



CBF Peer Learning Groups

Having difficult conversations

Communication is vital to effective leadership and healthy congregations. Misunderstandings, topics that provoke discomfort, or conversations amidst conflict can be challenging even to the best communicator. Though it might be tempting to delay or skip these dialogues, difficult conversations are some of the most important for genuine leadership.

In difficult conversations, there are often *three* conversations going on:

1. The “what happened” conversation, in which it’s important to
 - Explore stories
 - Avoid assumptions and blame, “right” and “wrong” characterizations
 - Disentangle intent from impact
2. The feelings conversation, in which it’s important to
 - Acknowledge and manage your emotions
3. The identity conversation, in which it’s important to
 - Recognize your questions around three core identities:
 - Am I competent?
 - Am I a good person?
 - Am I worthy of love?
 - Avoid the all-or-nothing syndrome

To have an effective difficult conversation:

1. Extend the Invitation
 - Describe your purpose
 - Invite, don’t impose
 - Make the other person your partner
 - Be persistent
 - Use key phrases such as “I’d like to talk about,” “I wonder if it would make sense if,” “would you mind discussing?”
2. Listen deeply
 - Negotiate your way into curiosity
 - Inquire, paraphrase, acknowledge

3. Speak up too
 - Start with what matters most
 - Recognize complexity
4. Tell your story clearly
 - Don't present your conclusions as THE TRUTH
 - Share from where your conclusions come
 - Don't exaggerate
5. Take the lead in problem solving
 - Reframe, reframe, reframe
 - Move from "either/or" to "and"
 - Listen even more
 - Name the dynamics
 - Test your perceptions
 - Come up with options

Questions for discussion:

- What types of conversations are most difficult for you?
- Think of a difficult conversation you would like/you need to have.
 - Who are the players?
 - What happened?
 - What are you feeling? What might the other party be feeling?
 - What's at stake for you? The other person?
 - How can you gauge if this conversation is worth having?
 - How might you invite the person into conversation?
 - What listening strategies could you use?
 - How can you express your own viewpoint in a nonjudgmental way?
 - How might you reframe the situation?
 - What are some options you might employ to meet each side's needs?
 - What are some standards you could employ going forward for a healthier relationship?
 - What are some ways you can keep communication open going forward?
- How can your PLG encourage you and hold you accountable to having this conversation?
- How might you use this outline for having difficult conversations with your key leaders?