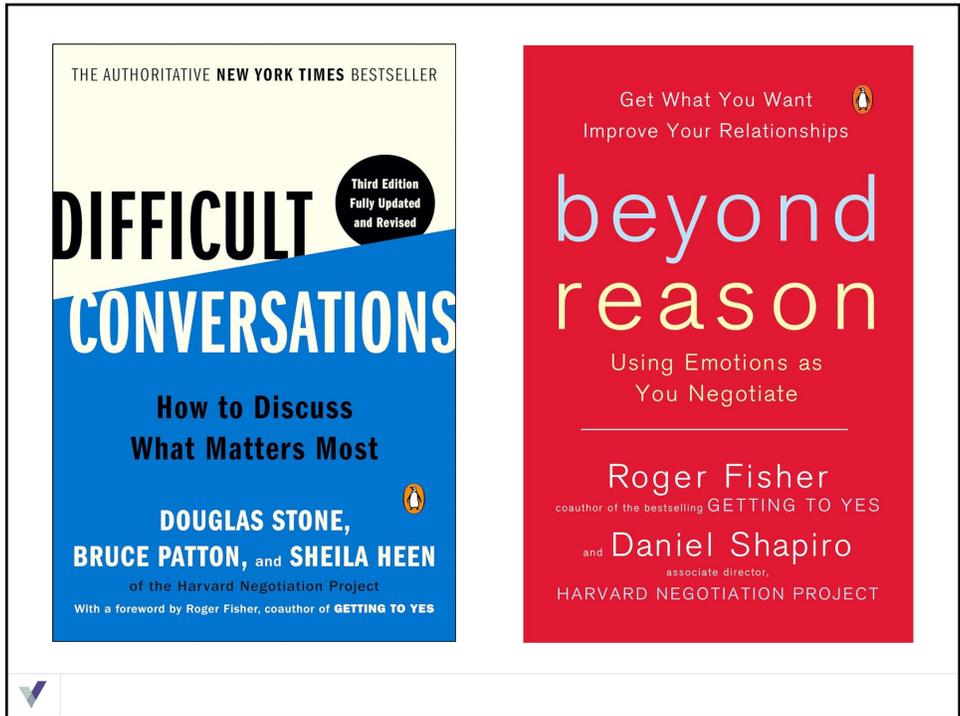0

1

Managing difficult conversations is complex

Facts: What happened? Right v. Wrong

Feelings: Intentions; Emotions

Identity: Attacking who I am

2

Guiding principles for creating *"yesable"* proposals

- You can't change someone's mind until you first seek to understand their thinking
- "<u>No</u>" means there is something to learn (*not crazy, evil, stupid, or selfish*)
- People act in ways *they believe* are in their best interests (whether I agree or not)
- What is persuasive to me may not be equally persuasive to them
- Rather than being about about right and wrong, I want to find them an "off ramp"
- Shared understanding ensures we're addressing the correct issue, regardless of agreement
- Effective persuasion is a joint activity
  - ▸ Enlists the help of the other person
  - ▸ They feel heard and are, therefore, more likely to hear you
  - ▸ They feel valued as a partner in the process
  - ▸ Easier for them to say "yes" because doing so does not require them to give in

3

Two key ideas we want to explore today

- How is the other person thinking about this situation?

- How do I most effectively engage them from an influence perspective?
    - Is there a more productive way to frame the conversation?
    - What do I do about emotions (mine and theirs)?

4

A tool for understanding their perspective

1. Who is the decision maker I am trying to influence?

2. What do they likely hear me asking or proposing? (*From their point of view; typically, negative*)

3. What consequences do they expect if they were to:
    - Say "YES" (– things)
    - Say "NO" (+ things)

Currently Perceived Choice (CPC) tool

WHO am I trying to influence? _____ 1

WHAT do they likely hear me asking or proposing? _____ 2

Perceived Consequences

What they expect if they agree? 3	*What they expect if they disagree?*
–	+
–	+
–	+
–	+
–	+
–	+
–	+
+	–

bad things (i.e. concerns, fears, = interests)

good things (i.e. able to do without agreement = alternatives)

5

5

Currently Perceived Choice (CPC) tool

WHO am I trying to influence? ***Person you're negotiating with***

WHAT do they likely hear me asking or proposing? ***Shall I today . . . (how might they hear what you're asking in a <u>negative</u> light?) . . . . .?***

Perceived Consequences	
What they expect if they agree?	*What they expect if they disagree?*
− I look incompetent	+ I enforce . . .
− I let them get away with . . .	+ I make them come back in the future . . .
− I risk losing . . .	+ I can still make them hurt (some threat)
− I set a terrible precedent	+ I can always do this with someone else
− I have less to do X, Y, and Z	+ I always change my mind tomorrow, maybe
− I am unable to go forward . . .	+ I maintain the status quo
− I feel ripped off and disrespected	
+ And I can see this benefit of moving on	− And I can see this cost of these actions

6

Making your proposal more *"yesable"*

Substance — Find OPTIONS that better meet both parties' INTERESTS

Context — Manage their perspective of their ALTERNATIVES

Process — Change how you are approaching your counterpart

Person(s) — Approach different stakeholders (understanding; intermediary)

9

Notes for moving from analysis to action

1. Substance: Find cost-effective ways to *increase benefits* and *decrease costs* to the decision-maker of agreeing.
   - Increase benefits to them.
   - Accelerate realization of benefits to them.
   - Increase (their perception of) the likelihood of benefits.
   - Reduce risks and costs to them.
   - Defer costs to them further into the future.

2. Context: Find cost effective ways to *reduce benefits* or to *increase costs* to the decision-maker of *not* agreeing.
   - Create new costs/negative consequences if they do not agree or act.
   - Reduce the benefits they realize from the status quo.
   - Create a fading opportunity.

Notes for moving from analysis to action

3. Process: Change the way you are approaching your target decision-maker.
   - Spend less time advocating for your point of view and more time exploring their concerns.
   - Enlist them as a partner in problem-solving; ask for, and be open to, their advice.
   - Explain your proposal/request in terms that make sense to them, and align with their interests.
   - Avoid threats; leverage warnings instead. That is, educate your target decision-maker on the consequences of different choices. Avoid actions that will feel coercive and are likely to trigger resistance.

4. Person: Approach different stakeholders.
   - Target individuals who are more influenceable — by you.
   - Target individuals who may be more able (than the individual you have been trying to influence) to decide or do what you need.
   - Target individuals who can (help) influence your target decision maker better than you can (on your own). Consider how best to approach and influence them as you seek their assistance.

Practice Scenario – Create a CPC

As a recent Dartmouth graduate and new resident of a large metro area, you eagerly joined the local Dartmouth Club to build connections and give back. When a position opened, you volunteered, excited to contribute. The club president, a 1977 graduate and retiree, has been leading for 11 years and has established a deeply traditional way of running the club. Monthly meetings are strictly in-person, held at a less than easily accessible venue in the evenings. Despite pushback from younger members and executive committee colleagues, the president refuses to allow Zoom participation, insisting it was only used as a "necessary evil" during the pandemic. In her view, the essence of the club lies in face-to-face camaraderie, which she fears will be diluted by virtual attendance. She argues that meeting in person fosters a sense of tradition, accountability, and genuine connection that Dartmouth alumni pride themselves on. Meanwhile, you and other younger members struggle to balance demanding jobs, long commutes, and personal responsibilities, making regular in-person attendance challenging. Adding to the tension, the president resists stepping down despite growing interest in modernizing the club's approach. She does, however, want to see more new members recruited but clashes with others over pricing for events, as younger members often balk at the higher costs that older alumni deem reasonable. The generational divide extends further as the college president is planning a visit to the area in three months. Disagreements have arisen over how best to host her—whether to prioritize a formal, exclusive dinner or a broader, inclusive event that attracts newer members. This ongoing conflict highlights contrasting values around tradition, accessibility, and what "showing up" truly means, creating a stalemate between preserving the club's legacy and adapting to modern realities.

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Breakout Room exercise

- Please discuss the following:
  - ▸ What **question** might the Club President be hearing (remember, this isn't likely what we're asking – it is through a negative lens)?
  - ▸ What might the Club President perceive to be the **negative consequences** for them if they were to say **"Yes?"** (try to come up with 5)
  - ▸ What might the Club President perceive to be the **positive consequences** for them if they were to say **"No"** (try to come up with 5)

- Take notes and be prepared to report back to the large group

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18

WHO am I trying to influence? *Club President*

WHAT do they likely hear me asking or proposing? ***Shall I today give into a new grad who is threatening the way we've always done this, and suggesting I'm no longer capable?***

Perceived Consequences	
What they expect if they agree?	*What they expect if they disagree?*
− Give up power and status	+ Maintains respect from my tribe
− Someone less experienced is running things	+ I don't get the blame; continue to be praised
− They will throw out things that won't work	+ Close friends remain supportive and feel supported
− We won't get the staff/volunteer support	+ I'm strong! I held my ground.
− Good work of these years is lost	+
− Lose sense of tradition and connection	+
−	
+	−

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WHO am I trying to influence? *Club President*

WHAT do they likely hear me asking or proposing? ***Shall I today undo over a decade of work and personal investment by giving in to the demands of younger members who don't understand the way we operate?***

Perceived Consequences	
What they expect if they agree?	*What they expect if they disagree?*
− Embarrassment at having to change a process that has worked	+ Continue to run the club as I please
− Loss of tradition and personal connections	+ Force younger members to adopt how we do things
− People will more easily and frequently cancel attendance	+ Build upon the great work of the last 10 years (refining and polishing)
− Special events will lose their prestige	+ If new membership becomes a real problem, I can always change my mind
− We won't look organized when the college president visits	+ I don't have to change anything, which would come at a huge cost of my time
− I risk my legacy by making too many changes	+ I can tell them I'll consider their ideas and then do nothing
+ Keeps younger members happy	− Risk damage to my reputation as not being open to new ideas

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Let's imagine how we'd rework our proposal

1. Substance: Find cost-effective ways to *increase benefits* and *decrease costs* to the decision-maker of agreeing.
   ▸ Increase benefits to them.
   ▸ Accelerate realization of benefits to them.
   ▸ Increase (their perception of) the likelihood of benefits.
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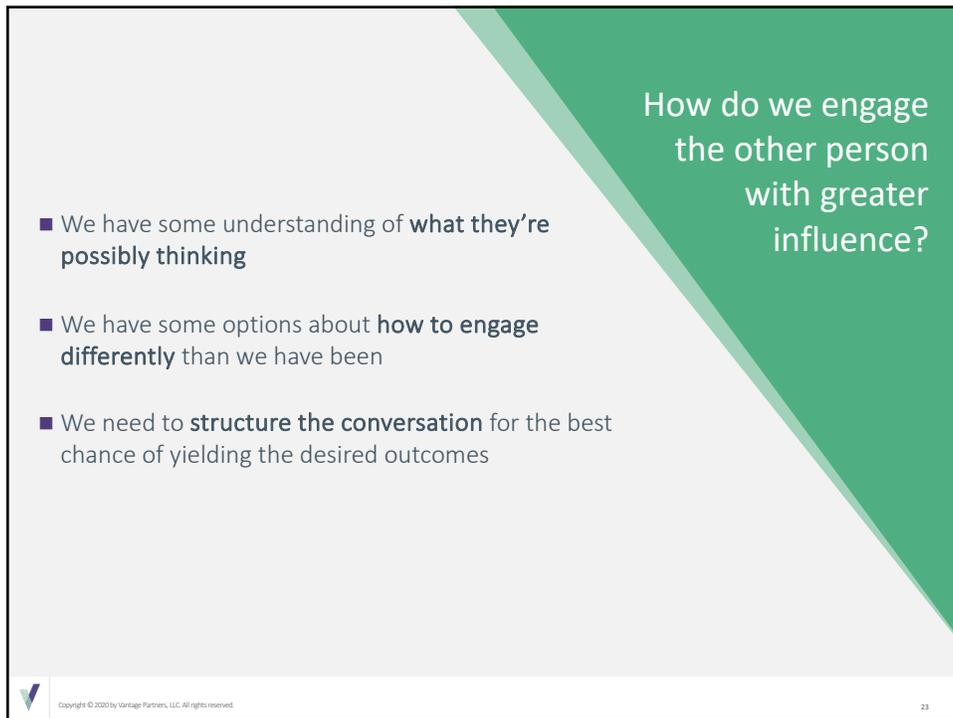   ▸ Create a fading opportunity.

3. Process: Change the way you are approaching your target decision-maker.
   ▸ Spend less time advocating for your point of view and more time exploring their concerns.
   ▸ Enlist them as a partner in problem-solving; ask for, and be open to, their advice.
   ▸ Explain your proposal/request in terms that make sense to them, and align with their interests.
   ▸ Avoid threats; leverage warnings instead. That is, educate your target decision-maker on the consequences of different choices. Avoid actions that will feel coercive and are likely to trigger resistance.

4. Person: Approach different stakeholders.
   ▸ Target individuals who are more influenceable — by you.
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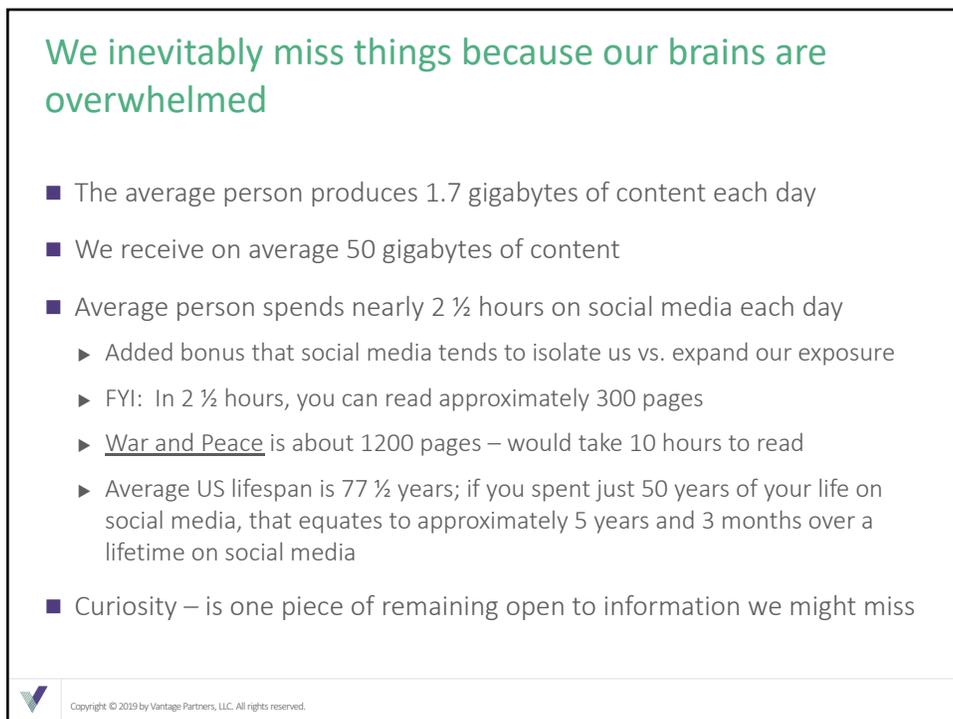
How do we engage the other person with greater influence?

- We have some understanding of **what they're possibly thinking**

- We have some options about **how to engage differently** than we have been

- We need to **structure the conversation** for the best chance of yielding the desired outcomes

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We inevitably miss things because our brains are overwhelmed

- The average person produces 1.7 gigabytes of content each day

- We receive on average 50 gigabytes of content

- Average person spends nearly 2 ½ hours on social media each day
  - ▸ Added bonus that social media tends to isolate us vs. expand our exposure
  - ▸ FYI: In 2 ½ hours, you can read approximately 300 pages
  - ▸ <u>War and Peace</u> is about 1200 pages – would take 10 hours to read
  - ▸ Average US lifespan is 77 ½ years; if you spent just 50 years of your life on social media, that equates to approximately 5 years and 3 months over a lifetime on social media

- Curiosity – is one piece of remaining open to information we might miss

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3 communication skills for more effective negotiations

INQUIRY
Being curious about how they understand things

ACKNOWLEDGMENT
Demonstrating understanding of their story and empathy with their feelings

ADVOCACY
Explaining how you understand it

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Genuine Inquiry seeks to understand their perspective

False Inquiry	Real Inquiry
■ "Don't you think that…?"	■ "How do you see this differently?"
■ "Isn't it true that…?"	■ "What is it that leads you to that story?"
■ "You don't really think that…?"	■ "Can you give me an example?"
■ "What are you thinking? Are you crazy?"	■ "Can you say a little more about that?"
	■ "What concerns you the most about this?"
	■ "What would be helpful for you to know as you make this decision?"
	■ "If we decided to move forward, what do you imagine that looking like?"

Effective Inquiry both digs <u>deeper</u> into the issue(s) and <u>broadens</u> the discussion to fully understand the entirety of the situation

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Keys to Influential Advocacy

- Create space to be heard: be inclusive of their concerns and thinking (*within clear boundaries*)

- **Be present** – fully engaged with the moment
  - ▶ Use clear and concise thinking to structure and share your message (*"pyramid principle"*)
  - ▶ Use direct language (*"straight, no chaser"*), and at the same time don't lecture, intimidate, insult, or be rude
  - ▶ **Be relational –** *trust in you increases trust in your story*
  - ▶ Be credible and competent – leverage examples, illustrations, and appropriate data
  - ▶ Pay attention to your tone and body language; what unintentional messages may you be sending?
  - ▶ Pay attention to the impact your message is having on them
  - ▶ Accept moments of silence and use pauses

- *"What I'm observing is …"*

- *"How I make sense of that is …"*

- *"My perspective is …"*

- **Consider reframing statements to questions**

- Be prepared to be challenged, and even invite criticism of what is missing or unclear in your reasoning/thinking

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Acknowledgment bridges Inquiry and Advocacy

False Acknowledgment	Real Acknowledgment
■ "I hear you <u>but</u>…"	■ "I hear your concern about XYZ, <u>and</u> I have a concern about ABC"
■ "I understand what you're saying, <u>however</u>,…"	■ "It seems like you're saying that…"
■ "So, what you're saying is [inaccurate summary]…"	■ "So, you feel [name emotion] about …"
	■ "I can imagine that …" "What am I missing?"
	■ Summarize (paraphrase) their perspective and ask check to see if you got it correct
	■ Empathy for their feelings (*a <u>doing</u> activity*)
	■ Validated: Safe, Seen, Heard, Understood

Remember "Understanding ≠ Agreement"

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Managing different perspectives is difficult

- Each of us tells a story about what happened
  - ▸ Different information
  - ▸ Different interpretations of ambiguous information
  - ▸ Different assumptions about missing information

- *Different conclusions are inevitable and aren't necessarily crazy*

- Most disagreements aren't about facts, but about what the facts mean; and no one has sole possession of the truth

- Debating conclusions is unpersuasive, escalates conflict, and hurts the relationship

- Understanding different stories generates new insight, resolves conflict, and strengthens the relationship

- **"And"** accurately captures this complexity; **"but"** denies it

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The Ladder of Inference – useful for managing different perceptions

YOUR STORY

Based on that conclusion, we screen out disconfirming information

We reinforce our existing beliefs, and our conclusions harden into untested "facts"
(confirmation bias)

We Draw Conclusions

We Interpret That Information

We Focus on Certain Information
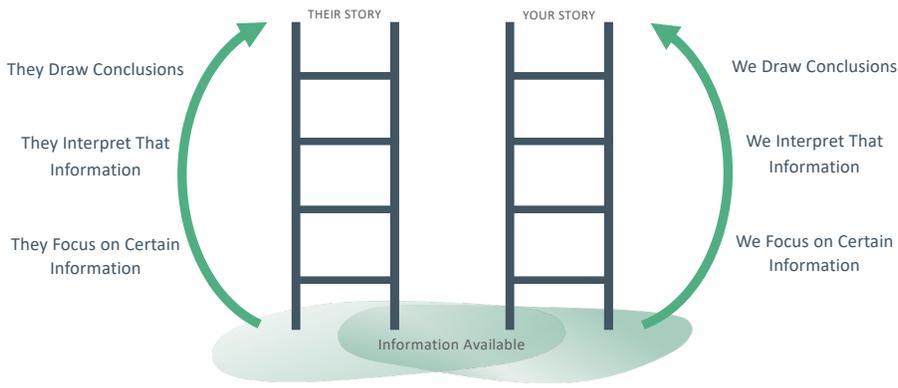
Information Available

The Ladder of Inference is based on the work of Argyris and Schön. See C. Argyris, R. Putnam, and D. Smith. *Action Science: Concepts, Methods, and Skills for Research and Intervention.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985.

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But hold on, they have a ladder, too!

They Draw Conclusions

They Interpret That Information

They Focus on Certain Information

THEIR STORY

YOUR STORY

We Draw Conclusions

We Interpret That Information

We Focus on Certain Information
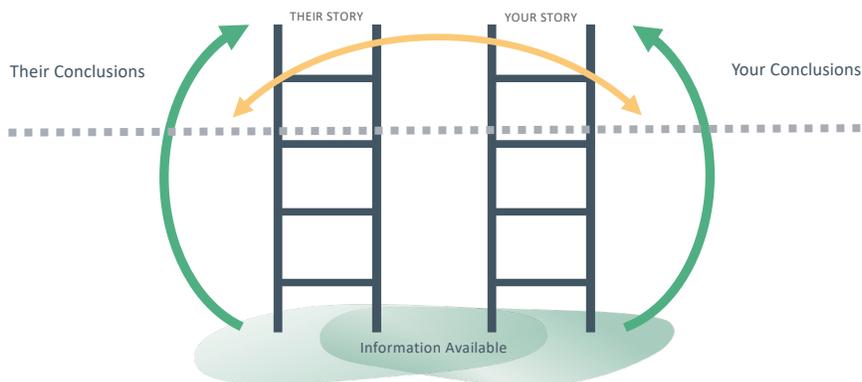
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Where most difficult conversations occur

Their Conclusions

THEIR STORY

YOUR STORY

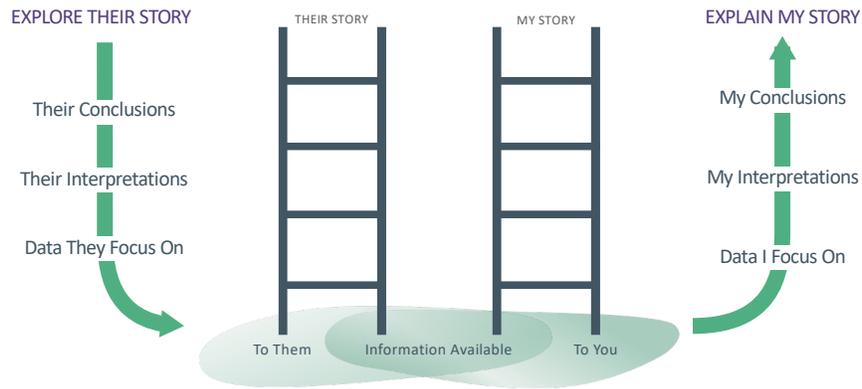Your Conclusions

Information Available

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A better way to structure difficult conversations

EXPLORE THEIR STORY

THEIR STORY

MY STORY

EXPLAIN MY STORY

Their Conclusions

My Conclusions

Their Interpretations

My Interpretations

Data They Focus On

Data I Focus On

To Them | Information Available | To You

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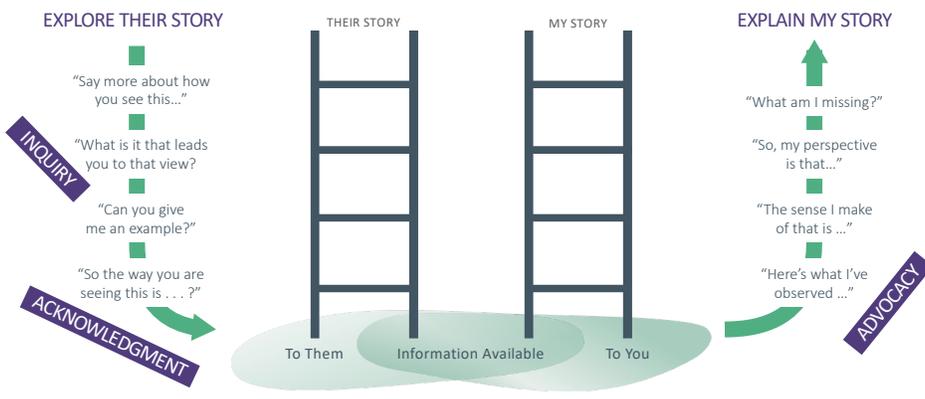
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No "magical" script – practice the 3 Skills of Communication

EXPLORE THEIR STORY

THEIR STORY

MY STORY

EXPLAIN MY STORY

"Say more about how you see this…"

"What am I missing?"

INQUIRY

"What is it that leads you to that view?"

"So, my perspective is that…"

"Can you give me an example?"

"The sense I make of that is …"

"So the way you are seeing this is . . . ?"

"Here's what I've observed …"

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ADVOCACY

To Them | Information Available | To You

The Ladder of Inference is based on the work of Argyris and Schön. See C. Argyris, R. Putnam, and D. Smith. *Action Science: Concepts, Methods, and Skills for Research and Intervention.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985.

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And managing emotions *(ours & theirs)* is still tricky

- Feelings and identity conversations often trigger an Amygdala hijack
- Strong emotions compromise our/their ability to think critically/creatively
- Recognizing and responding appropriately is essential to moving forward
- Empathy is typically a good first move

Emotions

Effective management
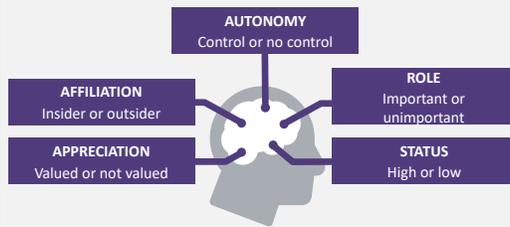
Problem-Solving

Simply acknowledging emotions defuses the impact

- Participants answered a phone survey about general happiness, desire for a life change, and life satisfaction
  - ½ on a sunny day and ½ on a rainy day
  - "Rainy day" participants reported
    - Lower general happiness
    - Greater desire for change
    - Significantly less life satisfaction

- <u>But</u> when researchers began the call by asking, *"By the way, how is the weather there?"* participants in the rainy condition responded as just as positively as participants in the sunny conditions

Source: "Mood, Misattribution, and Judgments of Well-Being" by Norbert Schwarz and Gerald Clore

Recognize and address emotional concerns

AUTONOMY
Control or no control

AFFILIATION
Insider or outsider

ROLE
Important or unimportant

APPRECIATION
Valued or not valued

STATUS
High or low

Based on Fisher and Shapiro, *Beyond Reason: Emotions in Negotiation.*

Express Appreciation: Express gratitude — privately or publicly. Celebrate successes!

Build Affiliation: Create and cultivate connection to the team or project (two-way).

Foster Autonomy: Enable personal ownership, voice, and agency.

Create Fulfilling Roles: Explain and expand their role, empowering them to make even greater contributions.

Build Status: Acknowledge their capabilities and expertise.

NOTE: Brené Brown, _Atlas of the Heart_, identifies 87 emotions!

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Breakout Room exercise

- Please discuss the following:

  ▶ Using what we've discussed about the three communication skills, Ladder of Inference, and emotional core concerns . . . How might we plan to structure the conversation for the best chance of yielding the desired outcomes?

- Take notes and be prepared to report back to the large group

45

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Caution for having these conversations via email

- Email negotiations are **2.5x more likely** to end in impasse than in-person

- Uncooperative behaviors are **more than 3x likely** in email versus face to face

  - ▸ _BUT_ the language used is likely to be more cordial

- Only **22% accurate in identifying emotions** (vs. 58% when in-person)

- Negotiators who use shorter, more numerous emails create more value

- Language barriers can be less of an issue in emails

- Email can help reduce perceived power differences between parties

- Easy to transmit more information and attachments (which has both benefits and challenges)

- Emails are permanent records and can be considered legal documents (_as well as easily shared – be careful!_)
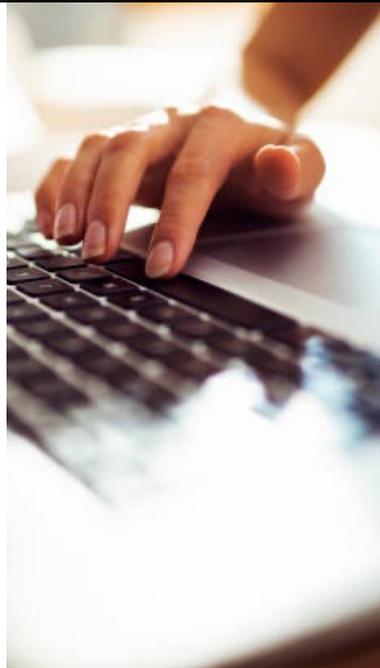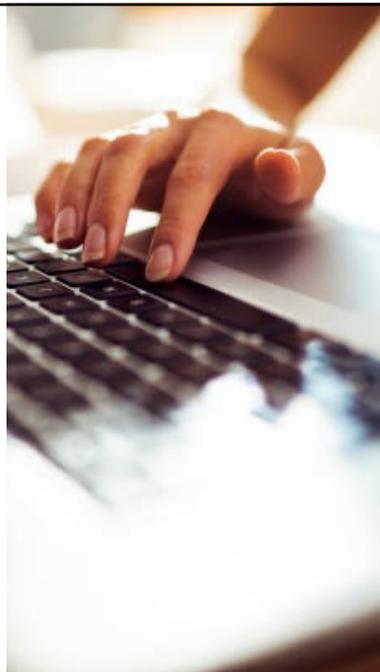
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Email negotiations – what to do

- Choose modality based on issue complexity and strength of relationship

- Use shorter, more numerous emails

- Craft emails to be understood – use **callouts**, bullets, colors, embedding, etc.

- Frame a productive process through clear intentions and good questions

- Be thorough and reread your own emails before sending

- Weigh how much information to share – don't overwhelm them

- Be patient and don't react immediately to challenging statements

- Recognize that many "cues" are lacking, so don't jump to conclusions

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