

FLIP script

the

**RESPOND WITH HEART, NOT HARM,
IN TOUGH CONVERSATIONS**

Words are powerful. Even with the best intentions, our immediate reactions during tough conversations can sometimes be dismissive, offensive, or unproductive, undermining inclusive dialogue. It's important to use words that demonstrate understanding, partnership, and a commitment to continued communication. Respond with heart by staying engaged and open when discussing difficult topics, which helps to resolve conflicts and work collaboratively across differences.¹

UNSUPPORTIVE ←

→ SUPPORTIVE

WHAT PEOPLE SAY
"NO OFFENSE..."

HOW IT'S UNSUPPORTIVE
Feels offensive and inauthentic as soon as the words are spoken. Puts people in a position to brace for a potential insult, even if that's not your intention.² Takes away a person's right to be reasonably upset as an equal in the dialogue.³

WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD
Nothing. If you want to make this statement, it's generally a sign that what you are about to say is offensive. Don't say it.

Be **SUPPORTIVE** during tough conversations by listening to others to encourage, rather than stifle, dialogue.

NOT CURIOUS ←

→ CURIOUS

WHAT PEOPLE SAY
"I'M NOT COMFORTABLE;
LET'S NOT GO THERE."

HOW IT'S NOT CURIOUS
Leaves no space to resolve differences. Shuts down the conversation because you may be worried about doing the wrong thing, being judged, or hearing a perspective that may challenge your way of thinking.⁴

WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD
"I know this is a delicate subject and I may say the wrong thing, but I'd like to try to talk about this so I can learn more."

Show **CURIOSITY** by asking questions, being open to new or different perspectives, and being willing to go beyond what is familiar or comfortable. You'll learn more about yourself and others.

NOT HUMBLE ←

→ HUMBLE

WHAT PEOPLE SAY
"I'M RIGHT"
AND/OR
"YOU'RE WRONG."

HOW IT'S NOT HUMBLE
Can be perceived as arrogant and overconfident.⁵ Focusing on "right" and "wrong" does not allow for a discussion—only winning or losing the argument.⁶

WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD
"We may not agree, but let's try to reach understanding."

Demonstrate **HUMILITY** by accepting that your views may be incomplete. Listen with humility to better understand others and show you are open to learning and thinking differently.⁷

NOT EMPATHIC ←

→ EMPATHIC

WHAT PEOPLE SAY
"I'M SORRY YOU FEEL THAT WAY."

HOW IT'S NOT EMPATHIC
Takes no personal ownership for any harm done.⁸ Comes across as not being genuine, and devalues the other person's experiences and emotions.

WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD
"I apologize for my actions and how they have impacted you. Although my intention was not to cause any harm, I see it did and will try to do differently in the future."

Express **EMPATHY** by showing that you understand and appreciate another point of view or experience. Acknowledge that your words and actions may have had a different effect than what you intended.⁹

NOT COURAGEOUS ←

→ COURAGEOUS

WHAT PEOPLE SAY
"DON'T ROCK THE BOAT."

HOW IT'S NOT COURAGEOUS
Does not provide a safe space for speaking up. Does not show willingness to step out of your comfort zone in order to make progress.¹⁰ May make others feel like they have to communicate carefully around a topic or "walk on eggshells."

WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD
"Dialogue is important and welcome, even when it's not easy."

Communicate **COURAGEOUSLY** by leaning into difficult conversations, rather than shutting them down. Doing this signals that you are willing to talk about tough or "undiscussable" issues.¹¹

UNACCOUNTABLE ←

→ ACCOUNTABLE

WHAT PEOPLE SAY
"DON'T BE SO SENSITIVE."

HOW IT'S UNACCOUNTABLE
Blames a person for their reaction and does not take responsibility for the way your words came across.¹² Suggests the other person is the problem for being "overly sensitive" and harms their sense of worth.

WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD
"It sounds like what I was trying to say came across differently than how I intended it. Can you help me understand how you heard what I said? That might help me try again."

Demonstrate **ACCOUNTABILITY** by taking responsibility for how your words and actions affect those around you. Use words and actions that demonstrate you want to work toward a constructive conversation.¹³

BE OPEN

Ask for feedback on how your words and actions or those of your team are received, and then make changes to improve. Listen and learn.

LEAD WITH INTENTION

Communicate in non-defensive ways, assuming positive intent and remaining committed to reaching mutual understanding, even if not agreement.

ROLE MODEL

Role model a willingness to step outside your comfort zone, even if it means making a mistake. Encourage others to take responsibility for how they react to tough situations.

SOURCES:

1. Catalyst, *Engaging in Conversations About Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Workplace* (2016).
2. Catalyst, *Engaging in Conversations About Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Workplace* (2016).
3. Jack Gibb, "Defensive Communication," *Journal of Communication*, vol. 11 (1961): p. 141-148; G. L. Forward, Kathleen Czech, and Carmen M. Lee, "Assessing Gibb's Supportive and Defensive Communication Climate: An Examination of Measurement and Construct Validity," *Communication Research Reports*, vol. 28, no. 1 (Jan-March 2011): p.1-15.
4. Gibb; Forward, Czech, and Lee.
5. Bruce Patton, "You Can't Win by Avoiding Difficult Conversations," *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2017): p. 553-557.
6. Gibb; Forward, Czech, and Lee.
7. Patton.
8. Gabrielle S. Adams and M. Ena Inesi, "Impediments to Forgiveness: Victim and Transgressor Attributions of Intent and Guilt," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 111, no. 6 (2016): p. 866-881.
9. Beverly D. Flaxington, "'I'm Sorry You Were Offended' Is Not Really an Apology!" *Psychology Today*, July 11, 2016.
10. Gibb; Forward, Czech, and Lee.
11. Jean Kantambu Latting and V. Jean Ramsey, *Reframing Change: How to Deal with Workplace Dynamics, Influence Others, and Bring People Together to Initiate Positive Change* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2009): p. 176-177.
12. Gibb; Forward, Czech, and Lee.
13. Turaga; Catalyst, *Engaging in Conversations About Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Workplace* (2016).

RESEARCH PARTNERS:

Altria Group, Bank of America, Bloomberg, BMO Financial Group, The Boston Consulting Group (BCG), Cargill, Incorporated, Chevron Corporation, Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, Dell Inc., Deutsche Bank, EY, IBM Corporation, Kimberly-Clark Corporation, McDonald's Corporation, Merck & Co., Inc., Sodexo, Uber Technologies, Inc., UPS, Verizon Communications Inc.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.



CATALYST
WORKPLACES THAT WORK FOR WOMEN

created: 28 November 2018

CATALYST.ORG