

How to Have Difficult Conversations About Race

Negotiation Guide

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ANALYZE THE SITUATION

Before engaging in the conversation, it's important to conduct a thorough assessment of the situation and identify the goals (from your perspective and your counterpart's). Begin by asking the following questions:

1. What is your goal?

2. What outcomes do you hope to achieve? What problems are you trying to solve?

3. Who is your audience? What do they think about the situation? What do they feel about the situation? What evidence do you have to support this?

4. What do you want from them? Behavior change? Perspective change? Commitment to taking a particular action?

4. What are some potential barriers to success?

PREPARE A STRATEGY

Due to the sensitive nature of these discussions, it will be important to prepare a strategy for your conversation. While we always hope for the best, it's critical to prepare for how you will respond if the conversation does not go according to plan.

1. Take some time to list out some of the worst (or most triggering) comments your opponent could make.

2. How will you respond if offended? What will you do? What will you say?

3. How will you know it's time to pause or end the conversation? How will you frame this to your counterpart?

Preparing for Plan B: Tips for Success

Remember: it's okay if the conversation does not go as expected. Here are some signs that it may be time to pause the conversation or schedule another time to talk.

- You are becoming increasingly emotionally triggered: your heart is racing, you are beginning to sweat, your thoughts are racing, you feel extreme emotions like anger, fear, or sadness.
- Your partner (ally) appears to be straying from the prepared strategy or talking points.
- Your counterpart is continuing to make triggering statements and/or their tone is increasing in volume and aggression.
- The conversation appears to have become unproductive.

If it appears that the conversation has moved in an unproductive direction, circle back to the original goals, which likely center on mutual respect and/or a positive relationship between you and your counterpart. Reiterate those positive goals and recommend picking up the conversation at a different time.

- "It seems like we have gotten off track. I want us to maintain a mutual respect for another, so let's table this conversation for another time."
- My goal with this conversation was to increase a mutual understanding. For the sake of our working relationship, what do you say we take a break and come back to this another time? Can we switch gears to discussing something else?"

INCORPORATING COMPASSIONATE CURIOSITY™

The Compassionate Curiosity Framework is designed to help you navigate the most difficult conversations in your life. Discussions about race, politics and other sensitive topics are a perfect opportunity to practice implementing the framework.

Acknowledge and Validate Emotions

Take notice of the emotions that arise during the conversation. To the best of your ability, try to imagine the emotions your counterpart is experiencing as well. Is there any part of you that can empathize with the emotions they are feeling? Practice showing empathy for yourself as well.

Get Curious with Compassion

List 5 open-ended questions that can increase your understanding of your counterpart's position and/or help lead them to see things from your perspective.

Examples:

- What impact do you think this policy has on people of color?
- How do you think it makes me (or others like me) feel when you say ___?
- What can we do as a company to achieve ___?
- What can we do to be more inclusive?
- What can you do to help make this office a safe space for all?
- Following this conversation, what do you think next steps should be?

Joint Problem-Solving

When it comes to next steps, it will be important for both parties to participate in identifying solutions. Remember: small progress is still progress. Focus on identifying reasonable, yet measurable, steps toward your mutual goal. Some questions to consider:

- What can actually be done?
- How will you commit them to continued progress?

At the American Negotiation Institute, we believe the best things are on the other side of difficult conversations. If your company is interested in corporate training or deal coaching, please visit www.americannegotiationinstitute.com.

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