

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS



Andrea Gintert, MPA, SPHR
Karen Kyle, MS



Session Agenda

- Introduction
- Relationship Grounding
- Six tools, one model
- Using the model and tools
- Practice
- Wrap-up



Introduction



**What makes some
conversations
“difficult”?**

Minding Relationships

The reciprocal knowing process involving the nonstop, interrelated thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of persons in a relationship

- Knowing and being known
- Giving the benefit of the doubt
- Accepting & Respecting
- Maintaining Reciprocity
- Persisting in mindfulness





A Walk in Their Shoes...

**What's
Important to
Me?**

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Grounding

The first conversation to have is with **yourself**.

- What is the issue?
- Why is it bothering you? What gets you “hooked”?
- What are your assumptions?
- What emotions are attached to the situation?
- What is your purpose in having the conversation?
How will you start it?
- What will happen if have this conversation? What will happen if you don't?

Tool #1: Make it Safe



CRIB:

- Commit to seek Mutual Purpose
- Recognize the purpose behind the strategy
- Invent a Mutual purpose
- Brainstorm new strategies

If you are misinterpreted, use a contrasting statement... state the message you're NOT trying to send and then state the message you ARE trying to send.

Tool #2: Listen

Listen

“Seek first to understand...”

- Ask open-ended questions
 - “Tell me more...”
 - “Help me understand...”
 - “What are your thoughts on...”
- Mirror to confirm feelings
- Paraphrase to acknowledge
- Prime
- Listen for what is NOT being said



Tool #3: “Yes, *AND*...”

Adopt the “Yes, *and*...” Stance

- We all see the world differently; all perceptions are valid
- This is about owning and stating your point of view, *AND* being open and willing to hear and accept another point of view



“Like parachutes, minds must be open to function properly.”

Tool #4: Recognize Your Stories



What are you telling yourself?

Why am I feeling this way?

What evidence do I have to support this story?

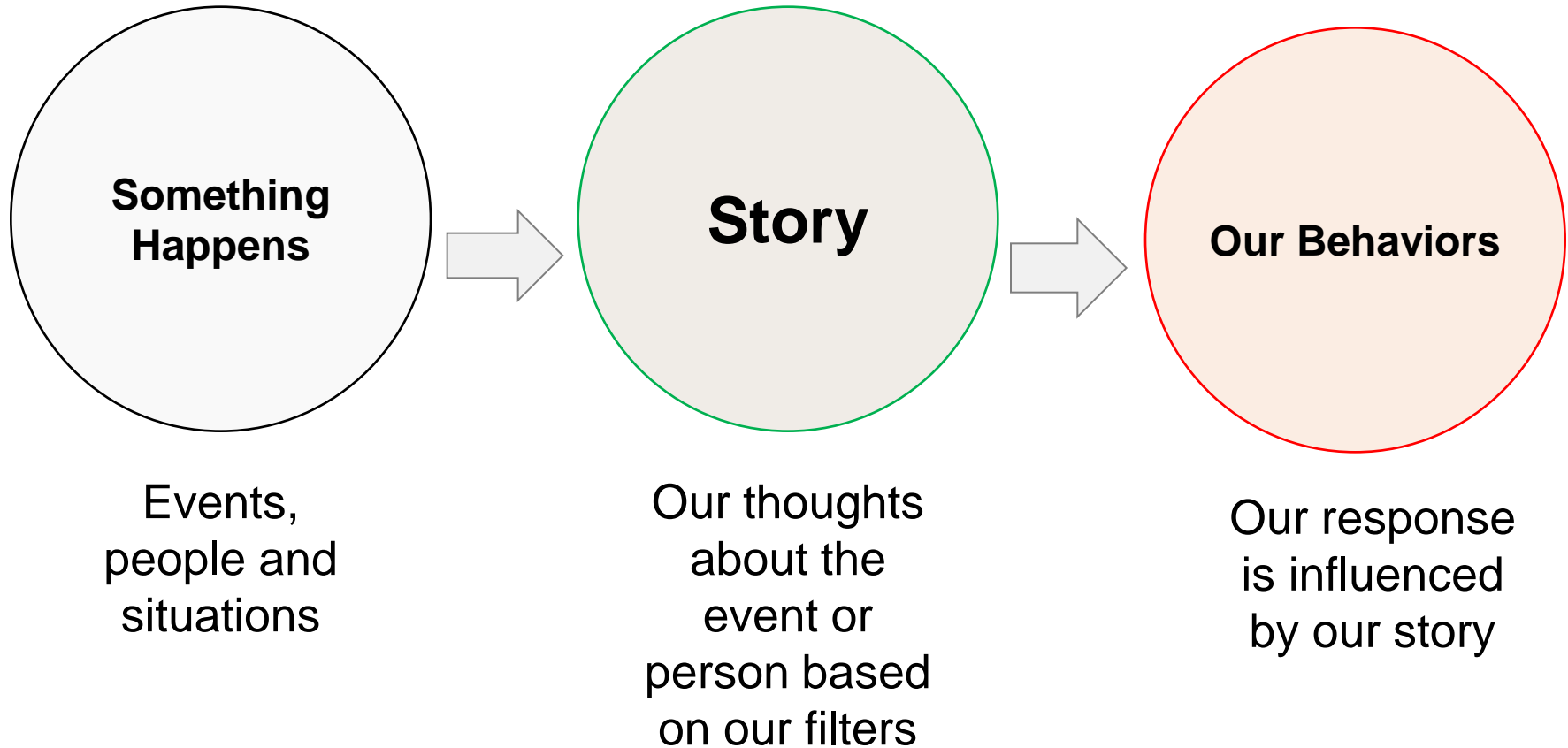
Victim *Am I ignoring the role I played in the problem?*

Villain *Am I automatically assuming the worst possible motives while ignoring any possible good or neutral intentions?*

Helpless *Am I really powerless to do nothing about this?*



Tool #4 Continued



Tool #5: Use “I” Messages

- Start your sentences with “I”
- Sentences that start with “you” sound accusatory and blaming and will likely result in defensiveness



Tool #6: Own Your Own Stuff

Focus on personal accountability, not blame

- Personal accountability = accepting responsibility for my own actions and non-actions





One Model

- State what you want to discuss. “I want to talk with you about...”
- Share a specific example. “I heard...”
- Explain what is bothering you. “I am concerned about..”
- Describe the importance. “From my perspective this is important because...”
- Own your own stuff. “I have some responsibility... For this, I am sorry.”

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One Model Continued

- Ask for the other perspective. “Help me understand your point of view.”
- Use the tools you have. Be quiet and curious. “Tell me more about that.”
- Summarize what was learned.
- Re-state the importance.
- Ask for what you want next. Make an agreement. Say, “Thank You.”
- Check back in two weeks.

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Scenario

As the admin manager for the department, you receive a complaint from a graduate student about another office staff member's behavior during a recent conversation. The student is attempting to schedule her candidacy exam, and her advisor has asked her to utilize the office staff for scheduling, but the co-worker refuses to schedule for that advisor. When pressed, she indicates it's not in her job description and to contact the advisor directly.

This coworker is not new to the department, and you knew that she had wanted the position you obtained when you began in the department. You could go to the department chair for assistance, but you decide you need to discuss this issue directly, and understand this person's overall commitment to the department and students.



Model using Scenario

1. State what you want to discuss.

“I want to talk with you about the effect you are having on our students.”

2. Share a specific example.

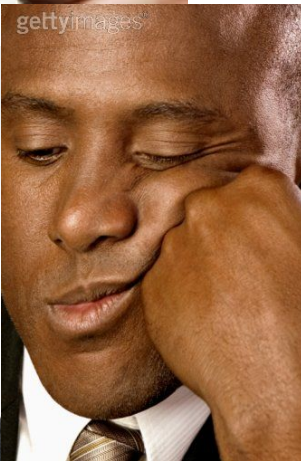
“Sue Student called me, complaining that you are not willing to schedule for Adam Advisor, and did not give her options for her candidacy exam. She claims you said it’s not in your job description.”

Continued



3. Explain what is bothering you.

“I am concerned that we meet the needs of our students and we assist them whenever possible. I’m afraid that this might be an indicator of a larger issue – your current feelings about this department, and our working relationship.”



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Continued

4. Describe the importance.

“This is important for two reasons. Of course Sue’s success is important, and how students perceive our department’s commitment to them is important. It’s your involvement in and contributions to this department that are my biggest concern.”



Continued

5. Own your own stuff.

“I should have approached you immediately after I learned you had vied for this position. I apologize for not doing this. It’s important to me that we work well together.”

Continued

6. **Ask for the other perspective.**

“Please tell me what *you’re* thinking.”

Use the tools you have. Be quiet and curious.

“Tell me more about that.”



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Continued

- 7. Summarize.** “You believe... and I should have...”
- 8. Re-state importance.** “If you... then...”
- 9. Ask for what you want to happen.** “Please...”
- 10. Explain what you will do.**
- 11. Say, “Thank You.”**



Practice

- **Select a real situation you face**
- **Find a partner**
- **Decide who will go first**
- **Let your partner know a small bit about the situation and person**
- **Practice your opening**
- **Partner: provide feedback after the opening**
- **Switch roles**



Readings + References

- Crucial Conversations (Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler)
- Difficult Conversations (Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, Sheila Heen, and Roger Fisher)
- Fierce Conversations (Susan Scott)
- Fierce Leadership (Susan Scott)
- John H. Harvey, J.H., & Pauwels, B.G. (2009). Relationship Connection: A Redux on the Role of Minding and the Quality of Feeling Special in the Enhancement of Closeness. [Eds.] Snyder, C.D., & Lopez, S.J. *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology: Second Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 385–392



Thank You!