

Work-Life Connecting the Dots Conference

Difficult Conversations Session Q+A | Friday, October 14, 2022

1. How do you deal with a narcissistic supervisor?

It's challenging to work with a supervisor with this type of quality, however there are some great suggestions from the LinkedIn Learning video below to help navigate this type of relationship.

[LinkedIn Learning: Beware the narcissist](#) | Are there advantages to working with this person? Be prepared to praise them. Keep boundaries in tact to protect your self-esteem and self-image. Appeal to their image.

2. How do you engage with people who are always on the defense or feel attacked?

[LinkedIn Learning: Tactics is someone gets defensive](#) | Understand that person's perspective in why they may feel defensive or attacked, stay calm, try to slow the pace of the conversation down, return to your intention or shared goal, engage with questions.

3. What do you do if people only bring the problems and no solutions or ideas?

I loved a response offered by one of our participants that suggested the following: I like to respond by asking "What would better look like to you?" It helps pivot the conversation to what actions can be implemented to reduce the issue at hand.

I'll also look to put the ball in their court in the moment by asking for their thoughts. If the problem continues, I'll often preface a meeting by saying something like, "I'd like each of us to come to the next meeting with three possible solutions to share."

4. What do you do when the situation is unresolved even after these steps?

I like to use the rule of three here. First, I'll try an initial approach. If it doesn't go well, I'll often be transparent by saying something like, "I feel like this didn't quite go as planned. What adjustments would you suggest we make to give us a better chance of success?" I'll make any necessary adjustments and then try for the second time. If that doesn't go well, I'll typically try a different approach (SBI, etc). If the third try doesn't go well, I'll usually escalate the issue to my Manager and share all of the approaches I've tried. Sharing what has already been tried shows my Manager that I've made an effort and am reaching out for their help after exhausting all of my other options.

5. What are your suggestions for handling big emotions - crying, defensiveness, etc.?

Start by listening and letting the person vent. Acknowledge the emotion they might be feeling. Managing your own emotions and expressing empathy can create a space that feels safe and make room for the emotion to settle. While the topic of your conversation may not be comfortable, I like to shift the dialogue to a future-oriented or a solutions-oriented path. That way, the person can feel supported and get the conversation moving in a productive direction.

[LinkedIn Learning: Managing emotions](#) | How you see others + How you see yourself + Intention = Behavior

6. Does this approach work with students?

Absolutely. This approach is a humanistic approach, so it can be applied across the board. Remember though: seek first to understand, then be understood!

7. How do you handle information gathering and addressing issues in a really small group where it might be evident who said what about someone else?

Whenever possible I try to make sure to keep the identity of folks that have shared information confidential. Remember, only share second-hand information as a trend. In this case I'd rely on my first-hand information only in conversation, but would take any trends into account when planning my approach.

8. How do you address safety to ensure people feel comfortable bringing up difficult topics where there may be fear of threats or retaliation?

Making the assumption that the term safety applies to emotional (non-physical) safety, I try to meet in an environment/location that is neutral and outside of our normal work environment. I'll also work to establish clear guidelines with the other person prior to starting the conversation (nothing will be repeated to others, no names will be used, etc). If safety refers to physical safety, I've actually called DPSS and asked an officer to be present but out-of-sight just in case anything goes sideways.