

Leadership Bites: Challenging Conversations 2

LEADERSHIP LEARNING IN 20 MINUTES



Leadership Academy

South East

Introduction

The way that we view a person or a challenging conversation will drive how we act. By taking time to think ahead of time, we can shift our mindset to one which encourages productive conversation and a successful outcome.

Key Insight: As well as changing our thoughts ahead of a conversation, we always have choice in how we respond during a conversation. “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is the power to choose our response” – Viktor Frankl – Neurologist, Psychologist, Author, Holocaust Survivor.

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There are 5 domains of human social experience which will either activate the threat or reward circuitry in the brain: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness and Fairness (Dr David Rock).

Knowing this, it's likely that both us as the instigator of a challenging conversation, and the other party, could well be easily triggered into an unhelpful threat / fear response.

We can adapt our approach to minimise these for the other party by making sure there is opportunity to build the relationship, or at least position the conversation in a way that is perceived to be fair, and non-judgemental.

Hot buttons / triggers

When someone 'presses our hot button' it means that we feel a flash of emotion that we find it hard to control. Without consideration, we can get caught up in that, and respond in anger or frustration.

These triggers are quick acting, and often subconscious – but we can minimise their impact. Firstly by becoming aware of who or what is likely to cause them, and then by considering why.

It's likely that the person has acted in a way that contrasts sharply with your own values or beliefs.

To minimise your reaction, you can: Pause, count to ten, focus on your breathing, or even suggest taking a break in the conversation and come back later when you can think more clearly. Under threat, your brain will be less likely to access the pre-frontal cortex and be driven by your overriding amygdala hijack.

Further learning ...

For further information and learning, as well as suggested activities, feel free to visit the [People.NHS.uk](https://www.People.NHS.uk) website or our [South East Leadership Academy site](#).



Think about your thinking

Consider 4 key areas which will take your mindset to a more positive place to approach a conversation:

1. I'm OK, they're OK (Adult – Adult approach. We don't criticise, we talk directly)
2. Beware 'simple stories' (So we avoid the fundamental attribution bias)
3. Beware 'halo / horns' (So we minimise any confirmation bias)
4. Beware 'I'm right, they're wrong' (We're open to being persuaded and seeing their perspective)

We can easily fall into the trap of assuming that just because we've experienced something, that's the truth. In actual fact, there can be many versions of the truth, or different perspectives which might be equally valid.

If we go into a conversation assuming that we're right, it leaves little space to either treat the person with respect, or to ask questions and listen to what they have to say.

As an alternative, try these:

- "I wonder what's going on for them, that they felt compelled to do that?"
- "I could be wrong ..."
- "What's their side of the story?"

Be mindful of what you are telling yourself before a challenging conversation starts.

Give it a go

1. Think about a challenging conversation that you've had in the past, that didn't go as well as you'd hoped. What difference might it have made if you'd thought differently before hand?
2. Think about a time when you've had a challenging conversation that's gone well *for both parties*. What made the difference?
3. Now think about a conversation that you've not had yet, but need to. What's the simple story that you may have already constructed? How can you challenge yourself to think differently?
4. And finally – can you consider it a conversation, rather than a challenging conversation? What difference does that make?

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Time to reflect...

Take some time to note down your thoughts on what you've learned;

What resonated?

What has made you curious?

What small changes could you make to start having an impact differently and quickly?



