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Heroic Conversations: **The Path to Authentic Solutions**

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Heroic Conversations

The following pages are excerpted from the “Heroic Conversations” manual.

Strategies for Difficult Conversations

COMPETITIVE

- I win/you lose
- focus more on the outcome than on the relationship
- sense that the other person (or their objectives) is a threat
- the PERSON is the problem
- limited resources

ACCOMMODATION/YIELDING

- I lose/you win
- focus more on the relationship than the outcome
- other's needs are paramount

AVOIDANCE

- not dealing with the situation
- can be through withdrawing, ignoring, postponing or changing the subject

COMPROMISE

- each party gives up part of what they want
- partial winners
- sometimes it is the only way to handle a difficult situation, however, it may lead to two dissatisfied people.

COLLABORATIVE/INTEGRATIVE

- frequently known as “win-win”
- emphasis on problem-solving to meet the needs of BOTH parties;
- mutually acceptable solution that maintains or strengthens the relationship;
- separates the people from the problem;
- focus is on underlying interests/needs and not the stated position;
- from sitting on opposite sides of the table to sitting on the same side

Ask if the other party is willing to talk about the situation.

- 1) Understand your goal(s) and be silent (at first).
- 2) Sincerely acknowledge one positive aspect of their behavior or performance.
- 3) Allow space for them to say "No." (e.g. "OK, if you ever do want to talk...").

Example:

"Lisa, I am wondering if you have a moment to talk. One of the things I have always appreciated about you was your willingness to get right to the heart of the matter. I may have misunderstood something you said last week. Are you open to having a conversation with me in order to...(clarify things, help me understand the situation better, etc)?"

Listen using open-ended questions that draw out underlying needs/goals.

Move from judgment and frustration to simple confusion and curiosity.

Open Ended Question:

"Help me understand _____."

"Can you say more about what _____ means to you?"

Paraphrase:

"So it sounds like you're saying _____, is that right?"

Your goal is a strong "nod of the head." For any other response, ask "What did I miss?"

Leverage your understanding of their beliefs/feelings/needs/goals, then offer yours.

Three steps:

- 1) Validate: "I can see how you might have thought/felt _____." (avoid ending this with "but").
- 2) Ask: "Would you be willing to hear my needs around this issue?"
- 3) Inform: State your needs/goals. Describe rather than evaluate past behavior or events.

Own the issue together using a "How can we..." question.

This question includes the needs of both parties. Avoid restating your positions, and instead, focus on the needs level.

Examples:

How can we resolve this so that your need for X and my need for Y are both met?

e.g. "How can we resolve this so that we both feel respected by each other?"

Work to brainstorm possible solutions into a future-focused agreement.

Come up with as many ideas as possible before evaluating which would actually work.
Sometimes a seemingly ridiculous idea can lead to a creative solution.

Make requests and promises ("what by when") so the agreement is rooted in action (positive, do-able, realistic).

Goals: BRIP Model

Types of Goals:

- Business (or Content)
- Relationship
- Identity
- Process

Business Goals: What does each person want? They are the easiest to identify, externally objectifiable, and can be listed or argued. (e.g. which system to implement, where to hold the offsite, my idea vs. your idea).

Relational Goals: Who are we to each other? Usually involves two questions.

- 1) How do I want to be treated? (e.g. “What I need here is some respect”)
- 2) How much interdependence to I desire (e.g. “I thought we were friends!”)

Relational goals are at the heart of all conflict interactions, yet are difficult to identify in both ourselves and others. The reasons for this vary from attribution error, misinterpretation, gender/cultural effects, relationship history.

Identify Goals: Who am I in this interaction? I am ____ kind of person. It can be related to a need for approval, inclusion, or respect. It is often covert, yet, when raised as an issue can dwarf all other issues and distort the conflict. These are also called “face” issues.

People try to avoid loss of face by defending against humiliation, embarrassment, exclusion, demeaning communication, or being treated as unimportant or low power individuals

These defenses can then escalate the conflict and be acted out through criticism, defensiveness, stonewalling, and contempt

Process Goals: What communication process will work best for this conflict?

e.g. how often we meet, who is included in the process, email phone or in-person, equal talk time for all parties, decision by consensus, leader, or sub-group

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: (Gottman)

- Criticism
- Defensiveness
- Stonewalling
- Contempt

Heroic Conversation Planning Form

It is helpful to do some advance preparation before attempting the heroic conversations model for authentic solutions. Choose a medium sized communication issue from your life. It should be one where you suspect the other party is at least willing to talk about the problem. When starting out, it is best to avoid situations where someone has power over you (e.g. the boss), but this can be learned over time.

Directions: Use the space below to write the basic circumstances of the issue and name the positions, needs and feelings

Self _____	Other _____
Circumstances:	
My Position:	Their Position:
My Interests/Goals:	Their Interests/Goals:
Business:	Business:
Relational:	Relational:
Identity:	Identity:
Process:	Process:
My Feelings:	Their Feelings:

Heroic Conversations

Benefits of Heroic Conversations:

- Blends the best of negotiation and mentoring skills without being “mechanical” or “fluffy”
- Provides a unique way of dealing with “no”
- Takes five to ten minutes to implement
- Transforms people’s anger and frustration into a more productive strategy

Facts about Heroic Conversations:

- Utilized by thousands of people in over 100 organizations:
 - United Nations Development Programme, JPMorgan Chase, Montefiore Medical Center, Columbia Business School, American Management Association
- Effective at all levels
- Recently made part of NYU curriculum for undergraduates

Testimonials for Heroic Conversations:

“Adam designs and facilitates leadership, conflict management, and creative problem solving programs for managers from over 85 different countries (e.g. India, China, Paraguay, Uzbekistan, Niger, and Jordan). The feedback from this diverse group of leaders ranges from very good to excellent and he is always quite well received. We are pleased to have him as a part of our learning advisory faculty.”

Tapan Mishra, Chief, Learning Resource Center, UNDP

“Adam facilitated an interactive workshop for our Annual Retreat. Attending the session were 72 of our top consultants, executives, and staff, many holding doctorates in the fields of clinical and organizational psychology. Adam’s ability to create an atmosphere of trust and openness for this highly experienced audience was quite extraordinary. Important issues were discussed in a way that created new options for communication throughout the entire organization, leading to greater buy-in on our overall strategic objectives. I can strongly recommend Adam as both an interactive keynote speaker and high level facilitator of communication for any team wishing to discuss real issues.”

Ilene H Lang, President, Catalyst

"In Afghanistan, we go through many conflict management training sessions and so I came today absolutely certain I knew what conflict management was. But you taught me in one day how "not knowing" can be more powerful than "knowing" in dealing with conflict, and so I leave with a much more powerful tool than I had ever learned before. Adam, you reached my head and you touched my heart!"

Mirwais Ramaki, United Nations Development Programme, Afghanistan

“Adam's course really impacted my life in a positive way. This course is not just about management, but about life, ideology and psychology and Adam delivered some extremely powerful tools. My first day back at work as a Director of two core facilities, I had already to resolve, yet again, a complex conflict, and using some of the tools he demonstrated, it went well. I would strongly recommend Adam as a trainer and coach”

Andreas Holzenburg, Director and Professor, Texas A & M University

Heroic Conversations: The Key to Organizational Success

A recent global study of over 11,000 corporations across 15 countries found that 58% of firms have experienced a significant rise in their workplace stress levels over the last two years (Regus, 2009). In a struggling global economy, high stress levels reduce workplace productivity and negatively impact the quality of deliverables.

One solution that is gaining ground among leaders is to reduce the number of stressful interactions through the ability to facilitate “difficult conversations” more quickly and effectively. This highly-interactive session will introduce the Heroic Conversations Model through a series of discrete, learnable steps.

Derived from an appreciation and study of inspirational mentors, coaches, bosses and teachers, this model provides a means of streamlining the communications process and improving the ability to generate solid business results. Developed by facilitator Adam Vane, the model has been successfully implemented in over 100 organizations, including Shearman and Sterling, LLP, JPMorgan Chase, Yale University School of Medicine and the United Nations.

Whereas some programs on negotiation merely explain techniques for finding solutions, this program helps members discover how to implement the model to see immediate results. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss real issues and be coached on real-world solutions.

By the end of the program, participants will have a technique for:

- Cutting through emotional barriers to develop new business
- Setting goals that elicit greater buy-in from stakeholders
- Understanding how to negotiate for results when faced with strong emotions
- Transforming communication from a competitive process to a constructive inquiry

Facilitator: Adam Vane, founder of Paragon Global Consulting, LLC is a trainer and executive coach with over 15 years of experience helping leaders and leadership teams develop their capacity for innovation and improve their personal and organizational performance. He is currently a Mentor Coach for the Columbia Coaching Certification Program and an adjunct faculty member at NYU. He received his MA in Organizational Psychology from Columbia University. Clients include United Nations Development Programme, Goldman Sachs, United Healthcare, Shearman and Sterling, LLP, Catalyst, and Yale University School of Medicine.

Heroic Conversations Public Calendar 2010-11: United Nations Organizational and Career Development Roundtable, National Association of Continuing Legal Education. 16th Annual Family Office Forum, New York City Bar Association, 1199 SEIU CCLC 11th Annual QCC Conference, Vistage International

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