

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Handling Difficult Conversations

How to Discuss What Matters Most

(رواه أبو داود والترمذي)

الْحِكْمَةُ ضَالَّةُ الْمُؤْمِنِ ، فَحَيْثُ وَجَدَهَا فَهُوَ أَحَقُّ بِهَا

The Wisdom is the lost property of
the believer. Wherever he/she
finds it, it is his/hers.



What is A Difficult Conversation?

- Anything we find it hard to talk about.
- Any conversation that causes stress, anxiety and frustration.

For Example:

- Giving negative feedback
- Admitting a mistake
- Expressing strong feelings.

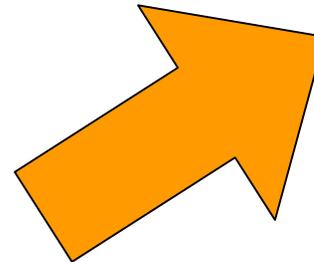


If we don't deal with issues...

- We feel taken advantage of
- Things may get worse
- We lose the opportunity to improve things

Paradigm Shift

**“Learning”
Stance**



**“Message-
Delivery” Stance**



Sort out ...

- What happened or should have happened?
- What feelings are involved?
- What identity issues are at stake?



What happened or should have happened?



Problem: It's 'THEM'!

- Limited Information base
- Selective observation
- Access to different information
- Assume “ We Know”
- Perceived through past experiences
- Conclusions reflect self-interest

سورة النساء 28

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُخَفِّفَ عَنْكُمْ وَخُلِقَ
الْإِنْسَانُ ضَعِيفًا

Allah wants to lighten your
burdens, for a human being
was created weak.

سورة النجم 3- 4

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ
إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا
وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ

He does not speak out of his
own desire except a
Revelation that is revealed
to him.

سورة ق- 22

لَقَدْ كُنْتَ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِّنْ هَذَا فَكَشَفْنَا
عَنكَ غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ

You were indeed oblivious of this. Now we have lifted your mask (screen) from you, so your sight this day is sharp.



Solution: Certainty \rightarrow Curiosity

- What do they know that I don't?
- How might their view-point make sense?
- What don't I know about myself that the others know?
- Different information leads to different interpretations - both make sense at the same time

سورة الحجرات 6

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن
تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصِحُّوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ

O you who believe! If a corrupt person brings you some news, inquire into it carefully lest you should harm others unknowingly and afterwards be sorry for what you did



Problem: Who Meant What?

- Our assumptions are often wrong or incomplete
- Intentions are invisible
- We defend our “good intentions” position

سورة الحجرات-12

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ
بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ

O you who believe! Avoid much
guesswork, for some of such
guesswork is a sin.

سورة العنكبوت 46

وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ
أَحْسَنُ

And do not argue with the
followers of earlier revelations
except in the most kindly manner

أَخْرَجَهُ الْأَلْبَانِيُّ

مَا ضَلَّ قَوْمٌ بَعْدَ هُدًى كَانُوا عَلَيْهِ إِلَّا أُوْتُوا
الْجَدَلَ

No group of people has gone astray
after being guided except those who
took arguments as a way of
communication

صحيح البخاري

إِيَّكُمْ وَالظَّنَّ ، فَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ أَكْذَبُ الْحَدِيثِ ، وَلَا تَحَسَّسُوا ، وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا
وَلَا تَحَاسَدُوا ، وَلَا تَدَابَرُوا ، وَلَا تَبَاغَضُوا ، وَكُونُوا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ إِخْوَانًا

Be aware of suspicions. Suspicion is the worst form of lying. And do not go after each other. And do not spy. And do not envy. And do not talk behind the back of each other. And do not hate each other. Be as brothers and servants of Allah



Solution: Untangle Intent From Impact

- What did the other person actually say or do?
- What was the impact of this on me?
- What am I assuming about the other's intentions?
- Hold our view as “hypothesis”



Problem: Who is to blame?

- Who caused the problem?
- Were they incompetent?
- Were they unreasonable?
- Were they unethical?
- How should they be punished?

سورة الفرقان 67

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَنْفَقُوا لَمْ يُسْرِفُوا وَلَمْ يَقْتُرُوا
وَكَانَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ قَوَامًا

And those who, when they expend, are
neither wasteful nor miser, but keep
just in between (the two extremes)



Solution: Abandon blame: Map the contribution system

- How have we each contributed to this situation?
- What can we do to move forward?
- How do I help them understand their contribution?
- How can I influence and improve the situation?
- How does the change they make facilitate the changes I need to make?



The ‘Feeling’ Conversation

- Situations are emotionally charged.
- Unaddressed feelings
 - Leak or burst out
 - Inhibit our ability to listen
- Share your feelings, not judgments
- Acknowledge others’ feelings without accusations or blame

(صَحِيحُ الْبُخَارِيِّ)

الْمُسْلِمُ مَنْ سَلِمَ الْمُسْلِمُونَ مِنْ لِسَانِهِ وَيَدِهِ ، وَالْمُهَاجِرُ
مَنْ هَجَرَ مَا نَهَى اللَّهُ عَنْهُ .

The Muslim is the one that keeps Muslims safe from his/her tongue and hand. And the Muhajir is the one who leaves what Allah has Forbidden



Identity Issues

- Am I Competent?
- Am I a Good Person?
- We tend to deny data inconsistent with our self-image.
- All or Nothing Syndrome
- Hopes and Fears.



Identity Solutions

- Identify vulnerabilities
- Negative Feedback does not define us
- Complexify your identity and stance
- Accept your mistakes
- Think long-term
- Take a break!



Creating a Learning Conversation

Primary task is not to persuade,
impress, trick, outwit, convert, or
win over the other person.



Should you just let go?

- Is the real conflict inside you?
- Is there a better way to address the issue than talking about it?
- Do you have a purpose that makes sense? Whose interests will it serve?
- Will it engage the other person in a conversation for “mutual learning” for the problem’s solution?



Begin from the “Third Story”

- Describe the problem in a way that rings true for both sides.
- Describe the problem as “differences” rather than “judgments”
- Extend an invitation to understand their perspective better and to share your own.
- Be willing to tell your internal struggle without judgments.

سورة الأعراف - 204

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ
تُرْحَمُونَ

And when the Qur'an is recited,
attentively listen to it and be silent
so you may obtain mercy.



Listen from the Inside Out

- Shift your internal stance from “I understand” to “Help me understand”
- Be genuinely curious and care for the other person.
- Inquire to learn. Don’t use questions to shoot holes in the other person’s arguments.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Paraphrase their perspective for clarity.
- Acknowledge feelings.

سورة الإسراء 36

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ
وَالْبَصَرَ
وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا

And do not follow (or pursue)
anything of which you have no
knowledge. Surely, your hearing and
sight and heart – all of them – will be
called to account for it

سورة الأحزاب 70

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا

O you who believe! Remain conscious
of Allaah and speak straight forward



Speak with Clarity

- Express what you see; why you see it that way; how you feel; and who you are.
- Believe that what you want to express is worthy of expression.
- Present conclusions as imaginings, as possibilities, as interpretations.
- Share where your conclusions come from.
- Avoid using “always” and “never”
- Instead of asking for agreement, ask “How do you see it differently?”

سورة البقرة - 143

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا

And thus we made you a
middlemost community



Lead Problem Solving

- Reframe. Translate
 - Your story into Different Stories.
 - Accusations into Intentions and Impact
 - Blame into Contribution
 - Judgments & Characterizations into Feelings
 - “What is wrong with you?” into “What is going on for you? Or “sounds like you are hurt”
- Make the other person feel like he/she’s heard and understood.



Conclusion - It is a Process, not a Project

- Sort out what happened, the emotions and identity issues
- Avoid insisting on being the right one.
- Avoid blame and reading others' intentions
- Try to understand the situation from a 'third-party' perspective
- Reframe the story: take on a learning mode.
- Invent options for each side's key concerns.
- Results that always go one way rarely last.