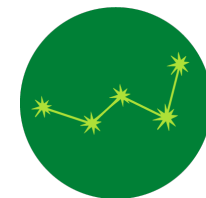**Illinois City/County Management Association**

Having Hard Conversations

8 February 2024

Anne Kritzmire
Coaching & Consulting

Connecting possibilities

Session Objectives

- Identify your patterns in managing difficult conversations

- Learn steps for preparing for a difficult conversation

- Learn tools and techniques for holding and participating in healthy dialogue

- Become familiar with tools and skills for keeping on track when emotions rise or the conversation goes negative

- Describe key behaviors leaders use to create a culture that supports having difficult conversations with greater ease

Difficult conversations

What are they for you?

- **Characterized by a struggle**

- **Active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles.**

- **Usually involve strong emotions**

"Difficult conversations" are rarely the problem...

it's how you think about them that matters.

What makes difficult conversations so challenging?

What are your top 2 least favorite hard conversations?

On the next page we will open a live poll for you to answer

A

Handling a legitimate complaint (from a resident or business)

B

Addressing negative performance on your team

C

Navigating a conversation w/ a stakeholder or senior leader you have no influence over

D

Handling an unfounded complaint

E

Uncovering and correcting different expectations

F

Handling differences in your and someone else's personality or approach to tasks

G

You are being overloaded with tasks and want to say STOP!

Join the Vevox session

Go to **vevox.app**

Enter the session ID: **171-976-252**

Or scan the QR code

What are your 2 least favorite hard conversations?

A. Handling a legitimate complaint (from a resident or business)

##.##%

B. Addressing negative performance on your team

##.##%

C. Navigating a conversation w/ a stakeholder or senior leader you have no influence over
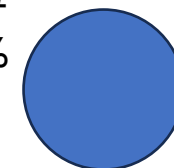
##.##%

D. Handling an unfounded complaint

##.##%

E. Uncovering and correcting different expectations

##.##%

F. Handling differences in your and someone else's personality or approach to tasks

##.##%

G. You are being overloaded with tasks and want to say STOP!

##.##%

What are your 2 least favorite hard conversations?

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B. Addressing negative performance on your team

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C. Navigating a conversation w/ a stakeholder or senior leader you have no influence over

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D. Handling an unfounded complaint

##.##%

E. Uncovering and correcting different expectations

##.##%

F. Handling differences in your and someone else's personality or approach to tasks

##.##%

G. You are being overloaded with tasks and want to say STOP!

##.##%

RESULTS SLIDE

What are the possible risks if you don't have the conversation?

- Lost opportunities

What are the possible benefits if you do have the conversation?

- Peace of mind

Your last hard conversation at work...

Think about the last (potential) difficult conversation you had, or were supposed to have

Consider what were:
- **Reason** for conversation
- **Person** involved and your **relationship**
- **Your intention** and **mindset**
- **Emotions**
- **Environment** (e.g., in person, virtual, phone, distractions)
- **Result** of conversation (productive | wanted a "do-over")

How do you manage conflict?

- Which method did you use?

- Is this your usual method? If so, why do you usually use this method?

- If not, what made this situation unique?

- What are the pros and cons of this method?

- What other method could you have used?

Assertive

Competing
The goal is to win

Collaborating
The goal is to find win/win

Compromising
The goal is to find a middle ground

Unassertive

Avoiding
The goal is to delay

Accommodating
The goal is to yield

Uncooperative

Cooperative

Source: The Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

Unproductive conflict: A struggle or an opposition; an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles.

Productive conflict: Open exchange of conflicting or differing ideas in which parties feel equally heard, respected, and unafraid to voice dissenting opinions.

Conflict Modes from TFI

Assertive

Competing

The goal is to win

Collaborating

The goal is to find win/win

Compromising

The goal is to find a middle ground
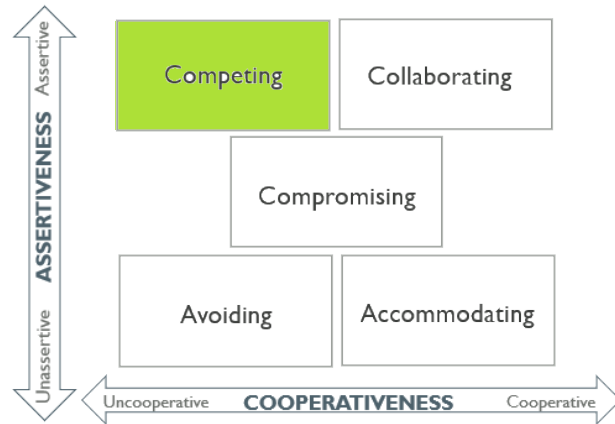
Unassertive

Avoiding

The goal is to delay

Accommodating

The goal is to yield

Uncooperative

Cooperative

Source: *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument*

Competing

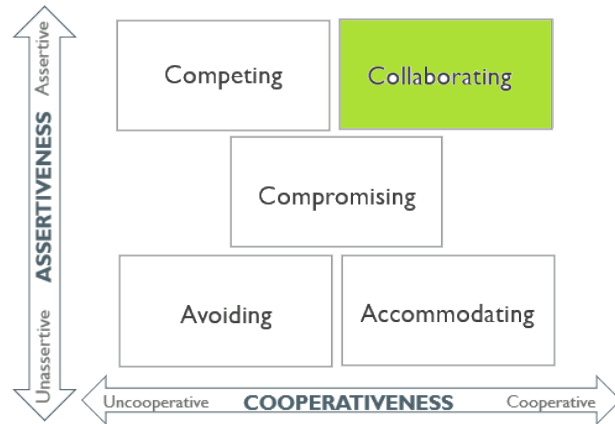**Looks like:**

- Power
- Defending
- Trying to win

Pros & Cons

- Saves effort
- Sets direction
- Requires strength

Useful for:

- Quick decisions
- Things that are vital to the organization
- Unpopular decisions

Collaborating

Looks like:

- Win/Win
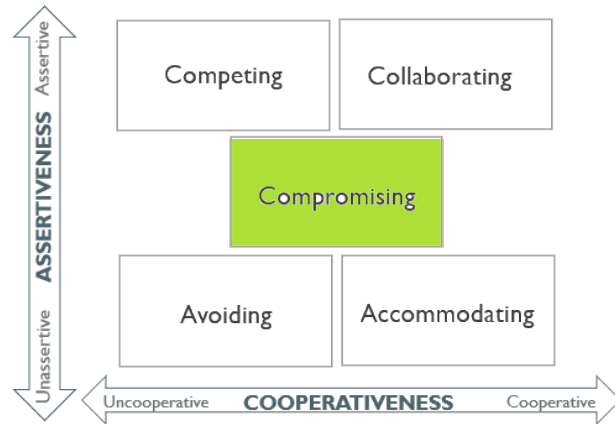- Creative solutions
- Exploring concerns

Pros & Cons

- Ownership mindset
- Takes time and effort
- Involvement of others

Useful for:

- Perspectives
- Learning & growing
- Gaining commitment

Compromising

Looks like:

- Give and take
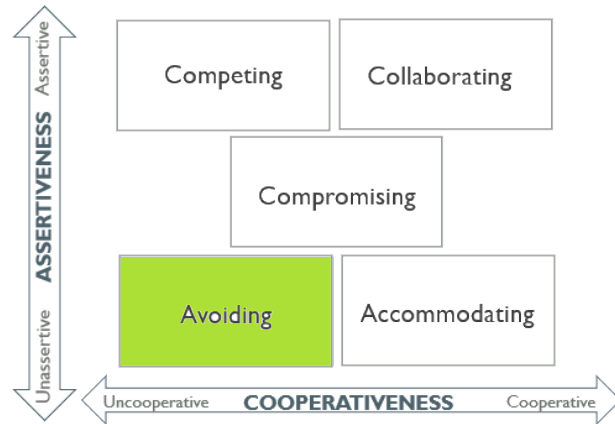- High level inquiry
- Mutually acceptable

Pros & Cons

- Limited discussion or ideation
- Saves time and effort
- Maintains relationship

Useful for:

- Backup mode
- Expedient solution
- Minimizing disruption

Avoiding

Looks like:

- No gains
- Ignores concerns
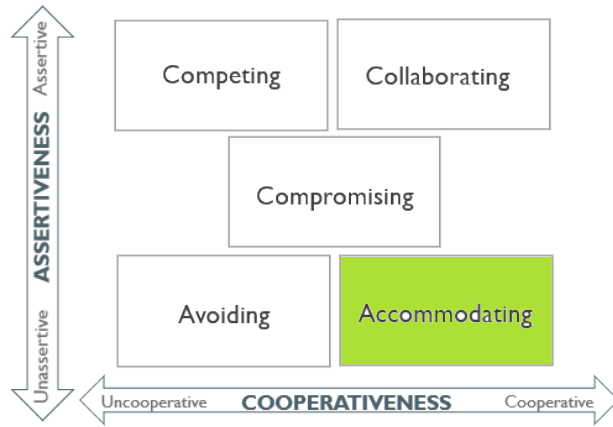- Side-steps issues

Pros & Cons

- Allows others to step in / get involved
- No discussion or accountability

Useful for:

- Reducing tension
- Allowing others to resolve
- When avoidance outweighs benefits of conflict

Accommodating

Looks like:

- Loss / Win
- Giving in to others
- Neglects concerns

Pros & Cons

- Creates engagement
- Your needs are not addressed

Useful for:

- Developing others
- Allowing a better solution
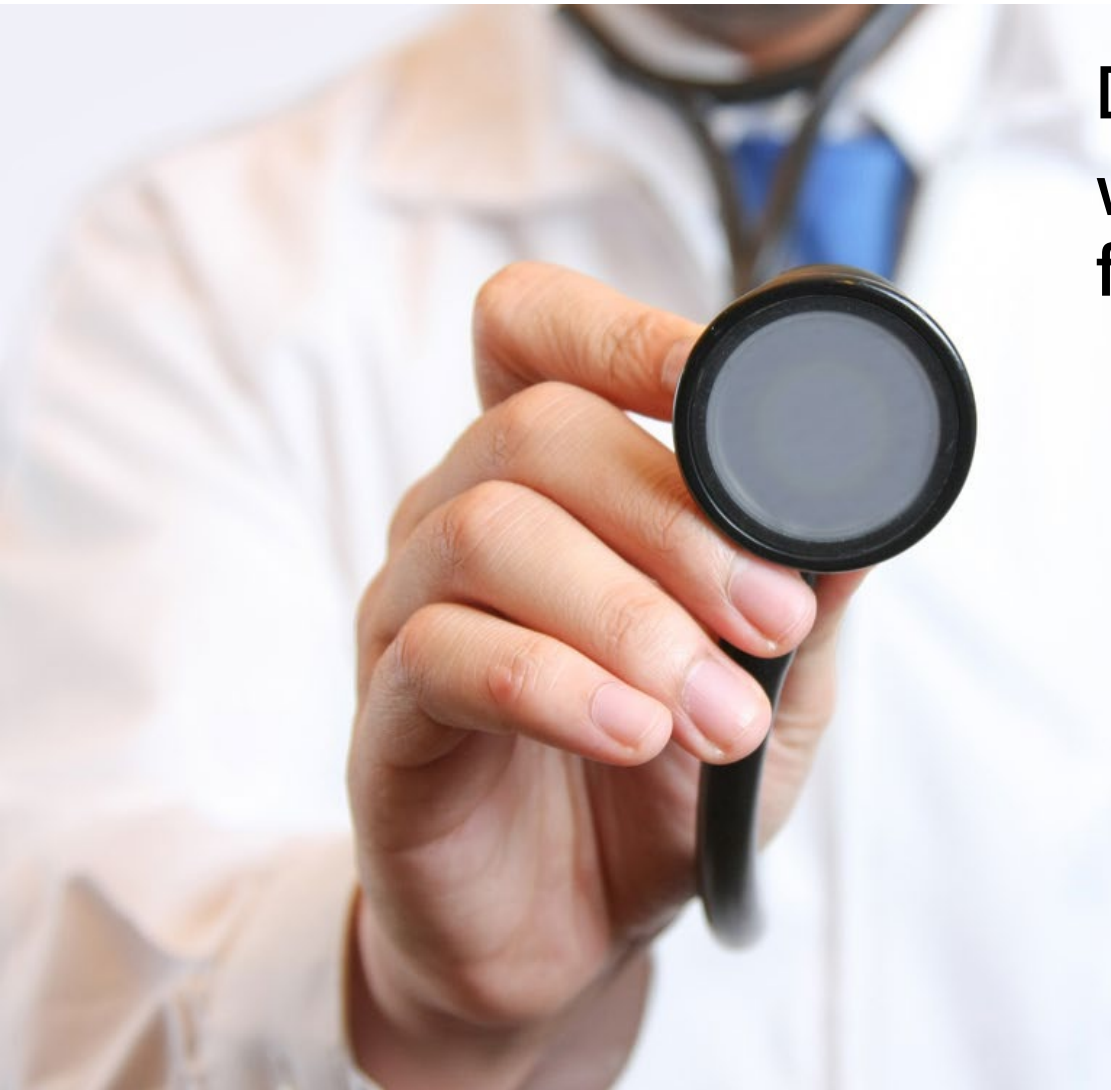- Maintaining relationship

Preparing for a hard conversation

1. LEADERSHIP MINDSET

2. FEELINGS & INTENTIONS

3. GATHER FACTS

4. IDENTIFY DESIRED OUTCOME

Check your biases

Gather facts and Diagnose issues: Performance | Behavior

Diagnosing the correct factor(s) will help you determine the best feedback approach.

SKILL – the "I can" or "I can't"

❑ Knowledge, training and skills

WILL – the "I will or "I won't"

❑ Motivation and confidence

UNDERSTANDING – expectations

❑ Communications and accountability

Identify your desired outcome:

KNOW: Summarize what you want them to know in 1–2 sentences.

DO: What should we start, stop, or continue to DO?

FEEL: How do you want them to feel? (respected, supported, responsible, empowered, encouraged, motivated, valued, aware)

Creating a ~~safe~~ brave environment

Mel Robbins steps

Your goal:

Untangling your emotions from the subject matter

1. Acknowledge your responsibility
2. Have a goal.
3. Listen and validate.
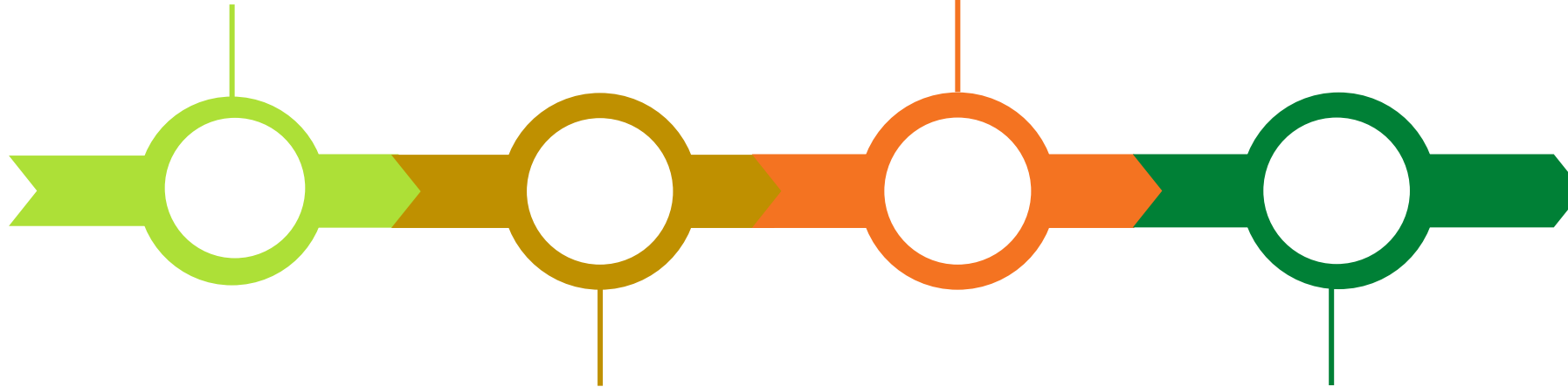4. Keep coming back to the outcome.

Giving feedback: SBI Model

SITUATION

Provide brief context of the situation you're about to discuss.

IMPACT

Express the impact this behavior had. How does it affect you, the team, and the business?

BEHAVIOR

Describe what you actually observed. As if there were a video camera.

PAUSE! Then get to outcome

Pause. LISTEN. Allow the other person to own this and respond.

Recognize signs of feeling "unsafe"

When people feel unsafe, they usually reveal their discomfort in their body language or voice tone

You may see one of 3 reactions
- **Fight** (aggressive)
- **Flight** (passive / aggressive)
- **Freeze** (passive / aggressive)

If the conversation gets emotional, use PURR

PAUSE: Check your feelings, self-talk, & conflict patterns. Remember intentions.

UNDERSTAND: Actively listen for what's important to them & the underlying issue.

RESPOND: Re-establish common ground with appropriate communication.

**R**EFLECT: Review, follow-up, and look forward.

What if the conversation gets negative? Rrrrrrr

- **Reframe:** Re-verbalize your intention for a win/win.
- **Rephrase:** Say words in a less negative way, i.e., "What I meant to say is…"
- **Revisit:** Use an earlier success to say, "We have a good track record working…"
- **Request:** Ask questions.
- **Restate:** Validate and invite them to clarify and restate what they mean (in a softer way).
- **Reorganize:** Change the priorities to process versus personalities.
- **Reposition:** Move to the same side of the table if possible.

Creating a culture

- Besides learning and practicing, leaders can set examples and build a culture where difficult conversations aren't so hard.

- And where conflict is against the village or county issues, not between staff.
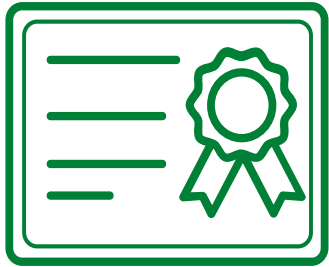
Show appreciation	Open up	Be prompt	Be inclusive – early & often
Recognize good work even more often than performance issues.	Get curious. Listen. Ask questions. Acknowledge your part. Validate.	For both good and not-so-good work, address quickly, and communicate that expectation.	Build trust by involving people all over the organization. Eliminate "us vs. them".

Your action plan

What is one thing you plan to change?

By when?

How will you and others be able to tell?

Questions, tools, and thanks

"Difficult conversations, *well held*, **accelerate the building of trust** between individuals.

They create a sense of connection for people."

-- Joseph Grenny, Vital Smarts

Anne@AWKritzmireConsulting.com

Planning worksheet

For your next "hard" conversation

What is the reason for the conversation? How does it align with your leadership mindset?	
Who is the conversation with? Relationship to you, their styles, values, potential fears? What are your intentions?	
Diagnose. What are the specifics of the situation / behavior? SBI. How would a video camera record this?	
Outcome: What do you want them to Know – Do – Feel? How will you tell?	
Environment for the conversation	
Prep: Check biases. Conflict styles. PURR and other tools.	
My next step	

Probing questions to consider

- "Tell me more about..."
- "Say more about what you mean by..."
- "What did you do specifically?"
- "What's a recent example?"
- "What happened next?"
- "What would that look like?"
- "Why is this important?"

Additional resources

From this session

- Your action plan
- Participants in this session!
- ILCMA
- Anne@AWKritzmireConsulting.com

Books:

- Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High *by Kerry Patterson, et al (Vital Smarts)*
- The Credibility Code: How to Project Confidence and Competence When It Matters Most *by Cara Hale Alter*

Video:

- How to have difficult conversations: Mel Robbins (4 min)

Assessment:

- TKI Conflict Mode assessment

Articles:

- Does Your Team Have an Accountability Problem?
- Judy Ringer: Checklist and Openers for Difficult Conversations