



# Communicating Effectively Through Disagreement

When opinions collide, teams don't need louder voices. They need better language. Here's how leaders can use simple communication habits to ease tension, reduce misinterpretation, and guide conversations back to collaboration.



## Communicating Effectively Through Disagreement

**Inspired by:** Harvard Business Review “A Smarter Way to Disagree”

Across global organizations, disagreement is not a sign of dysfunction. It is a sign of diversity. Research from Harvard, UCLA, and leading behavioral scientists shows that the real issue is not opposing perspectives, but the language people use when expressing them. While intentions remain internal, language is visible, measurable, and deeply influential. When words signal curiosity and respect, conversations become more productive. When they signal defensiveness or certainty, even small disagreements can escalate into conflict.

Most people approach disagreements with positive intentions wanting to stay respectful, open, and calm. But intentions alone are invisible to others. What shapes the outcome is how those intentions are translated into observable behaviors, especially language. Without clear verbal signals, people often misinterpret each other's motives, creating gaps between intention and perception. Research confirms that expressing curiosity, acknowledging the other side, and showing humility dramatically increases trust and collaboration during disagreement.

### 5 Behaviors That Improve Disagreement

- Signal a desire to learn: Clearly express curiosity instead of assuming the other person knows your intentions.
- Acknowledge the other side: Reflect what you heard before offering your view.
- Find common ground: Identify shared goals or values to reduce defensiveness.
- Hedge your claims: Use language that leaves space for nuance (“from my perspective,” “it could be”).
- Share your story: Personal experiences build trust more effectively than data alone.



# Mashar Perspective

In GCC cultures, communication is rooted in dignity, respect, and relational harmony. Because preserving relationships is highly valued, disagreement often becomes indirect through silence, softened language, or avoidance. This can create misunderstandings, where leaders assume agreement when teammates are simply trying to stay respectful.

By using clear verbal signals such as explicitly stating curiosity, naming shared goals, and acknowledging differing viewpoints, leaders in the region can create psychological permission for open dialogue without compromising cultural norms. When leaders demonstrate calm, receptive communication, teams feel safer to express concerns, contribute ideas, and engage in healthy, constructive debate.



## Learn More

Review the original research and ideas that shaped the thinking and insights behind this article.

[Read "A Smarter Way to Disagree" on Harvard Business Review](#)



## Related Mashar Program

Develop the communication skills needed to express disagreement with clarity, confidence, and influence.

[Explore the Present, Speak & Influence More Program](#)



## Further Reading

Explore additional research-based insights on leadership, communication, and workplace dynamics.

[Explore More Insights on Harvard Business Review](#)

