NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

CONFLICT & POWER DYNAMICS

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CONFLICT CONTAINS INFORMATION



Expectations Two people think different things were agreed.

Priorities The goals or resources are genuinely competing.

Boundaries A behaviour or responsibility needs naming.

Interests There may be no mutually satisfying outcome.

ASSESS THE DATA

CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE. ESCALATION IS NOT.



01

CONFLICT HAPPENS

Different interests, expectations and priorities will collide.

02

AVOIDANCE HAS A COST

Unspoken issues tend to become bigger decisions later.

03

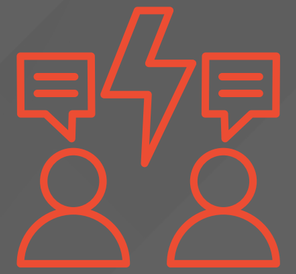
ESCALATION IS A CHOICE

You can challenge clearly without making every disagreement a crisis.

THE AIM IS NOT ZERO CONFLICT, IT IS BETTER JUDGEMENT WITHIN IT.

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WHEN A CONVERSATION KNOCKS YOU SIDEWAYS



YOU DO NOT HAVE TO RESPOND AT SOMEONE ELSE'S SPEED.

01

DO NOT RUSH

A pause gives you a choice.

02

DO NOT DEFEND EVERYTHING

You can address the issue without rebutting every word.

03

DO NOT MIRROR THE HEAT

Their tone does not have to become yours.

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WHO DO YOU BECOME UNDER PRESSURE?



THE EXPLAINER

More context, more detail, less clarity.

THE DEFENDER

Answers every accusation as if all are equally important.



THE PLEASER

Agrees too quickly to restore comfort.

THE AVOIDER

Withdraws and hopes the issue passes.

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THE FAST FUNNEL: REGAIN CHOICE UNDER PRESSURE

1
PAUSE
Breathe before you answer

›

2
INTENT
Why am I engaging?

›

3
OUTCOME
What needs to move?

›

4
MESSAGE
What must stay consistent?

›

5
RESPONSE
Say it calmly and clearly

NOT: HOW DO I WIN THIS EXCHANGE?
INSTEAD: HOW DO I MOVE THE ISSUE FORWARD?

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POWER CHANGES THE CONVERSATION



UP

Donors, funders, trustees, senior executives

Fear of losing funding, access or approval

ACROSS

Peers, partners, other departments

Competing priorities and unclear ownership

DOWN

Direct reports and junior colleagues

Your response sets the tone for others

THE RISKS CAN FEEL VERY DIFFERENT: WHAT CAN THEY INFLUENCE, AND WHAT AM I AFRAID OF LOSING?

DE-ESCALATE WITHOUT DISAPPEARING



ACKNOWLEDGE

“I can see why this matters to you.”

CLARIFY

“Can we separate the concern from the decision?”

STATE THE NEXT STEP

“Here is what I can commit to.”

ACKNOWLEDGING SOMEONE’S CONCERN IS NOT THE SAME AS AGREEING WITH THEM.

NOT EVERY RESOLUTION RESULTS IN HAPPINESS!



1. **What is non-negotiable?**
2. What trade-off are we making?
3. What decision actually belongs to us?
4. How can we communicate it with respect?

A DIFFICULT OUTCOME IS NOT AUTOMATICALLY A FAILED CONVERSATION.

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WHAT WOULD YOU SAY NEXT?

A senior stakeholder says this in front of colleagues.

“This doesn’t make sense. Why are we doing it this way?”

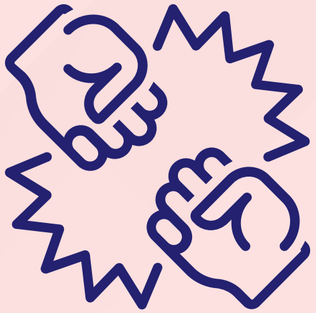
NOTICE
What is your automatic reaction?

READ
Where does the power sit?

CHOOSE
What outcome do you need?

RESPOND
What is your first sentence?

CONFLICT IS INFORMATION. YOUR RESPONSE IS A CHOICE.



1. NOTICE your own reaction
2. NAME the actual problem
3. CHOOSE the next useful action

ANY QUESTIONS



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