

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Dreaded Conversations

Effectively Communicating in Difficult Conversations


Heather Burchell
Human Resource Services, WSU Pullman

Revised Sept. 2017

HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

What is a Dreaded Conversation?



HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Why are these conversations so difficult?

- We are often caught off guard
- Adrenaline kicks in
 - Fight or Flight response
 - Decreased blood flow to the brain
- We have no time to think of our best response
- We say something that is counter-productive

HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

**Part One:
Before the
Conversation**




It starts with you!

HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Prepare yourself:

- What do you want?
 - For the conversation?
 - For yourself?
 - For the other person?
- What preconceived notions do you have?
 - About the other person?
 - About their behavior and/or your concerns?



When the discussion gets heated:

- Dialogue shuts down and argument takes its place
 - Dialogue: an exchange of ideas and opinions
- Goals:
 - Establish common ground
 - Establish common goals

HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

- Remember the “what do I want”?
- Pay attention to both the content and how the participants are communicating and feeling.
- Take active steps to encourage and allow the other participant to engage in the conversation completely.

People are often upset not because of what we say but why they think we are saying it (our perceived motivation).

HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

ABRAHAM MASLOW

SELF-ACTUALIZATION
CREATIVITY, SPONTANEITY, PROBLEM SOLVING, LACK OF PREJUDICE, ACCEPTANCE OF FACTS

ESTEEM
SELF-ESTEEM, CONFIDENCE, ACHIEVEMENT, RESPECT OF OTHERS, RESPECT BY OTHERS

LOVE/BELONGING
FRIENDSHIP, FAMILY, SEXUAL INTIMACY

SAFETY
SECURITY OF BODY, OF EMPLOYMENT, OF RESOURCES, OF MORALITY, OF THE FAMILY, OF HEALTH, OF PROPERTY

PHYSIOLOGICAL
BREATHING, FOOD, WATER, SEX, SLEEP, HOMEOSTASIS, EXCRETION

Abraham Harold Maslow (April 1, 1908 – June 8, 1970) was a psychologist who studied positive human qualities and the lives of exemplary people. In 1954, Maslow created the Hierarchy of Human Needs and expressed his theories in his book, *Motivation and Personality*.

Self-Actualization - A person's motivation to reach his or her full potential. As shown in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a person's basic needs must be met before self-actualization can be achieved.

www.tmmartini.com (Copyright © 2013 Dutch Renaissance Press LLC)

When things start to go wrong:
If they're upset...
We sometimes try to soften the message.

Instead, don't sugar coat your message...
clarify your intentions.

Make sure you're considering lower-level needs such as respect (the "esteem" level on Maslow's Hierarchy).

HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY


When things start to go wrong:

If we are upset...

We commonly react in a defensive manner and blame others.

Again, we are often upset not because of what is said but why we think they are saying it.

“What is the worst and most hurtful way I can interpret this?”



“Why do you always get defensive whenever I attack you?”

Remember:

- What they say about assumptions... they're usually wrong.
- Be open minded and re-think your assumptions.
- You can only control your own behavior and try to improve your own communication.
- Try a curious approach, it is hard to be curious and defensive at the same time.

HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES

Things we tell ourselves...


Excuses for our own bad behavior:

- It's not my fault, I'm the victim here.
- It's all their fault; they're terrible, horrible, and no good!
- I had no other option. “The only way to get them to listen is to yell and scream”

HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES

"People were always talking about how mean this guy was who lived on our block. But I decided to go see for myself. I went to his door, but he said he wasn't the mean guy, the mean guy lived in that house over there. 'No, you stupid idiot,' I said, 'that's my house.'"

~ Jack Handey

 HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Communication's 2 to 1 Ratio

"We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak."

Epictetus
(Greek philosopher)


 HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

The Numbers of Meaning

In communication about feelings and attitudes, we receive our meaning:

- 55% based on what we see
- 38% based on how it sounds (tone, volume, and speed)
- 7% based on the actual words that are spoken

Albert Mehrabian, UCLA professor

 HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Be an Active Communicator.


- Hear the Words.
- Notice the Non-verbal Communication.
- Re-frame and Re-peat:
 - In your own words, make sure that the message you received is the message that the sender intended

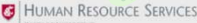
 HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Speak from the Heart

- Hear and understand me.
- Even if you disagree, don't make me wrong.
- Acknowledge the greatness within me.
- Remember to look for my loving *intention*.
- Tell me the truth with compassion.


Hyerl Bracey, *Managing from the Heart*



 HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Elements of a Difficult Conversation

- Content
- Relationship
- Process

 HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Content

What do you need to say?


Make a list.
 Less is more—as long as it’s enough.
 Keep asking yourself, “What’s most important?”

 HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Relationship

Who are you at work?

- You, the very fine person
- You, the job title


 HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Relationship

How do you balance YOU and YOU when they are in conflict?

- What message do you want to deliver?
- What message does the institution need to deliver, through you?
- Where do they overlap?

(C.K. Gunsalus, The College Administrator’s Survival Guide)

 HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Process

Focus on:

- the behavior, not the person
- a description, not an evaluation
- sharing information, not giving advice
- usefulness to the recipient, not satisfaction for you
- the most important information, not everything you'd like to share

HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

A structure for difficult conversations

- 1) Observe without evaluation.
- 2) State your feeling, being careful not to substitute thinking for feeling.
- 3) Express your need concretely.
- 4) Use clear, positive action language to make request.

“When your project report was late, I felt embarrassed and angry, because other people were waiting for that information. I need you to meet deadlines when I assign them—and tell me right away if there are problems.”

HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Practice a Difficult Conversation

Pick a partner and practice, using the examples we're handing out.

“I saw . . .”	(Observe without evaluation.)
“I feel . . .”	(State your feeling, being careful not to substitute thinking for feeling.)
“I need . . .”	(Express your need concretely.)
“I request . . .”	(Use clear, positive action language to make request.)

HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY


Dreaded Conversation Practice Scenarios

#1 At yesterday's staff meeting, an employee rolled his eyes at you when you announced a new office policy that employees had to notify supervisors when they were making use of sick leave.

#2 Earlier today, an employee slammed her office door and could be overheard using profane language while talking loudly on her phone.


#3 An employee was late to work today. This employee has been late two or three times a week for the past month. Each week, you have met with the employee to clarify expectations.

#4 Yesterday, an employee sent out an email notice to the university community with incorrect deadline dates.

 HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY


The Most Difficult Conversations

- Consult with experts first: Human Resources, the Attorneys-General, your supervisor.
- Prepare an outline, so you don't miss anything important.
- Be calm, clear, and straightforward.
- Allow the other person to express his or her emotions without being controlled by them.
- Create a firm conclusion to the conversation with next steps.

 HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Action/Results

- When you've successfully handled a dreaded conversation, make sure it wasn't a "wasted" effort.
- Decide what the follow-through will be:
 - Who does what, by when, and follow-up (how, when, who).

 HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Good Communication is Everyone's Job



"Beasley, you're a good communicator, look down the table and make eye contact for me!"

HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY



**This has been a
WSU Training
Videoconference**

If you attended this live training session and wish to have your attendance documented in your training history, please notify Human Resource Services within 24 hours of today's date:

hrstraining@wsu.edu
