

## Executive Conversations Storyboard

<p><b>Course Description and Objectives</b></p>	<p>The executive level Difficult Conversations workshop goes beyond the conversation process and immerses participants into the “why” of difficult conversations.</p> <p>Good communication is important both in business negotiations and in daily life. This workshop explores what makes some conversations difficult, why people avoid having difficult conversations, and why people often manage difficult conversations poorly. Participants will walk away with techniques for having more effective, fruitful discussions.</p> <p>Participants will learn to....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Embody the skills to manage emotions effectively and constructively: their own &amp; others</li> <li>· Identify the types of conversations that consistently emerge in business</li> <li>· Enhance listening skills and understand why it matters</li> <li>· Appreciate what is at the root of most difficult conversations</li> <li>· Apply tools and take difficult conversations to productive, learning conversations</li> </ul>
<p><b>Welcome &amp; Introductions</b> 5 minutes</p>	<p>Introduce yourself and allow participants to do so.</p> <p>Today’s session is looking at the next level of communication. You already know and practice effective communication. The next level of communication is looking at effective conversations. At your level of leadership, your job has shifted from the technical, task-related job functions to a focus on leadership skills. The skills that made you great at your job and rise through the ranks are no longer the most important skills you need. Based on your personality and behavior style, some of us are better equipped naturally to handle these conversations. Others must continue to develop your skill set as it relates to leadership- communication, employee management, and professional presence just to name a few.</p> <p>You experience a variety of situations every day that you have to address. That’s what today’s session is geared</p>

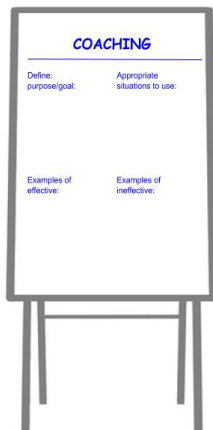
	<p>for. Here are our objectives or takeaways for today's session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identify areas of improvement</li> <li>● Understand needs of conversations</li> <li>● Articulate the why of conversations</li> <li>● Experience preparation and execution</li> <li>● Be mindful of mitigating factors</li> </ul> <p>Planning for conversations ahead of time will enhance your ability to effectively communicate when the topic may involve sensitive information or evoke an emotional response. We'll compare conversation styles for coaching, feedback, and dialogue and what you can do as a leader to build psychological safety and trust. We will work through some specific models you can use for different types of conversations and have some fun while working on scenarios using these models.</p> <p>Any questions before we start?</p>
<p><b>Connections</b> 5-10 minutes</p>	<p>First- I want you to think back to the last conversation you had that was difficult - whether it was a difficult employee, a sensitive subject, or one you just dreaded.</p> <p>Jot down the topic, your feelings at the time, feelings after the conversation, what you might do differently, other person's reaction...</p> <p>Take a few minutes to write down this information. Then you will share out with a partner.</p> <p>Give time to complete.</p> <p>Turn to your shoulder partner and discuss what you wrote. Listen for commonalities, good examples to share with the whole group.</p> <p>Identify commonalities between groups. Discuss: "The Why" and "Patterns of Behavior" (address the patterns of this incident?) What were the topics or context of these difficult conversations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Telling someone bad news</li> <li>● Asking for a raise at work</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Giving someone negative feedback about their behavior</li> <li>● Making decisions about finances</li> <li>● Raising issues with a supervisor or someone in a power position</li> </ul> <p>Why are these conversations difficult?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Complexity of issues</li> <li>● Sensitive topics</li> <li>● Emotions are usually strong</li> <li>● They cause stress</li> <li>● People have very different views about the topic</li> <li>● It can impact our self-esteem</li> <li>● Uncertainty about how it will turn out</li> <li>● People worry about it going badly and becoming confrontational</li> <li>● Typically, people care about the issue and the person involved</li> <li>● They don't want to hurt feelings</li> <li>● People have few experiences or models of these conversations going well</li> <li>● Power difference between the people</li> </ul> <p>What makes someone "difficult?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Avoids accountability</li> <li>● Gets angry easy</li> <li>● Cries in difficult situations</li> <li>● Unpredictable behavior</li> <li>● Know-it-all</li> <li>● Doesn't listen</li> <li>● Doesn't talk</li> <li>● Instigates drama</li> </ul> <p>As you can see, there are so many variables to these situations- it's no wonder we don't always enjoy them! It's one thing to know how to communicate in a way that inspires others and brings out their best. It's another to actually do it, in the heat of the moment, when your emotions are high, and the topic is sensitive.</p>
<b>Self-Assessment</b> 10 minutes	<p>Before we go into depth on strategies to utilize, let's take a look at where you are currently.</p> <p>This self-assessment will identify skills important to handling difficult conversations.  Rate yourself.</p>

	<p>Share out?          What areas are your strengths? What areas do you see growth opportunity?          What's the most difficult for you? What's the easiest?</p> <p>We will talk about these statements today and their importance in an effective difficult conversation.</p>
<p><b>The Amygdala Hijack</b>  <b>Why are these conversations so difficult?</b>  <b>5 minutes</b></p>	<p>A few minutes ago we talked about why these types of conversations are difficult and one (or more) factor we identified is "feelings." Let's look at this idea of feelings more closely and one of our innate responses.... There's actually a great deal of neuroscience behind feelings, emotions &amp; our innate reactions.</p> <p><b>Amygdala Hijack</b>          The "amygdala hijack" is a term first used in Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence. We now know there are two minds: one that thinks and one that feels. The amygdala is the emotional part of the brain, which regulates the fight or flight response. Any strong emotion- anxiety, anger, or even joy can spark this amygdala hijack. Think of this as a product of our evolutionary history- it is an extremely useful reaction if suddenly you are threatened by a wild animal. This survival mechanism lets us react to things before the rational brain has time to think and make a decision. However; the hair trigger amygdala can respond irrationally and distort things. A rush of stress hormones floods the body before the prefrontal lobes of the brain can react. The prefrontal lobes regulate executive function - such as self-control, focusing our attention and critical thinking. When it gets hijacked- it is like losing 10 to 15 IQ points temporarily.</p> <p>Pose questions to the group:</p> <p>In those difficult conversations you've had- have you felt your amygdala was hijacked?</p> <p>How does this affect us?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say things we might regret</li> <li>• Don't think clearly/logically when hijacked</li> <li>• Can feel angry, afraid, anxious, tearful</li> <li>• Raise our voice</li> </ul> <p>What can we do about it? How to avoid the amygdala</p>

	<p>hijack?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can train your brain to be less emotionally active</li> <li>• Count to ten (or 100) to turn on the part of your brain that was hijacked</li> <li>• Take deep breaths and focus on breathing (not on the emotion)</li> </ul> <p>The amygdala hijack is one reason why these conversations can be difficult for us- we have to work on our response in these situations - as hard as it may be. (Brainstorm list- physical and mental adjustments to avoid amygdala hijack)</p>
<p><b>Feelings &amp; emotions in the workplace</b> <b>5 minutes</b></p>	<p>In a fast-paced work place, we often tell ourselves that we don't have time for feelings. But ignoring them, and by extension ignoring our needs, may actually sabotage our productivity. According to Human Resources magazine, "...study after study indicates that employee emotions are fundamentally related to and actually drive-bottom-line success in a company."</p> <p>Just as there is brain research on the amygdala hijack, there's also new research on our brains "at work" and how our brains impact our work. Emotions convey information. Oxytocin is a hormone that you have probably heard of -it acts as a neurotransmitter. It influences social interaction, playing a role in work-related behaviors and feelings of empathy and generosity and trust. The brain network that oxytocin activates is evolutionarily old. This means that the trust that oxytocin enables is deeply embedded in our nature. Yet at work we often get the message that we should focus on completing tasks, not on making friends. Neuroscience experiments show that when people intentionally build social ties at work, their performance improves.</p> <p>What are some emotions we would consider productive (positive?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joy</li> <li>• Gratitude</li> <li>• Hope</li> <li>• Pride</li> <li>• Inspiration</li> <li>• Love</li> </ul>

	<p>What are some emotions we consider unproductive (negative?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annoyed</li> <li>• Bitter</li> <li>• Anxious</li> <li>• Critical</li> <li>• Sad</li> <li>• Mad</li> </ul> <p><i>What's the difference between feelings &amp; emotions?</i>  <i>We all use the words interchangeably to more or less explain the same thing – how something or someone makes us feel.</i>  <i>Emotions are lower level responses occurring in the amygdala creating biochemical reactions in your body altering your physical state.</i>  <i>Emotional reactions are coded in our genes. They originally helped our species survive by producing quick reactions to threat, reward, and everything in between in their environments. They are generally universally similar across all humans and even other species. For example, you smile and your dog wags its tail. Emotions precede feelings,</i></p> <p><i>Feelings are sparked by emotions and colored by personal experiences, beliefs, memories, and thoughts linked to that particular emotion. People might not be aware of their emotions because they've been trained since birth to repress, suppress, ignore, demonize, and avoid them. Or, they swing to the opposite pole and allow their emotions to explode soon after they arise.</i></p>
<p><b>Flip Chart Activity</b>          What's the difference between feedback, coaching and dialogue?</p> <p>10-15 minutes</p>	<p>Before we dig strategies for these difficult conversations, let's examine three words that are sometimes used interchangeably - feedback, coaching and dialogue. We are going to deconstruct their meaning, purpose, and effective practices associated with each. Your job tasks as executives are complex and have many different facets and components, just as your experiences will be varied. Everyone may not encounter the exact same situations, but the context</p>



may be similar- projects off track, team members not getting along, or coaching employees to improvement. Let's take a look at these conversation types.

Chart paper with these labels:

- Definition
- Purpose/goal
- Examples of effective dialogue/feedback
- Examples of ineffective dialogue/feedback

Prior to dividing into groups- brainstorm definition for coaching/feedback/dialogue

Now divide into smaller groups. Can do 3 flip charts.

Ask each group to start at 1 flip chart. They will fill in as much information as they can in 3 minutes.

Have one scribe

They will then rotate to the next flip chart and add information. Give 2-3 minutes at each chart.

Add additional information with each rotation.

End up back at your starting chart.

Share out.

Hand out "Conversations" a blank chart for notes

\*What category do you place the conversation from your connection's activity?

Did anything make you go "aha" during this flip chart?

What resonated with you?

**Implications of avoiding or ignoring difficult conversations**  
**3 minutes**

More than one-third of managers admit to shrinking away from giving bad feedback when they anticipate a negative reaction.

However; most people have never been coached to have these conversations with the right balance of empathy and assertiveness.

Avoiding or ignoring- can actually lead to dysfunction and lack of performance, which can ultimately have a negative impact on a team and the business as a whole. It is estimated that workplace conflict affects not only morale and productivity, but also turnover. A major study found that employees spend an average 2.8 hours a week dealing with conflict, which amounts to roughly \$359 billion in workforce costs.

Ultimately, the elephant in the room only grows or becomes much more unwieldy and greatly impacts our job performance.

	<p>It diminishes trust and engagement, increases passive-aggressive behaviors, adds to talking behind people's backs,</p> <p>This also includes failing to give honest, candid feedback.</p> <p>Leaders must invest time attending to feelings of trust &amp; safety or waste an unreasonable amount of time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive behavior.</p> <p>Why are these conversations important to have?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain culture of company/team</li> <li>• Prevent issues from impacting job/project/team</li> <li>• Hold personnel accountable</li> <li>• Coach employees into improved performance</li> <li>• Improve relationships</li> <li>• Reduce stress</li> <li>• Improve productivity &amp; engagement</li> <li>• Delaying usually results in the problem getting worse, since most employees believe that if the manager doesn't take time to fix a problem, then everything must be OK.</li> <li>• And when good people see bad behavior get ignored, good people leave</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategies/Models</b> 10 minutes</p>	<p>We've talked about different types of conversations, emotions involved, and why these conversations are difficult. Now our next part of the session will look at specific strategies to use in these conversations - to make them easier, more productive, and less stressful on everyone.</p> <p>Remember that each type of conversation has a different purpose or goal. All of these conversations will have a similar process but will differ in your word choice and approach.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dialogue</li> <li>2. Coaching</li> <li>3. Feedback</li> </ol> <p>With notations for Feedback to unfamiliar Difficult information up</p>

<p><b>Conversation Preparation</b></p> <p><b>10 minutes</b></p>	<p>Use one scenario to practice your preparation for a conversation as a group of 3 Employee consistently arriving late. (Leave scenario details vague) Discuss type of conversation to select. Examine purpose and goals. Share out- record exemplars on chart paper.</p> <p>Go back to your self assessment- what do you need to strengthen? In planning- what do you need to take time on preparing?</p>
<p><b>Scenarios</b></p> <p><b>45 minutes</b></p>	<p>Form triads. Two people engage in a conversation. The third person gives feedback on the conversation. Decide on scenario. Take time to plan out what to say.</p> <p>When most of us need help with our jobs- we turn to our peers. This is a vital component of “just-in-time” training. Instructions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Read through the Scenario section below to understand what you will be discussing. Do not share your scenario description with your counterpart. You may have different items within the same scenario that you may or may not want to reveal.</li> <li>2. Once you have read through the prompts, start your activity. Each group will be given approximately five minutes to prepare, five minutes to conduct the scenario, and five minutes to debrief and receive feedback from the observer.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Mitigating factors</b></p> <p><b>10 minutes</b></p> <p>Building Trust &amp; Psychological Safety Tips</p>	<p><b>Being comfortable in the uncomfortable</b></p> <p>To be effective in our jobs, we cannot hide from tough issues or situations. We have to be willing to step into the unknown and challenge yourself. Reflect upon what is most difficult for you. Is it the possible reactions of the other person, are you afraid you will lose your temper? Afraid you will say something wrong? Taking time to prepare and practicing these situations will better prepare you for these difficult situations. That’s why the old saying is true- repetition is the mother of learning.</p>

	<p>There are other ways to mitigate these difficult conversations.</p> <p><b>Psychological safety &amp; Building Trust</b></p> <p>Amy Edmonson, Harvard graduate, and businesswoman, has conducted ground-breaking research on psychological safety. She defines it as a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.</p> <p>She indicates that many managers worry about appearing too soft when they talk about PS. Sometimes it's easier to give the facts and figures. That makes me appear hard-nosed. But it's also out of touch with reality.</p> <p>Paul Santagata, Head of Industry at Google, knows the results of the tech giant's massive two-year study on team performance. It discovered that the highest-performing teams have one thing in common: psychological safety, the belief that you won't be punished when you make a mistake. Studies show that psychological safety allows for moderate risk-taking, speaking your mind, creativity, and sticking your neck out without fear of having it cut off — just the types of behavior that lead to market breakthroughs.</p> <p>Going back to the brain science of the amygdala—explain why psychological safety is both fragile and vital to success in uncertain, interdependent environments. The brain processes a provocation by a boss, competitive coworker, or dismissive subordinate as a life-or-death threat. The amygdala, the alarm bell in the brain, ignites the fight-or-flight response, hijacking higher brain centers.</p> <p>When the workplace feels challenging but not threatening, teams can sustain the broaden-and-build mode. Oxytocin levels in our brains rise, eliciting trust and trust-making behavior. This is a huge factor in team success, as Santagata attests: “In Google's fast-paced, highly demanding environment, our success hinges on the ability to take risks and be vulnerable in front of peers.”</p> <p>So, there is science behind these feelings and emotions. Trust and PS are related. Positive emotions like trust, curiosity, confidence, and inspiration broaden the mind and help us build psychological resources. We become more open-minded, resilient, motivated, and persistent when we feel safe. Humor increases, as does solution-</p>
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	<p>finding and divergent thinking — the cognitive process underlying creativity. As a comparison- high stress is a potent oxytocin inhibitor. This makes sense-right? When you are stressed out, you do not interact with others effectively. Oxytocin also increases a person's empathy, a useful trait for people trying to work together.</p> <p>Leaders must understand the stakes. In a 2016 global CEO survey, PwC reported that 55% of CEOs think that a lack of trust is a threat to their organization's growth. But most have done little to increase trust, mainly because they aren't sure where to start. Compared with people at low-trust companies, people at high-trust companies report: 74% less stress, 106% more energy at work, 50% higher productivity, 13% fewer sick days, 76% more engagement, 29% more satisfaction with their lives, 40% less burnout.</p> <p><b>Assumptions about intent</b>  What assumptions are you making about this person's intentions? You may feel intimidated, belittled, ignored, disrespected, or marginalized, but be cautious about assuming that this was the speaker's intention. Impact does not necessarily equal intent. Be ready to discuss you felt with "I" statements. Ask what their intent was. Be willing to believe in their potential to change or improve.</p>
<p><b>Wrap- up</b></p>	<p>There are always going to be difficult people and difficult situations. The question is, can you transform these situations into opportunities to increase your ability to respond with awareness?  By paying attention to feelings and needs, executive conversations helps cultivate the sense that "I matter, you matter, we matter," which can improve relationships, build team spirit and contribute to the growth of the Organization or team. Honesty does not have to be brutal. Instead of avoiding difficult conversations, find the courage to start conversing in a constructive way, with skill and empathy.</p> <p>Circle back to self-assessment- what topics/activities/models helped you grow?  Circle back to difficult conversation in "Connections"</p>

	<p>page. What ideas do you have for “re-doing” that conversation with a different outcome?</p> <p>Most effective portion of today?</p> <p>What are you committed to working on over the next 30 days?</p> <p>If new information isn’t applied, we’ll forget about 75% of it after just six days.</p>
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