



The DHS Leader Development Program: Difficult Conversations

Leadership and Learning are Indispensable to One Another – John F. Kennedy

Tip of the Month:

Seeking options for your Cornerstone *Continuous Development* 12-hour requirement? Check out these Skillssoft courses:

[Workplace Conflict: Recognizing and Responding to Conflict](#)

ID: comm_22_a01_bs_enu

[Workplace Conflict: Strategies for Resolving Conflicts](#)

ID: comm_22_a02_bs_enu

[Leading Teams: Dealing with Conflict](#)

ID: team_03_a07_bs_enu

News to Know

[The DHS Coaching Collaborative](#) – check out the Coaching Talent Bank and invest in your success!

Have you thought about a rotational opportunity? Go to the [Homeland Security Rotations Program](#).

Want to know more about Cornerstone, Keystone, or Capstone? Visit the [DHS Leader Development Program](#).

Did you know that the LDP identifies targeted development for [Team Members and Team Leads](#)?

Don't forget, seasoned DHS Leaders must complete [12 hours of Leader as Teacher "Give Back"](#) – write a blog, be a mentor, hold a brown bag lunch....

Questions? Contact your component [LDP Action Officer](#) or email DHSLeaderDevelopment@dhs.gov.

Got a minute (...or three?) Check these out!

Peter Sheahan: When You Have a Difficult Team Member



Video (2 minutes)
Bookid=63410

Peter Bregman: How to Have a Difficult Conversation



Video (2 minutes)
Bookid=46016

Susan Scott: Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work & in Life, One Conversation at a Time



Book Summary (8 pages)
Bookid=31863

Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler: Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High



Book Summary (8 pages)
Bookid=25074

Points to Ponder

“Learning” isn’t about a course – it’s about a course of action!

Learning the Inquiry-Advocacy Technique

This activity will give you a tool for practicing inquiry and advocacy.

Step 1: Watch the Video

Think about a recent or current difficult communication you experienced involving conflict or disagreement and keep it in mind as you watch the video [Relating: Balancing Inquiry and Advocacy \(Bookid=73493\)](#).

Next, reflect on how inquiry and advocacy were or were not used during the communication you experienced. Ask yourself these questions:

- Did anyone ask the other person why he or she thought or believed as he or she did?
- Was there opportunity for either to explain their positions, thoughts, or rationales without being interrupted or dismissed?
- When advocating for decision or action, did each listen and try to understand?
- In the end, did both feel the conflict was resolved, even if no decision or agreement was reached?

Step 2: Make a Discussion Guide

Balancing inquiry and advocacy supports great leadership and management, but it requires continuous practice. Therefore it is helpful to have a discussion guide to use before and after difficult conversations. Below is an example:

Guiding questions	Notes (before)	Notes (after)
Ask the other person		
Both participants explain		
Listen for understanding		
Get beyond the conflict		

Create this discussion guide in any format that works for you – for example, on your smartphone, your desktop, or even an index card.

Step 3: Find Opportunities to Practice

Use your discussion guide to notes about what worked using the inquiry and advocacy technique. Keep practicing!

Real-World Research

It's important to prepare diligently for difficult conversations, especially those that are performance-related.

One of the most important aspects of managing conflicts well is learning to actively listen. Ask incisive questions to understand how the situation came to be, then listen. Listening encourages the other person to think for himself or herself.

Nancy Kline in her book *Time to Think* states that listening demonstrates respect, curiosity and attention. A skilled listener asks 'What do you think about this?' rather than provide the answers."

-- Atomus Ltd, 2011

Outcome

Think about the leaders you know that have avoided difficult conversations, and the consequences on the organization. Effectively prepare for and manage difficult conversations because its one of the core responsibilities of a leader – compassionately and courageously serving the best interests of individuals and the organization.

