



## **Difficult Conversations**

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In this session, we will:

- Identify your preferred style for managing conflict and the strengths and weaknesses of that style
- Understand the mindset we often use in challenging situations
- Learn a mindset that leads to better results and stronger relationships
- Practice techniques to prepare for and engage in difficult conversations

## What's on your plate right now?

- Reflect on your current work life.

What issues are you dealing with in which

- The stakes are high;
- People have different opinions;
- Emotions run strong?

5 minutes



## What's on your plate right now?

- Switch plates with a neighbor and discuss.
- Are your issues similar or different?

10 minutes



## What's on your plate right now?

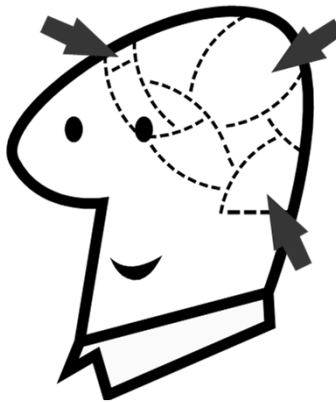
Join with another pair.

- What are the themes you see across plates?
- What are the issues people are dealing with?
- Who else is involved (i.e., what roles)?

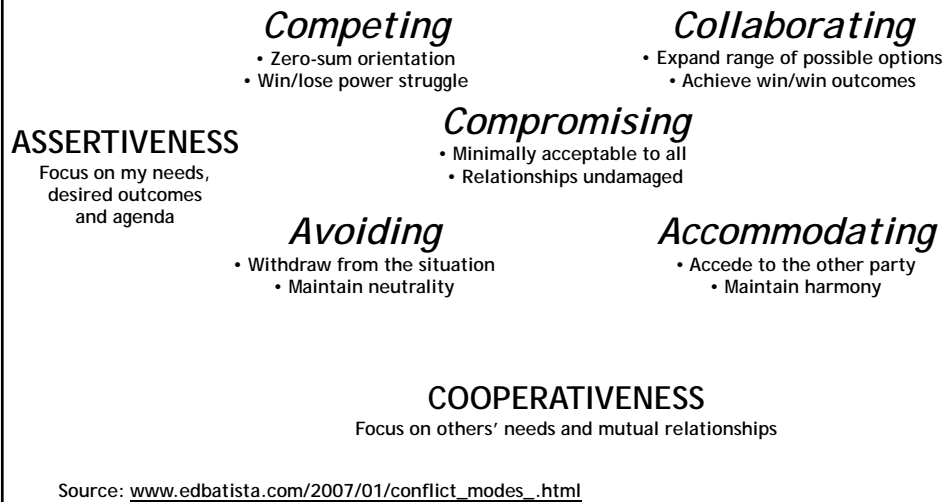
10 minutes



## Your Perceptions of Conflict



## Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Modes



## Results for this class: number scoring over 75% for each mode



## Read your Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode report

1. What is your preferred mode?
2. What do your scores tell you about the strength of your preferred mode?



## TKI Discussion

In small groups, discuss:

1. What does this conflict style gain you?
2. What does this conflict style cost you?
3. What advice can you give to people to help them use this style effectively?

Select a recorder and a reporter before you begin your discussion!

# FOUR STEPS TO HANDLING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS



## Four steps for successful conversations

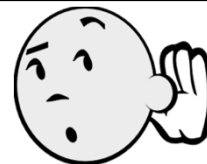
1. Get ready



2. Set the stage



3. Explore each other's stories



4. Move to action



## GET READY



- Start with mindset
- Get clear on why you want to raise the issue
- Move from certainty to curiosity

Managing conflict starts with what's in your head . . .



Before anything comes out your mouth



What do you see in this photo?



## Rethinking Thinking

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJLqOclPqis>



## The Ladder of Inference



Inside your head

- Take **action** based on beliefs
- I adopt **beliefs** about the world
- I draw **conclusions**
- I make **assumptions** based on my meanings
- I add **meanings** (cultural and personal)
- I select **data** from what I observe
- Observable **data**

## We All Go Up the Ladder

- Assumptions
- Inferences
- Attributions



What do you see in this photo?



You'll be on safer footing if you . . .

**Aim for this**



**Instead of this**



## Basic formula to “lower your ladder”

- Share what you **observed**
  - What I noticed was...Did I miss something?
- Test what it **means**
  - That sounds like...Did I get that right?



## Get Ready: individual reflection

- Look at the issues you described on your paper plate and pick one conversation that you would like to prepare for.
- Use the handout to answer the reflection questions.
- Share with a partner and ask for feedback, especially whether they spot places where you may have climbed up the ladder of inference.

## SET THE STAGE



- Share purpose
- Check your alignment
- Agree on *how* as well as *what* to talk about

## Genuine Questions



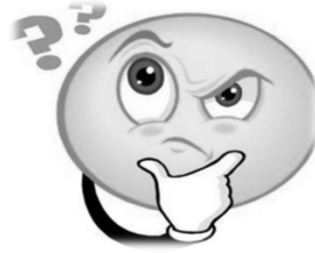
Come from:

- Curiosity and the desire to learn
- The assumption that others may see things you do not

Often begin with “what” or “how” and are open-ended

Separate your point of view from the question

## False Questions



Come from:

- The desire to make a point
- The assumption that you are right

Often begin with a contraction (don't, isn't)

Embed your point of view in the question

## The “You Idiot” Test

- Imagine adding “you idiot” to the end of your question.
- If the meaning stays the same, chances are it's not a genuine question.



## State your view and ask genuine questions

### **Your view**

- I'd like to discuss . . .
- What I saw happening was . . .
- I think it would be a good idea if we . . .
- I suggest we . . .

### **Genuine question**

- Are there other things you would like to talk about?
- Did I miss something?
- What do you think?
- Do you see things differently?

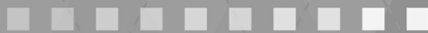
## Share All Relevant information

- Ensures common basis of understanding
- Information can be rational or emotional
- Consider your unexpressed feelings or thoughts

## Set the Stage: individual reflection

- Use the handout to answer the reflection questions.
- Share with a partner and ask for feedback, especially if they see opportunities for you to focus on state your views and ask genuine questions.

## EXPLORE EACH OTHER'S STORIES



- We each have our own story
- Listen for shared interests
- Focus on contribution, not blame

## Veginots Exercise

Purpose: to experience conflict and reflect on it

- 3 minutes to read
- 2 minutes to plan
- 8 minutes to negotiate
- 3 minutes to reflect
- May choose to share anything from your role; just can't hand over your paper
- At end I will ask you "where should I deliver the veginots, to Dr. Smith or Dr. Harper?"

## Reflections

1. What were the barriers to exploring each other's stories?
2. What did you do that helped you to listen? What were you thinking that led you to these actions?
3. What did you do that hindered your ability to listen? What were you thinking that led you to these actions?
4. What assumptions did you make?





Focus on your **interest** *before* taking a **position**



Positions are...

- Demands
- Suggestions
- Proposed solutions
- Courses of action
- Fairly specific



**The *What* to Do**

## Examples of Positions



- We need a new park
- We should have weekly meetings

## Interests are...

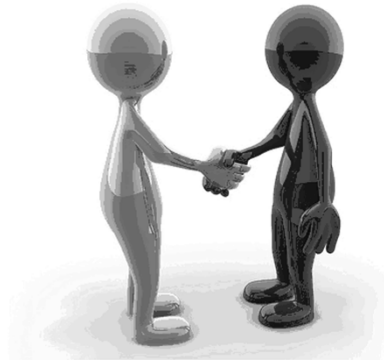
- Reason(s) for a position
- Underlying goals or objectives
- More general and open to interpretation
- Not actions



**The *Why* behind the  
*What***

## Examples of Interests

- We need to provide recreational opportunities for residents
- We need to improve communication and coordinate our work



## Move from Position to Interest by...



- Sharing your reasoning
- Providing relevant information
- Remaining open and curious

## Explore Each Other's Stories: individual reflection

- Use the handout to answer the reflection questions.
- Share with a partner and ask for feedback, especially if they see opportunities for you to focus on interests.

## MOVE TO ACTION



- Summarize what you've heard and check for agreement
- Clarify expectation
- Identify next steps



## Your Choice: to **Respond**, not **React**



### Move to Action: individual reflection

- Use the handout to answer the reflection questions.
- Share with a partner and ask for feedback, especially if they see opportunities for you to agree on next steps.

## CONTINUING TO DEVELOP YOUR SKILLS



### Additional Resources

- *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High* by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler (McGraw-Hill, 2012).
- *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well* by Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen (Penguin, 2014).
- *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most* by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen (Penguin, 1999).



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