible solutions. Choose the best one.
6. Implement the solution.
7. Follow up and revise as needed.

Helping Individuals Process the Situation: The Three Types of Questions You Can Ask

Observational Inquiries:

Questions about what you observed (*observational inquiries*)

- *What I heard you say was....*
- *What I just heard is that.....*

Reflective Inquiries:

Questions to help individuals reflect on the 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 your workplace? In your relationships?*

Call-to-Action Inquiries:

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

- *If you could say something to _____, what would you say?*
- *If you could tell _____ what you need to be able to _____, what would you say?*



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