



**SEAPOWER THROUGH ENGINEERING**

5.2.9

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5.2.9 Critical Conversations

TIME: 2.0 HR

**TOPIC LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Upon successful completion of this topic, the student will be able to:

1. Recognize principles of consideration and candor that enable effective leadership.
2. Recognize the impact of bias on decision making.
3. Understand the linkage between a culture of awareness, individual character, and optimal organizational performance.
4. Understand the need to resolve contentious issues expeditiously in the best interest of the organization, recognizing the existence of different perspectives.
5. Identify specific techniques for improving performance within the workplace.

**STUDENT PREPARATION**

Student Support Material

1. People Skills Handbook, Aanstadt-Corbett-Jourdan-Pearman, 2012

Primary References

1. For Your Improvement, Korn Ferry, 2019, Eighth Edition
2. Navy Necessary Conversations Guide, Version 3.0, April 2024 (draft)
3. EDO School Note “Non-Attribution Policy”

Additional References



# Introduction

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- This is an opportunity to practice engagement in challenging discussions
  - Facilitator's role
    - Provide relevant academic lessons
    - Guide an open dialogue
- Rules Of Engagement (ROE)
  - Involve everyone, teach back and be transparent
  - Non-attribution environment; bounded, but honest discussion



# Assumptions

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- What do “assumptions” have to do with critical thinking?
- Real life examples...
- Why is it important to validate your assumptions?
  - We all operate with a unique view of the world
  - Bad assumptions lead to bad decisions



# So What...

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- Preformulated opinions can impair our ability to Get Real, Get Better (GRGB)
  - “Critical thinking requires a recognition of your biases.” – MaryAnn Watson, Director DAU UXD
  - Critical thinking drives necessary rigor into our decision-making and problem-solving
  - Sometimes the barriers to optimal performance lie below the surface and our assumptions prevent us from seeing them
  - How does this affect innovation?



# Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

- A vital set of skills that enable individuals to understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively, both personally and interpersonally
  - Enhanced employee engagement by connecting with the team on an emotional level, understanding their needs, and motivating them effectively
  - Proficiency in recognizing how one's own emotions influence the team, allowing them to manage their responses and interactions in ways that promote a positive work environment

*Emotionally intelligent leaders can navigate disputes with empathy and tact, fostering constructive resolutions and maintaining team cohesion*



# Preparing for a Difficult Conversation

- Recognize that different perceptions about the same reality can exist
  - We can all be right. Individual assumptions play a role. Embracing this understanding can lead to a path for resolution
- Create a convenient time and a “safe space” for the conversation
  - Be open and vulnerable; likely to be reciprocated
- Understand Human Motivation (3 Hs)
  - Heart, Head, Hand
- Understand Human Reaction (5 Fs)
  - Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn, Flop
- Apply Emotional Intelligence (EQ)
- Check your assumptions
  - Know yourself and your audience
  - Be aware of flawed logic

*It's ok to not know where to begin,  
**not starting is the only sure path to failure***



# Flawed Logic

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- Familiarize yourself with common assumptions and generalizations that influence false conclusions and distractions:
  - **Straw Man Fallacy**. Oversimplification or misrepresentation of someone's argument makes it easier to challenge or refute
  - **Causal Fallacy**. Assuming that one event caused another, without ample proof of the connection, accelerates decision-making
  - **Authority Fallacy**. Accepting a claim as true simply because an authority figure stated it simplifies decision-making
  - **Horn effect**. A single attribute can form a complete view of someone
  - **Halo effect**. A person who is well-liked can do no wrong
  - **Bandwagon effect**. The majority opinion should prevail
  - **Anchor effect**. The first piece of information received shapes the decision



# Flawed Logic (cont'd)

- **Sunk cost effect**. Time and money invested justifies continuance
- **Attribution effect**. Judging oneself by intent, while others are judged by their actions, is perfectly valid
- **Over-attribution effect**. A person's individual behavior is determined by their abiding personal values and attitudes
- **Confirmation effect**. Evidence that supports an expectation overshadows contradictory evidence
- **Prototype effect**. Someone seems to fit the mold, therefore they are the perfect fit
- **Affinity effect**. The one that is most liked has instant advantage over the others
- Others?



# Accomplishing a Difficult Conversation

- Set a neutral tone
  - Shared beliefs or values (common ground) could be a good starting point
- Build trust
  - Engage with dignity & respect, listen actively, assume positive intent
- Avoid blame; remember, we are a team. Learn from mistakes and move on
  - Start with “I” instead of “You” (e.g., “I didn’t receive...” vs “You didn’t deliver...” or “Help me understand...” vs “Why did you...”)
- Passion is good...until it impacts the ability to think and respond objectively
- Apply empathy; ask open-ended questions; more listening than talking
  - Embrace the power of “why”
- Talk about solutions or what can be done differently to avoid the unpleasant situation in the future
- Don’t presume a complete resolution from the initial discussion
- If conversation becomes confrontational, reframe it (defuse the situation)

*Key components: Trust, Authenticity, Openness, Patience, and Unity*



## Scenario #1

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- You're the supervisor of a 12-person project team consisting of GS-9 to GS-12 employees. Aside from one employee (Johnny), the team is high-performing and seems to have high morale. Earlier this morning you overheard Johnny speaking to one of the other employees (Sue) in a disrespectful manner. You've decided to call Johnny in to your office to talk about it:



## Scenario #2

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- You're the supervisor of a 12-person project team consisting of GS-9 to GS-12 employees. Command policy prescribes 0800 start time for all non-supervisory personnel. One of your most high-performing employees (Kim) has been arriving after 0900, despite repeated reminders about the policy to the entire staff. You have decided to call Kim into your office to discuss the issue:



# The Floor is Open





# Influence of People on Outcomes

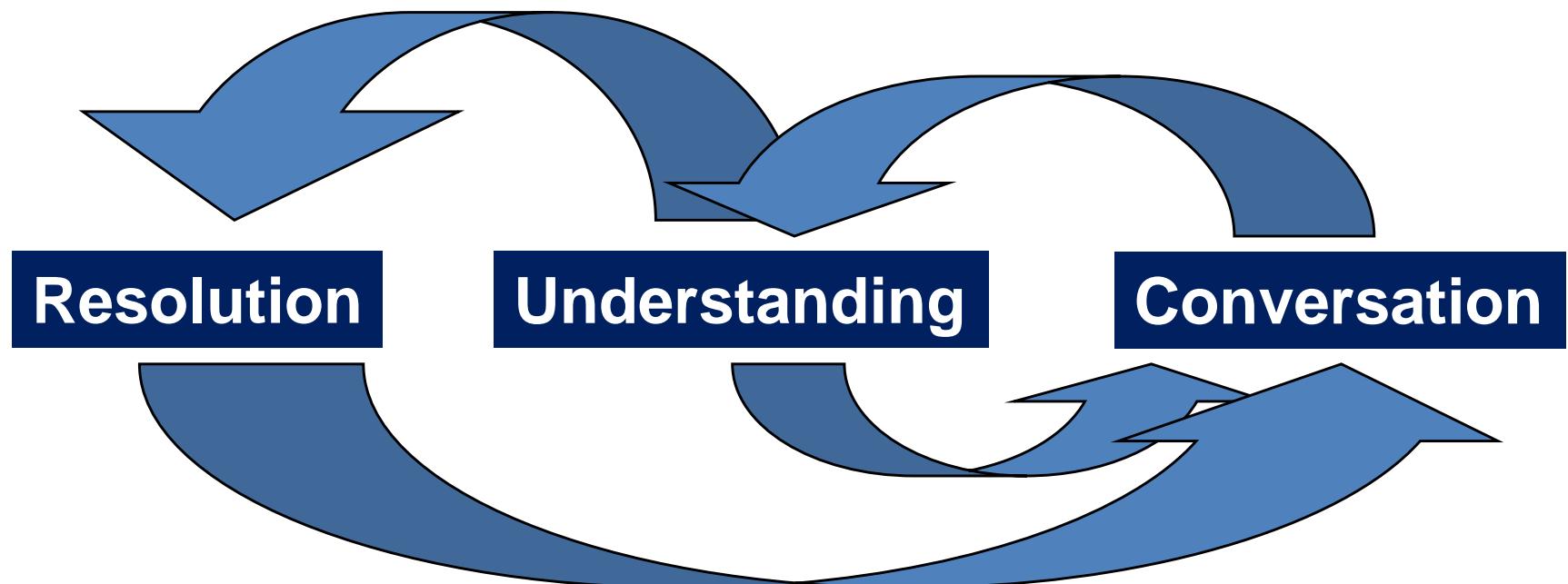
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- Increased creativity in problem solving
- More innovation
- Better understanding of customers
- Better decision making
- Improved recruiting and retention of skilled personnel
- Expanded empathy and stronger interpersonal relationships
- Peak operational and warfighting readiness



# Closing

- Your ability to properly address contentious situations is especially important at this stage of your career



*Every conversation is a potential game-changer*



# Backup



# Sound Bites

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- “Respond to adversity; don’t react.” – Tony Dungy
- “Communicating is more than speaking; it involves your entire presence.” – NAVEDTRA 134A
- “The more senior you become, the more you should listen.” – VADM Moore (ret)
- “What people believe prevails over the truth.” – Sophocles
- “You can’t make good decisions unless you have good information and can separate facts from opinions and speculation.” – Colin Powell
- “The initial reaction is usually the most uninformed response.” – Tim Haney
- “What you allow is what will continue.” – Unknown
- “Certainty is no substitute for clarity.” – Dr. Robert Radi
- “To be confident and not delusional is a real skill.” -- Katt Williams
- “It’s not what you say, it’s what they hear.” – Red Auerbach
- “In life as in warfare, strategists will always prevail over tacticians.” – Robert Greene
- “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response.” – Viktor Frankl