

Holding Difficult Conversations

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*Presented for Texas Department of Information Resources as part of the
Technology Today Series.*

Ryan Soisson



Holding Difficult Conversations

Welcome!



Host

Joy Hall Bryant

Program Director, IRM Outreach

Texas Department of Information Resources

**Texas Government Data Forum is
June 21st. Don't forget to register!**



Presenter

Ryan Soisson

Founder & Principal Soisson & Associates

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Learn More

- DIR website: www.dir.texas.gov
- Visit the DIR **CALENDAR** to view events and access more details. (See link at top of any page.)
- Click on STAY **CONNECTED** on DIR home page (bottom left) to subscribe to discussion groups.
- Use the **SEARCH** field to find specific information quickly.

Today's Program

- **CPE form** - in handout pane for download or will emailed.
- Use **Question Pane** to submit any questions or comments.
- **Evaluation form** displays upon exit. We appreciate feedback.

Introduction

A difficult conversation

(Name) and I disagree about _____:

- What good performance looks like
- Who gets to make the decision to kill the project
- How the team meeting should have gone
- Which vendor to hire
- Who is responsible for cleaning the breakroom
- Which priorities should be funded
- What temperature to set the thermostat
- Where to send little Lisa to school

Are These Conversations Too?

- The purchasing process is inefficient
- High absenteeism from the frontline staff
- Persistent low quality work from the X team
- The Six Sigma initiative that will not get off the ground
- Unrealistic project deadlines
- Software solutions that don't integrate

Issue	Don't	Instead
Motive		
Preparing		
Opening		
Pushing		
Positions		

Motive

Motivation

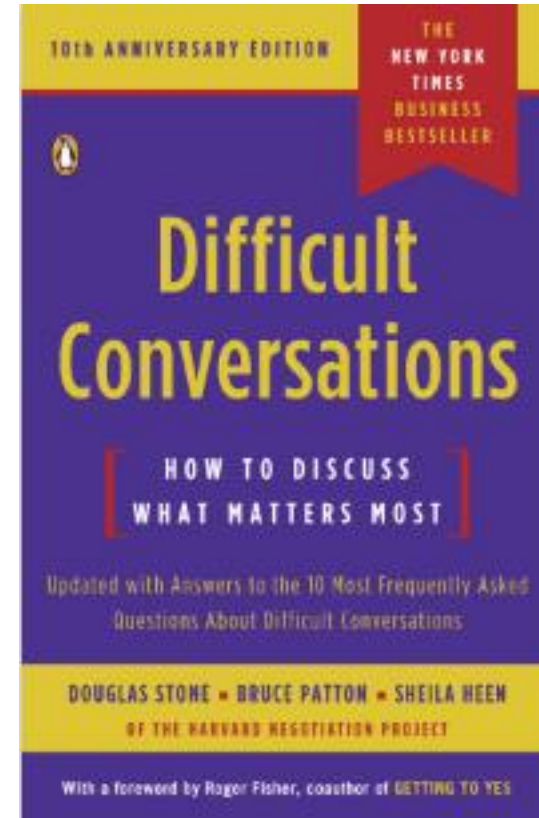
You can't win a difficult conversation.



Motivation

“Difficult conversations are not about who is right. They are about what is .”

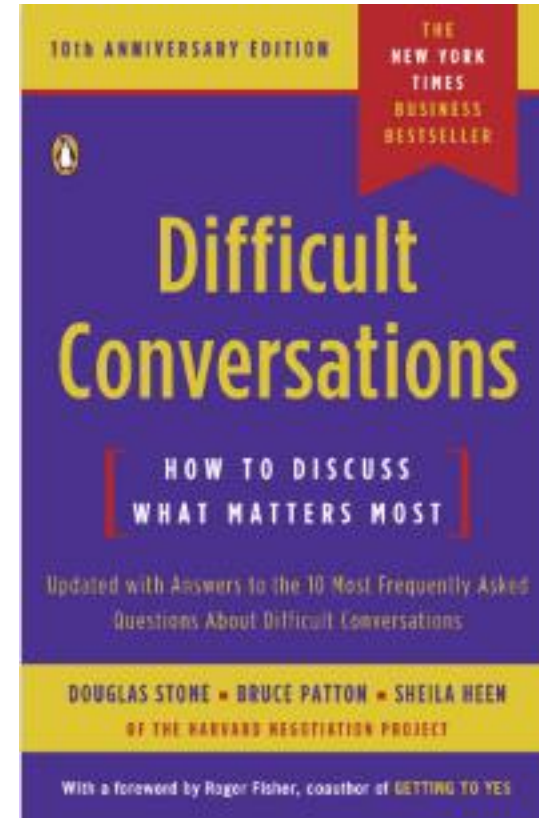
- Harvard Negotiation Project



Motivation

“Difficult conversations are not about who is right. They are about what is important.”

- Harvard Negotiation Project



Motivation



Issue	Don't	Instead
Motive	Try to win Establish that I am right	Ask: am I trying to win an argument? Ask: how can I focus on solving a problem?
Preparing		
Opening		
Pushing		
Positions		

Preparing

Preparation

Using the question pane, please type a couple of words describing what you typically do to prepare for a difficult conversation.

Self Coaching

Crucial Conversations



Preparation

If the goal is not to “win” the argument, then these may not help:

- Creating compelling list of points
- Writing your arguments
- Compiling evidence
- Scenario mapping (if she says.... I'll say...)
- Determining how to convince [name] to accept your solution

Self-Coaching

- 1. Attribution:** At my worst, I think name does _____ because s/he is _____.
- 2. Attribution:** Why would a reasonable and good person think/do what name does?
- 3. Contribution:** I contribute to this problem by _____, _____, and _____?
- 4. Contribution:** How can I most contribute to solving the problem?

Issue	Don't	Instead
Motive	Try to win Establish that I am right	Ask, what am I acting like my motive is? How can I focus on solving a problem (and learning?)
Preparing	Prepare your argument Scenario map	Ask attribution and contribution self-coaching questions.
Opening		
Pushing		
Positions		

Opening

Opening

Write down *word-for-word* how you will open this conversation. I'll get you started.

“(Name) thanks for meeting with me. [Wow, it was really hot outside this week].... I want to talk about....

Keep this short!

Openings: Elements

- Under 30 seconds (**must**)
- Clear, succinct topic (**must**)
- Empirical facts to *illustrate* the issue (**recommended**)
- Clear issue stated from neutral *3rd person* POV (**recommended**)
- Identify your contribution (**bonus**)
- Hypothetical if providing a judgment (**bonus**)

Goal:

1. Get name to **understand** the issue
2. Get name to **feel safe** engaging with you

Opening: Neighbors Noisy Dog

“(Name) thanks for meeting with me. I want to talk about.... your dog. I probably should have brought this up sooner. When spot is out past 9pm, he barks and often keeps my sons from being able to sleep. That happened twice this week. I’m wondering if we could find a solution. (Stop).”

Opening: Neighbors

Contribution

Neutral

“(Name) thanks for meeting with me. I want to talk about.... **your dog.**

I probably should have brought this up sooner.

When spot is out past 9pm, he barks and often keeps my sons from being able to sleep. That happened twice this week. I’m wondering if we could find a solution. (Stop).”

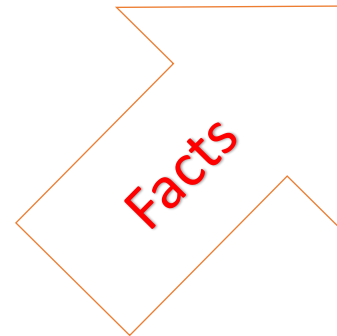
Facts

Opening: Unfair Partnering

“(Name) thanks for meeting with me. I want to talk about.... how we divide clients between us. In the last month, I feel like I’ve been getting the difficult and less profitable clients. And you seem to be getting the better ones. For instance I took A and B, while you had X and Y. You may see this differently. (Stop).”

Opening: ers

“(Name) thanks for competing with me. I want to talk about.... **how we divide clients between us.** In the last month, I feel like I’ve been getting the difficult and less profitable clients. And, you seem to be getting the better ones. For instance **I took A and B, while you had X and Y.** You may see this differently. **(Stop).**”



Opening: Different Visions

“(Name) thanks for meeting with me. I want to talk about.... My perception of the differing visions we have for where our organization is headed. I believe we need to move in direction XYZ and my sense is you feel strongly that we should move toward ABC. There may be strong cases to move in either direction. I’d like to hear everything you have to say and also put all the data and reasons I have on the table. I’m hoping we can work towards a common direction, whichever that happens to be.” (Stop)

Opening: Different Visions

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Facts



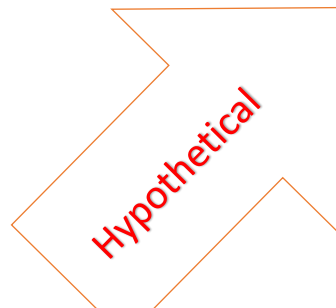
Hypothetical

Opening: Lying?

“(Name) thanks for meeting with me. I want to talk about.... A concern I’m having. Let me be really clear then please tell me if I’m off base here. I’ve been told by two people that you said you won the AAA contract. You told me last week you secured the BBB contract. Today, I find that we are not contracted with either. And in talking to AAA, they said you missed the last two meetings. *I’m beginning to wonder if you are being honest with me. Is that what’s happening, or is it something else? (Stop).*”

Opening: Lying?

“(Name) thanks for meeting with me. I want to talk about.... A concern I’m having. Let me be really clear then please tell me if I’m off base here. I’ve been told by two people that you said you won the AAA contract. You told me last week you secured the BBB contract. Today, I find that we are not contracted with either. And in talking to AAA, they said you missed the last two meetings. *I’m beginning to wonder if you are being honest with me. Is that what’s happening, or is it something else?*” (Stop).



Common Openings

“(Name) thanks for meeting with me. I want to talk about....

... our different needs around...

... a *pattern* I’m seeing develop...

... *how we have conversations*...

... *some issues* that are causing me to...

(**Stop**).

Issue	Don't	Instead
Motive	Try to win Establish that I am right	Ask, what am I acting like my motive is? How can I focus on solving a problem (and learning?)
Preparing	Prepare your argument	Ask attribution and contribution self-coaching questions.
Opening	Circle, sugarcoat, accuse, judge, belabor	In > 30 seconds share facts, topic, invite. Make name feel safe to engage.
Pushing		
Positions		

Pushing

After Opening

- Stop talking!
- Avoid making your case, rather Help them tell “their side.”
- Ask questions to learn. Be genuinely curious.
 - Help me understand?
 - Tell me more?
- Acknowledge their key points (this is not agreeing, just acknowledging).
 - So, what I’m getting from your response.
 - I think I understand why you would say that.
 - I see it differently, but appreciate why you believe that.
- Summarize their side *fairly* before responding.
 - So, it sounds like you have three main concerns... A, B, C. Is that correct?
- Once they know they have been heard and understood, share your interests, needs, concerns. This does not mean making point-for-point counter argument of what they just said.

Example of a Summary & Response

So, I think I now understand why you want to sleep with the window open. It reduces energy costs, you love the sounds of the outdoors and it lets the air circulate better. Is that about right? And, I appreciate that it make you angry when I close the window in the middle of the night because that sometimes wakes you up.

I think I get all of that and appreciate your needs. At the same time I have some needs as well. My biggest concern is security....

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Positions		

Positions

A Disagreement

Q: Where will Lisa go to school?

A = Private School

B = Public school



Resolving Problems

Public	Private
Position 1: <i>Attend public school!</i>	Position 2: <i>Attend private school!</i>
Interest 1:	Interest 2:
Common Interests:	
Possible Solutions:	

Resolving Problems

Public	Private
Position 1: <i>Attend public school!</i>	Position 2: <i>Attend private school!</i>
Interest 1: <i>cost, diversity, sports, like public</i>	Interest 2: <i>quality, college, safety, like private</i>
Common Interests:	
Possible Solutions:	

Resolving Problems

Public	Private
Position 1: <i>Attend public school!</i>	Position 2: <i>Attend private school!</i>
Interest 1: <i>cost, diversity, sports, like public</i>	Interest 2: <i>quality, college, safety, like private</i>
Common Interests: <i>cost, diversity, quality, safety</i>	
Possible Solutions:	

Resolving Problems

Public	Private
Position 1: Attend to public school!	Position 2: Attend private school!
Interest 1: cost, diversity, sports, like public	Interest 2: quality, college, safety, like private
Common Interests: cost, diversity, quality, safety	
Possible Solutions: ½ public, ½ private public school with tutors or “booster” online learning private but diverse experiences in summer public but sign-up for weekend sports leagues private but find strategies for college scholarships public but learn self-defense home school; charter school, etc.	

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Positions	Assume "the position"	Look for interests beneath your and their position

FAQ!

Q: Doesn't this all require the other person to "play along?"

Q: What if they yell, get quiet, lie....?

Q: What happens when you can't plan for a conversation?

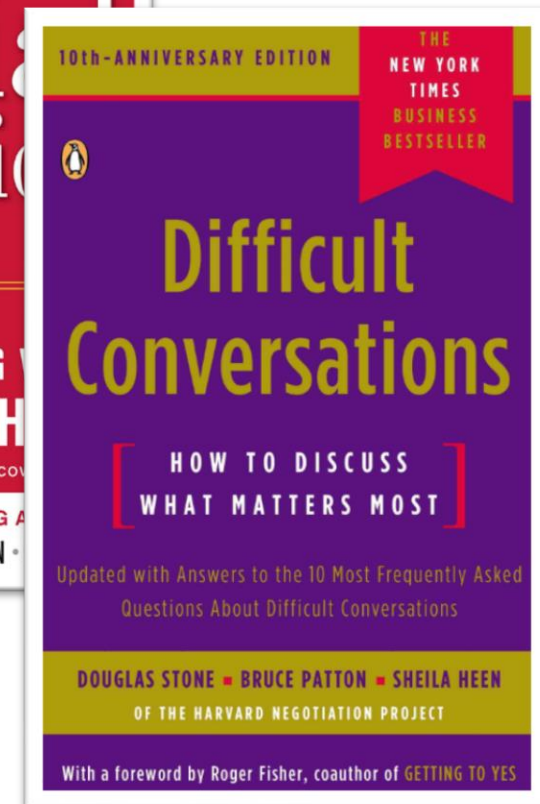
Q: Why not use power?

Q: How do you develop skills?



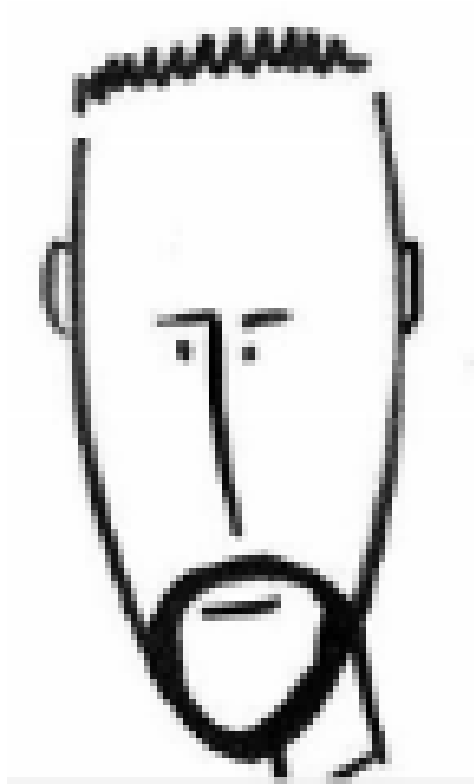
Suggested Reading

- Crucial Conversations
- Difficult Conversations



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www.soissonandassociates.com



Facilitation
Team Development
Training
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