

NCJW[®]

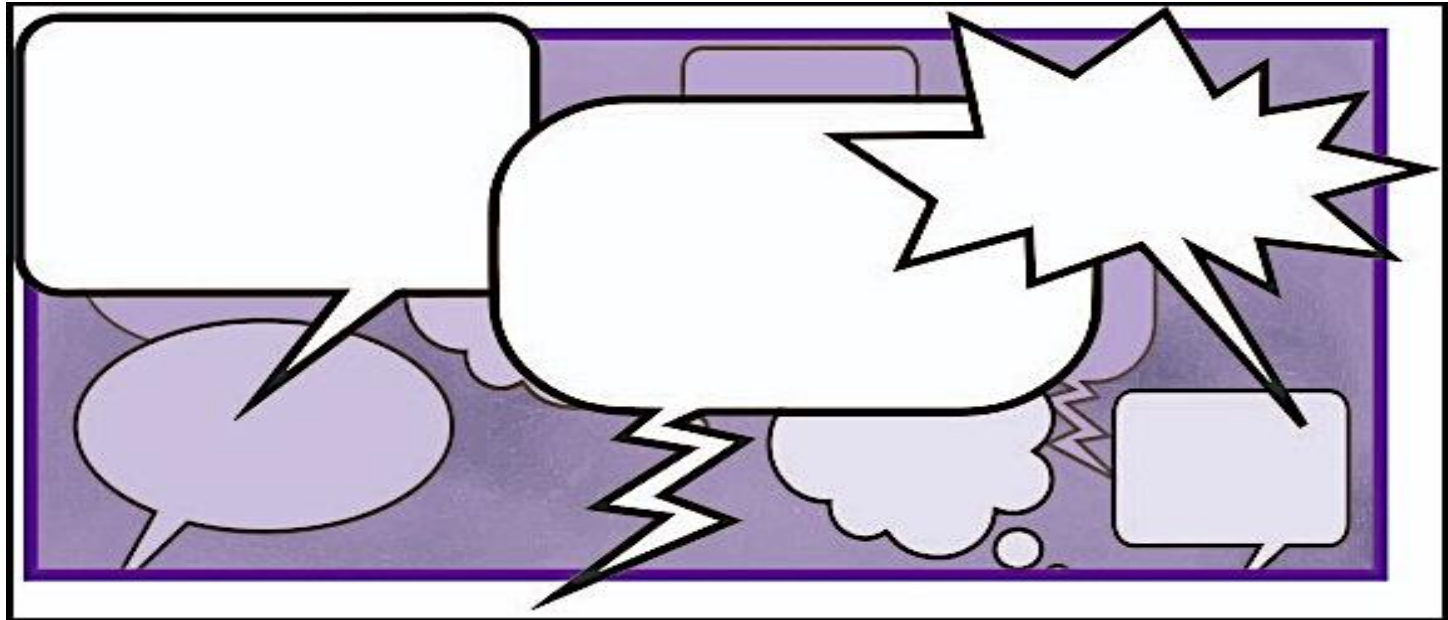
National Council of Jewish Women

NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

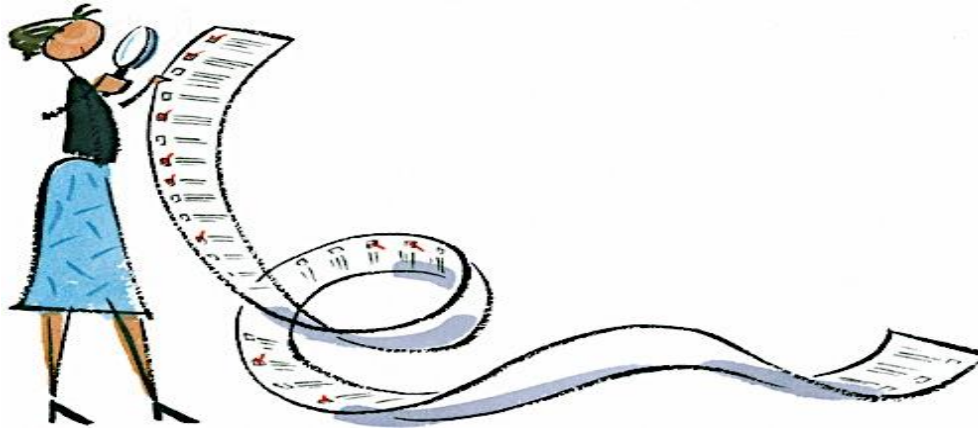
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Presented by Julie Matlof Kennedy

What Is A Difficult Conversation?



Why Do We Avoid Difficult Conversations?



How Can We Make Difficult Conversations Productive?



Three Conversations

- **The “What Happened?” Conversation**
- **The Feelings Conversation**
- **The Identity Conversation**

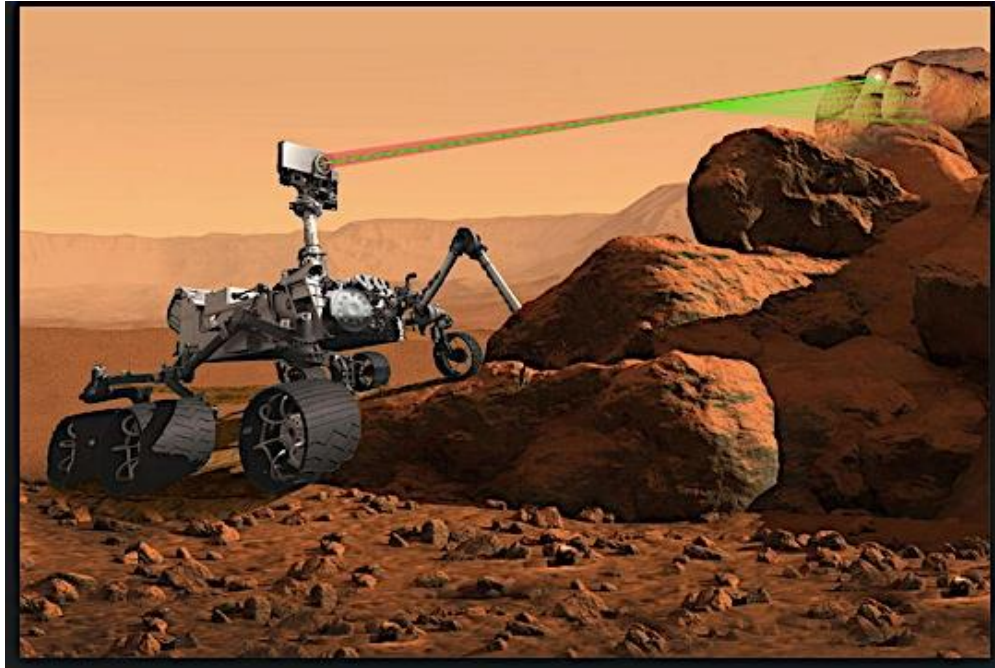
The “What Happened?” Conversation

- **Who’s right, who’s wrong, who’s to blame, who’s liable**
 - **Almost every Difficult Conversation occurs as a result of what at least TWO people choose to do**
- **Different stories about what happened**
 - **Naïve Realism**

Being Right Is Rarely Enough



Moving to Learning in the “What Happened?” Conversation



Disentangling Intent and Impact

- **We're often wrong about another person's intentions**
- **Ask:**
 - **What did the person actually do?**
 - **How did that affect me?**
 - **What intention am I assuming?**
 - **Know that your answer is only a hypothesis!**

Abandoning Blame

- **Distinguish between blame (judging) and contribution (understanding)**
- **Role reversal: how would the other person describe my contribution?**
- **Sneaky contributions**
 - **Avoidance**
 - **Assumptions**

The Feelings Conversation

- **Difficult Conversations tend to be fraught with emotion**
- **Have your feelings or they will have you**
- **The urge to blame is often a red flag**
 - **MY feelings are YOUR fault**

The Emotional Storm



Moving to Learning in the Feelings Conversation

- **Acknowledge *judgment, attribution, and accusation* behind your own feelings**
- **Roz never thanked me for leading that project and I'm hurt**
 - **Judgment: A good friend would have thanked me**
 - **Attribution: She's trying to hurt my feelings**
 - **Accusation: She's inconsiderate**

Expressing and Acknowledging Feelings

- **Make room for feelings before problem-solving**
- **“I feel”**
- **Acknowledgment ≠ agreement**

The Identity Conversation

- **Internal (maybe subconscious) dialogue**
- **What Difficult Conversation means for the sense of self**
- **Am I competent?**
- **Am I a good person?**

Moving to Learning in the Identity Conversation

- **Accept these truths**
 - You and she may each have a lot at stake
 - Your intentions are complex; so are hers
 - You have both contributed in some way to the problem

Questions to Contemplate in the Identity Conversation

- **How do I react to negative feedback?**
 - **Defensive, angry, hurt, fearful, curious?**
 - **What identity issues might be activated for me?**

- **How do I feel about giving negative feedback?**
 - **Fearful, reluctant, uncertain, calm?**
 - **What identity issues might be activated for me?**

Preparing for a Difficult Conversation: Multiple Stories

- **What's my story?**
 - Remember, that's what it is
- **What might I be missing?**
 - What open-ended questions should I ask?
- **What might be her story?**

Preparing for a Difficult Conversation: Intent/Impact/Contribution

- **What was my intent?**
- **What impact might my action have had?**
- **What was the impact of her action on me?**
- **What am I assuming about her intent?**
- **What did we each contribute to the problem?**

Preparing for a Difficult Conversation: Feelings and Identity

- **What am I feeling about the conflict?**
- **What am I feeling about the conversation?**
- **How can I express the emotion without be emotional?**

- **How might she be feeling?**

- **What do these feelings mean for our self-images?**

Difficult Conversation Tactics: The Third Story

- **The Personal Story:** “I’m fed up with the way you’re strolling in late. You’re being totally inconsiderate of me and others in the office, ignoring the fact that we have to cover until you get in.”
- **The Third Story:** “I’d like to talk with you about our morning office routine and how it’s been going lately.”

Difficult Conversation Tactics: Open the Door



- **Create an opening for problem solving**
- **“I’d like to let you know how I see it. And I’d like to hear about your perspective on it as well. Then let’s see where we can go from there.”**

Difficult Conversation Tactics: Observation



- **Concrete, specific statement of your perception**
- **“I’ve noticed that you’ve been arriving at the office between 9:30 and 10:00 several times a week. It’s not every day, but it was three days last week.”**

Difficult Conversation Tactics: Description of Impact



- **Factual statement of impact**
- **“When that happens, Sue and I have to cover for you, including your responsibilities for answering phones, responding to urgent emails, and setting up the conference rooms.”**

Difficult Conversation Tactics: Open Questions



- Frame questions to elicit a narrative (not yes/no)
- “What’s your perspective on this?”
- “How do you see it?”
- “What else would you like me to know?”
- Who, what, why, how, when

Difficult Conversation Tactics: Active Listening



- **Focus on understanding**
- **Content: “I want to be sure I get your view”**
- **Feelings: “I can see this is frustrating”**
- **Reflection: “I think you’re saying...”**

Difficult Conversation Tactics: Reframing (Interests Behind Positions)



- **Complaint:** “I’m fed up with all the noise in the office”
- **Confrontational response:** “An open floor plan is no excuse for not getting work done”
- **Reframed response:** “It sounds like you’d like to work in more peace and quiet”