Courageous Conversations

Connecting the Dots Conference
October 10, 2023

Presenters:
Tina Jordan, Performance Consultant & Educator, Organizational Learning
Steve Vinson, DEI Program Manager, Michigan Medicine
Session agreements

- Be present and engaged
- Expect and accept discomfort and joy
- Anticipate unfinished business
Session goals

- Define a “courageous” conversation
- Explore principles of courageous conversations
- Consider ways to hold a courageous conversation (guidelines and tools)
Definition of a “courageous” conversation
Courageous conversations are…

discussions that require you to speak candidly, openly, and about topics that may be sensitive and/or uncomfortable. Courageous conversations have the potential of creating strong emotions.
Scenario:
Difficult or Courageous Conversation?
PARTICIPANTS:

Please submit in the Q/A.

What differences did you notice between the difficult conversation and the courageous conversation?
“difficult” or “crucial” conversations
Communication is a **skill** that you can learn…

If you’re willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of every part of your life.

~ Brian Tracy
Communication Process
Communication Process: Noise!

![Diagram showing the communication process with Noise as a factor]

- **Sender** → **Encoding** → **Message** → **Decoding** → **Receiver**
- **Feedback** loop connects back to **Encoder**
- **Noise** as a disrupting factor in the process
Communication Noise

What's that email about?

I need coffee!

The dog's barking again!

I need to send that email!

Who's at the door?

Is that the call I'm expecting?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Debate</th>
<th>Discussion</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is about learning without judgment with a view to understand and find places of agreement</td>
<td>Is about listening to find flaws and weaknesses in other people’s ideas</td>
<td>Uses listening to find places of disagreement but to avoid conflict. Looks for rationality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has participants broaden their own perspective, discover shared meaning</td>
<td>Win an argument / prove the other person is wrong</td>
<td>Have a conversation, present ideas, often in academic settings</td>
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<tr>
<td>A form of communication that explores thoughts and feelings, invites differences of opinion and experience</td>
<td>A form of communication between two or more people where an issue is discussed and opposing arguments are put forward</td>
<td>A form of communication where ideas are presented, often in a clear, neutral way</td>
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<td>Often focuses on individual backgrounds as irrelevant or as cause for disparagement</td>
<td>Ignores the influence of individuals’ backgrounds or status in the conversation</td>
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<td>Assumes there is one right answer, seeks to prove others wrong and win the argument</td>
<td>Seeks new information, provides answers, avoids conflict and does not seek joint action for change</td>
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Principles of a courageous conversation
Conflict is good!
Conflict
The Learning Edge

Conflict

Comfort Zone

Learning Edge

Unsafe Zone

The Program on Intergroup Relations
University of Michigan
https://igr.umich.edu
Scenario:
Conflict is good!
<table>
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<th>Positive or Healthy Conflict</th>
<th>Negative or Unhealthy Conflict</th>
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<td>Differing views are handled in a productive, constructive way</td>
<td>There is no good-faith attempt to problem-solve</td>
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<td>Differences are acknowledged</td>
<td>Differences are ignored in order to make one’s point</td>
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<td>Seeks to understand; listens to understand</td>
<td>Seeks to change the other’s mind; listens to respond and not to understand</td>
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<td>Discomfort is communicated respectfully by using “I” statements</td>
<td>Discomfort is ignored/denied or negative emotions are expressed inappropriately and/or hurtfully</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration leads to a resolution</td>
<td>Hostile conflict leads to adverse outcomes</td>
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A Colleague says: (sounding exhausted) “I can't believe how much work I have to finish this week. It's overwhelming. It’s also my mother’s 90th birthday and I’m having a party for her Friday evening.”

What kind of responses are these?
- Sympathetic
- Empathetic
- Compassionate
Sympathy

I'm sorry you're in pain.

Empathy

I can practice perspective-taking by imagining what this pain might feel like.

Compassion

You are suffering, and I will do what I can to help.
Be brave
A "brave space" is the "creation of a challenging environment that encourages equal participation across representative identities."

Bravery is necessary, instead of safety, because “learning necessarily involves not merely risk, but the pain of giving up a former condition in favor of a new way of seeing things.” (Boostrom, 1998)
WHAT IS CULTURAL HUMILITY?
Scenario:
Bravery, Cultural Humility
## 4 Positions of Power

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<th>Power TO/WITH</th>
<th>Power WITHIN</th>
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<td>Uses coercion, authority</td>
<td>Shares power by trusting and empowering</td>
<td>You feel comfortable sharing power</td>
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<td>A “knower,” owner of the truth. “I’m right and you’re wrong.”</td>
<td>Offers positive and constructive feedback</td>
<td>You accept mistakes and corrects them</td>
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<td>Blames others</td>
<td>“Let’s find the solution together” mindset</td>
<td>You voice questions and concerns</td>
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<td>Uses shame and fear</td>
<td>Fosters a climate of respect, trust and openness</td>
<td>You ask for positive and constructive feedback</td>
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<td>Criticizes publicly</td>
<td>People feel safe and free to voice questions and concerns</td>
<td>You operate as a learner and work in progress</td>
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<td>Tone and volume can be laced with anger and frustration</td>
<td>Clarifies and validates alignment</td>
<td>You are the source of calm in stormy situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fights every fight</td>
<td>Stays grounded and listens effectively to opposing views</td>
<td>You are confident in capabilities hold yourself accountable to others/commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishes others (perhaps emotionally, passive-aggressively)</td>
<td>Recognizes and praises</td>
<td>You ask for help</td>
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Scenario: Power Dynamics
You

Be who you choose to be no matter who others are or how they act.
Others

Every person has intrinsic value and deserves respect, regardless of faulty thinking and/or poor behavior.
How to hold a courageous conversation?
Plan
Prepare
Practice
Put into effect
Plan
Prepare
Practice
Put into effect
Purpose and needs assessment

Consider:

- What is the purpose of holding the courageous conversation?
- What are the risks of having or not having a courageous conversation?
- What are the rewards of having or not having a courageous conversation?
- Where and when would be best to hold the conversation?
- What might come up during the conversation that I should prepare for?

Make a clear and committed choice!
Plan
Prepare
Practice
Put into effect
thoughts

behaviors

Emotions (feelings)
Courageous Conversations Invitations

I’d like to talk about _______.
I think we may have different ideas about how to _______.

I’d like to talk about ________ with you, but first I’d like to get your point of view.

I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes to talk?

I think we have different perceptions about _______.
I’d like to hear your thinking on this.
Plan
Prepare
Practice
Put into effect
CLARA Method

Calm and Center: Internally calm and center yourself before engaging in listening.

Listen: Listen with an intent to understand. Listen for underlying principles, cultural values, emotions, and issues behind what is being said. Listen for commonalities. Observe body language and tone of voice which may provide additional meaning. Listen for inherent needs and interests, not just what is said.

Affirm: Affirm the principles or issues in what was said, or simply the feelings or emotions that were expressed (“you care strongly about this”). Affirming is not agreeing, it’s acknowledging or recognizing what is shared. This can be done by simply repeating or rephrasing what was said.

Respond: Respond to the issues that were raised and the underlying needs behind them. Ask questions about what was said.

Add: Add information to the conversation. After seeking to understand, seek to be understood.
Practice!
Practice!
Practice!
Plan
Prepare
Practice
Put into effect
Courageous conversation agreements

- Stay engaged and committed
- Expect to experience discomfort
- Speak your truth
- Expect and accept unfinished business
- Care for each other is more important than being right
Scenario:
A Courageous Conversation
PARTICIPANTS:

Please submit in Chat.

What Courageous Conversations Principles did you notice in that conversation?
When the conversation goes wrong
Connecting the Dots

- Courageous Conversation
  - Compassion
  - Conflict
  - Power Dynamics
  - Cultural Humility
  - Bravery
  - Emotions
  - Heart, Soul, Head, Hands & Feet

- Dialogue Format
- Watch out!
- Noise
- Course Correct

Watch out!
Remember:

● It’s okay to be afraid, unsure
● It’s more important to DO right than to BE right
● Don’t expect perfection, but do work towards growth
We do the best we can with what we know, and when we know better, we do better.

— Maya Angelou —
Q & A
Resources

- “Establishing Brave Spaces: The Role of Safety/Comfort in Dialogue,” The Project on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan, 2014 [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H-8x9rvMFlVwp01KKUeeiOoQakEdSSw/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H-8x9rvMFlVwp01KKUeeiOoQakEdSSw/view?usp=sharing)
- “When an Argument Gets Too Heated, Here’s What to Say,” by Liane Davey, Harvard Business Review, March 3, 2016 [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ik3QMLQtPEEy-Sq7rTHqWAlk5OYxLxZB/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ik3QMLQtPEEy-Sq7rTHqWAlk5OYxLxZB/view?usp=sharing)
- “What is Intergroup Dialogue?” The Project on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H86Vrz3RDeS_HA9bxtwdzV1tzIdyTSuA/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H86Vrz3RDeS_HA9bxtwdzV1tzIdyTSuA/view?usp=sharing)
- “Developing Community Guidelines,” The Project on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GopOcUlFi2m0iF-34aGhNt0z9R2LecHW/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GopOcUlFi2m0iF-34aGhNt0z9R2LecHW/view?usp=sharing)
- “Learning to Listen,” The Project on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GxW7e_JsB_DaFerDXqa3pWFXgVITARO8/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GxW7e_JsB_DaFerDXqa3pWFXgVITARO8/view?usp=sharing)
- “Ways of Being in Dialogue,” The Project on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H68xU16GoyTLbg0HxOGTkTV5N-Nsm6Dg/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H68xU16GoyTLbg0HxOGTkTV5N-Nsm6Dg/view?usp=sharing)
- “What is Cultural Humility,” PsychHub video, October 5, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_wOnJJExE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_wOnJJExE)
Resources (continued)

- “LARA: Engaging Controversy with a Non-violent, Transformative Response,” B. Tinker, 2004. workshop handout available by request from info@LMFamily.org
- “Conflict Resolution Guide,” Office of Student Conflict Resolution, University of Michigan https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Gm9RkxauWvh-KrkgkkvJx0fD5tSLIZPj/view?usp=sharing
- Compassion Research Lab website, drshanesinclair.com, accessed September 2023
Resources (concluded)

- “4 Types of Power: What are Power Over, Power With, Power To and Power Within?” Graeme Stuart, February 1, 2019, [https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2019/02/01/4-types-of-power/](https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2019/02/01/4-types-of-power/)
- “Exploring the 4 Types of Power in Leadership.” Cecilia Calderon, March 2021, Stop At Nothing, [https://www.stopatnothing.com/4-types-of-power/](https://www.stopatnothing.com/4-types-of-power/)