



Understanding the Obstacles of Difficult Conversations

Being aware of the common obstacles that can prevent constructive conversations can help you be prepared to avoid, manage, and overcome these obstacles in your interactions with others.

Obstacle #1

- I believe one thing, you another

Obstacle #2

- I don't know your opinion, perspective, or facts until I ask and successfully engage you in sharing them

Obstacle #3

- Being real with myself about the facts of the situation and then sharing my opinion, perspective, and facts in a constructive way

Obstacle #4

- Managing the conversation when it gets tough or destructive

Obstacle #5

- Successfully reaching resolution and then following through

I am constantly losing my balance. My skill lies in my ability to regain it.... The question is not whether you will get knocked over. You will. The real question is whether you are able to get back on your feet and keep the conversation moving in a productive direction.

**-Stone, Patton, et al
Difficult Conversations**

Overcoming Obstacles

Obstacle #1: I Believe One Thing, You Another

Personal Application

What is your truth right now? What might the other person's be for this same situation? Challenge yourself to identify what their perceptions might be, what facts they might have that you don't, and what they believe that may be different than what you believe.

I believe...	S/he may believe...



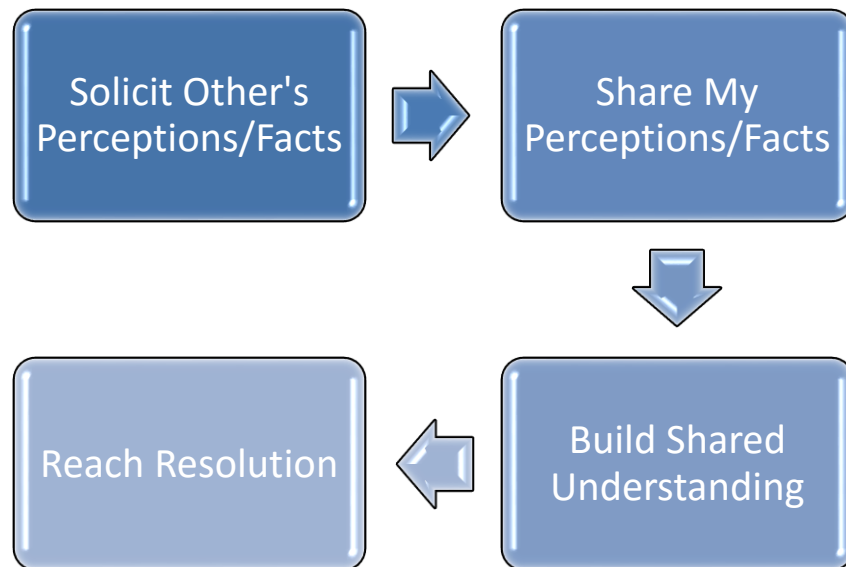


Overcoming the Obstacles: The Learning Conversation

To have a real conversation, reach an agreement, solve the problem, and move forward successfully, we each have to realize that there is absolutely more to the story than we know, **always!**

I only know my truth; I must also learn yours.

The key to overcoming the obstacles is shifting your focus to a **Learning Conversation**.



Adopting a Learning Conversation as your goal will enable you to overcome the greatest obstacles to successful conversations.

We will look at strategies for each of these next.

If we're going to achieve our purposes, we have lots we need to learn from them and lots they need to learn from us.

*-Stone et al
Difficult Conversations*

Overcoming Obstacles

Obstacle #2: I don't know your opinion, perspective, or facts until I ask and successfully engage you in sharing them

At the core of a Learning Conversation is your openness to learning what you don't know from the other person involved and them from you.

The ONLY way for you to have all the facts, opinions, and perspectives needed for a successful resolution:

You have to ASK and LISTEN!

Don't	Do
Believe you already know the facts with absolute CERTAINTY	Ask questions with genuine CURIOSITY
Ask yourself, "How can they possibly think that?"	Ask yourself, "I wonder what facts and information they have that I don't?"
Get defensive and focus on being right or winning	Allow others to challenge your stories and share new ideas and perspectives
Be afraid that <u>listening</u> to a different opinion means that you are <u>agreeing</u> with it	Sincerely invite differing opinions and make it safe for others to share their perspectives
Believe that you have to either accept or reject the other person's story. If we accept their story, then we have to accept ours is wrong.	Accept both stories; take the 'AND' stance. This allows you to understand that how each of you sees the situation matters and is your truth. For example, they can be giving their best effort, and you can believe that it is not good enough to meet your expectations.



Overcoming Obstacles

Obstacle #3: Being real with myself about the facts of the situation and then sharing my opinion, perspective, and facts in a constructive way

Before you Begin...

Have a Clear and Productive Purpose

Separate Fact from Fiction: Know Your Story

Have a Clear and Productive Purpose

Problem: We Often Begin with an Unproductive Purpose

Despite what we sometimes pretend, our initial purpose for having a difficult conversation is often to prove a point, to give them a piece of our mind, or to get them to do what we want. In other words, to deliver a message.

-Stone, Patton, & Heen
Difficult Conversations

Solution: Carefully Define a Clear, Productive Purpose. Revise Unproductive Goals.

Not to deliver a message

Instead: To share information, ask some questions

Not to persuade them and get your way

Instead: To understand their point of view, explain yours and work together for a solution

Not to punish or blame

Instead: To strengthen the relationship and reach agreement on solutions

Not to be right or win

Instead: To learn and produce results



Every sentence
has a history.

*-Crucial
Conversations*

Overcoming Obstacles

Obstacle #4: Managing the conversation when it gets tough or destructive

Watch Out! When Others Turn Inward or Outward

Inward	Outward
Don't confront authority Silent treatment Hints Sarcasm Innuendo Play the martyr and pretend we're helping Blame a team rather than confront the individual	Subtle manipulation Verbal attacks Act like know everything Discredit others Use force to get our way – power, bias

Strategy: Step Up, Stay Calm, and Dig Deep

One of you will have to take responsibility for working to get the conversation back on track. Choose to step up and take ownership, stay calm, and explore what's really going on with the other person.

Take a step back, don't get sucked in!

Remind yourself of your purpose: How would you behave if achieving this goal is what you truly wanted?

Be sincere in inviting them to share.

Be curious and avoid defensiveness.

Ask yourself: Why would a reasonable, rational, decent person say this?

Encourage them to share their story with you.

Listen well! Apply active listening techniques and listen with empathy.

Moving to Action

Obstacle #5: Successfully Reaching Resolution and Then Following Through

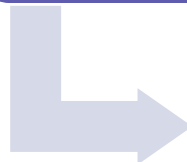
Difficult conversations require a certain amount of compromise and mutual accommodation to the other's needs. If you find problem-solving difficult and anxiety producing, it may be because you are focused on persuading them.

--Stone, Patton, & Heen
Difficult Conversations

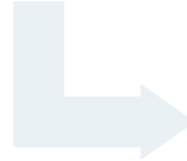
Share problem solving to reach agreement on a resolution and next steps



Create options that address the needs and concerns of both parties



Agree upon a plan for action, with clearly defined accountability



Follow up!

Most difficult conversations are not, in actuality, a single conversation. They are a series of exchanges and explorations that happen over time.

--Stone, Patton, & Heen