



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF LISTENING

SEPTEMBER 19, 2019

Be Bold! Listen for Common Ground

Participation Guide

By Sheila Bentley, Graham Bodie, Anita Dorczak, and Michael Purdy

The purpose of today's activity is to help you have a conversation that involves conflict or disagreement, but in a way that allows those involved to **listen for common ground, keep emotions in check, treat each other with respect, and focus on keeping the lines of communication open.**

The topic may be one that you have had numerous conversations about in the past, but without positive outcomes. Perhaps the disagreement is significant (it has big stakes), in which case there is likely considerable emotion that can get out of hand. Or perhaps you have experienced conversations marked more by arguing to win rather than mutual problem solving.

This Guide will walk you through three "Parts" that segment an otherwise difficult conversation into "Rounds." Imagining a conversation as a series of more manageable parts allows us to provide useful information about how to conduct each round and how to manage the emotion so that the conversation doesn't end in a heated exchange of insults with participants stomping off in frustration, or ending in a stalemate. Each round guides you through a process that focuses on keeping the lines of communication open:

PART 1: What's Keeping You from Listening? (Allow about 30 minutes)

PART 2: Following a Listening Process (Allow about 30 minutes)

PART 3: Getting to Solutions (Allow 1 hour or more)

September 19 is all about being bold—so what are you waiting for?!

NOTE: If you participated in the August 19 activity, you will notice that we have added some "prework" to the Participation Guide in Parts 1 and 2. This is due to the added complexity of issues that are highly contentious and that there may also be strong emotions being expressed. These two factors suggest that participants will benefit from taking some steps at the beginning in order to be prepared to address these factors. For today's conversation, start at Part 1 and go through this Participation Guide as it is organized.



Suggested schedule:

PART 1: Can be done as prework on September 16, 17, and 18, or can be done first on September 19

PART 2: September 19

PART 3: September 19 (with follow-up as needed)

If it is impossible for you to carve out two hours of uninterrupted time, we invite you to accomplish Part 1 (Rounds 1, 2 and 3) as prework prior to September 19 (see suggested schedule). It is important that both Part 2 (Rounds 4 and 5) and Part 3 (Rounds 6-9) be accomplished as a team, with all those who have a stake in the decision. Of course, if the decision is highly complex, or if there are parts that will require more than one conversation, we invite you to accomplish as much as you can for this year’s International Day of Listening.

**PART 1: What’s Keeping You from Listening?
Purpose, Passion, and Process**

Part 1 focuses on factors that might interfere with your ability, desire, or effectiveness while listening. Each of these rounds will focus on a different factor that might be keeping you from listening to your fullest potential.

We have provided a suggested schedule for Part 1 that occurs over the three days prior to International Day of Listening. If you are going to accomplish all of Part 1 along with Parts 2 and 3 on September 19, then ignore the dates: the content is the same.

Monday: September 16

Round 1: Purpose: Identify the conflict. Invite all conversation participants to define how they see the conflict. The key questions to address in Round 1 are:

- Are you all talking about the same thing? If not, you won’t be listening for the right purpose.
- Is there more than one issue?

What is the conflict? _____



Once the conflict is identified, have all participants set goals for this conversation. What would you like to achieve through this conversation?

What are your goals for this conversation?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____

Tuesday: September 17

Round 2: Passion: Now that you have identified (and agreed on) the conflict and established goals, it is time to address how you feel about this topic.

What emotions are you experiencing? To keep it simple, circle those that apply:

- Mad** **Sad** **Glad**
- Surprise** **Afraid** **Disgust**

List any other emotions you are experiencing:

How are these emotions keeping you from listening to your fullest potential?

What could YOU do in this conversation to help alleviate the emotions?

Watch for signals that emotions might be interfering with your ability to hold a meaningful conversation. Notice when your shoulders stiffen, your jaw clenches, the hair on the back of your neck stands up, or your body tenses. If you are experiencing strong emotion, your body may be in the *fight or flight* mode. As a result, you may not be fully processing all aspects of the situation, including what others are saying. Not fully hearing or understanding others lowers your chances for finding common ground.

Take note of emotions as you begin to engage in the conversation. If your ability to listen is being overpowered by your emotions, try taking a break. Review the Rules of Engagement (see Part 2, Round 4) at any point where you sense your emotions are taking over. Have an observer interrupt when rules aren't being followed. Allow for participants to call for a time out if they need one.

Wednesday: September 18

Round 3: Process: Identify what needs to change in order to hold a successful conversation. Review the goals that you want to accomplish. Refer to the chart below, then examine the inputs to see what needs to change before you hold the conversation. Are there inputs that cause the conversation to be ineffective from the beginning, i.e., would it be better to hold the conversation on neutral turf?

Examine the processes. How is the conversation conducted? Does the conversation follow a set pattern—a pattern of behaviors that have occurred before, and they are the same ones that lead to negative outcomes.

Inputs, Processes, and Outcomes of the Listening Process

<u>Inputs</u>	+	<u>Processes</u>	=	<u>Outcomes</u>
Environment		Listening Habits		Message Understood
People Involved		Listening Behaviors		Empathy
Listening habits		Hearing		Correct Action Taken
Past history		Attending		Relationship Improved
Prior knowledge		Comprehending		Information Gained
Expectations		Responding		
Attitudes		Remembering		
Time available				

- Examine the processes:
- How is the conversation conducted?
 - Does the conversation follow a set pattern—a pattern of behaviors that have occurred before, and they are the same ones that lead to negative outcomes?
 - Do you have the right people involved?
 - Would it be better to meet on neutral turf?
 - Is everyone up-to-date on the past history, or does it need to be reviewed?
 - Does everyone have the necessary prior knowledge?
 - Are there some attitudes that need to be changed?
 - Do you need to establish some rules of engagement?
 - Would an observer or “referee” help?
 - Do you need to create a way to capture the information, commitments made, actions to be taken, including dates and responsible party?

From your perspective, what needs to change? Write a summary.

International Day of Listening / Thursday, September 19, 2019
Be Bold: Listen for Common Ground

PART 2: Following a Listening Process

Have a volunteer read the following two paragraphs:

Today, we are going to discuss a topic/issue that may produce disagreement. It is our intention to have a respectful conversation in which participants listen to each other to seek understanding and to find common ground that can be used to lay a foundation for a solution. At any time if emotions start to become too intense and are affecting the conversation negatively, anyone can request a time out. This could be for 10-15 minutes while people take a break and allow emotions to cool and people can continue discussion in a respectful way. Or it could be longer.

The goal of today's conversation is not for anyone to win an argument, but rather for all of us to participate in a conversation that keeps the lines of communication open. This will allow us to begin to solve a problem and move forward in implementing the solutions. To assist us in this process, we are going to adopt a few rules of engagement.

Read each rule--you can ask for different volunteers, going around the room reading the rules out loud.

Rules of Engagement

1. Commit to finding common ground.
2. Come with an attitude of wonder—why would the other person feel as they do?
3. Do not interrupt.
4. Allow the speaker to finish his/her thoughts.
5. Respect the other person's views and show respect as you listen.
6. Put away cell phones and other devices that cause interruptions.
7. Avoid listening only for what you can disagree with.
8. When appropriate, restate what the other person said in your own words to show that you have listened and understood.

After all rules of engagement have been read, ask the group if they want to comment or add anything—if there is anything they disagree with or will have trouble following. If the group seems accepting of these rules, ask for a verbal commitment: Are these rules of engagement something we can agree to follow for our conversation today?

Guide for Observer

1. Select a participant to act as an observer. (Or you can invite a neutral person to take on this role.)
2. After each party states his/her position, the observer will summarize what has been said until the statement accurately reflects the content of each participant's message for all parties to listen to.
3. Next, the observer will describe or comment on the body language of each party.
4. The observer will inquire if it was helpful to the parties to hear his/her comments. If yes, he/she will continue to intervene if not he/she will suggest engaging a mediator (with proper training), an arbitrator or a collaborative attorney.
5. The observer can also act as a referee to interrupt the conversation when someone is not following the Rules of Engagement.

Round 4: Find the Common Ground:

What areas do you already have agreement about?

Review the thoughts about Purpose, Passion, and Process

What areas of common ground do you have? i.e., You would all like to solve this problem.

You would all like to have this conversation in a more respectful and productive manner.

You agree that it is a complex problem that will require more than one solution.

Have each person write out their understanding of the group’s Common Ground

Round 5: State the conflict:

As an introduction to the conflict you will be discussing, go around the group and ask each person to state what they think the conflict is. (What is the problem that needs to be solved.)

Do you all agree on what the conflict is? If not, you won’t be able to find a solution because you aren’t addressing the same problem.

Do you need to address more than one conflict that is under the umbrella of the issue you are discussing? If so, list all of the conflicts, prioritize the issues that make up this conflict, and start with the most important issue. Or choose the conflict that comes first in the sequence. You may need to save the other conflicts for another session.

(Note: Another technique that can be used here is to ask each member not only to state what the conflict is but to give a solution: What would it take to resolve this conflict for you?)

What is the conflict that will guide our conversation today?

International Day of Listening / Thursday, September 19, 2019
Be Bold: Listen for Common Ground

PART 3: Getting to Solutions

Round 6: Determine whether the conflict exists in a closed system, an open system, or a combination.

Closed vs. Open System in Conflict

Closed System: one with limited resources, such as time, money, responsibility for tasks, equipment, natural resources, etc.

Examples of a closed system:

- If you get a raise, there is less money for my raise.
- If you get assigned fewer responsibilities that must be achieved, then I have to do those responsibilities.
- You don't have the power that you think you should have. (Can the power be shared, or do you need to establish who has the power and in which situations?)
- Conflicts over natural resources, such as land and water, are closed system conflicts because the resources are limited.

Open System: one where the resources are not limited, but we aren't getting what we want or need—such as love, respect, or appreciation.

- If you already have one child, and a second child is born, you don't have half as much love to give. You can love each child equally and more. (But you do have limited time, money, and other resources—which are part of a closed system.)
- You don't feel that your work is appreciated.
- You don't feel that you are getting the respect you deserve.

Resolving a conflict in an open system is often a matter of letting others know that you feel underappreciated, disrespected, or unloved, etc., and let them know what you need or want in order to feel appreciated, respected, or loved. It may not be money, but simply more praise, more time spent with you, specific examples being given of how you are appreciated.

Is the conflict a closed system or an open system? _____

If it is a closed system, what is the limited resource? _____

If it is an open system, what is the want or need that is not being met?

Round 7: Identify which conflict management style would be appropriate for this conflict.

Collaborative Conflict Resolution

In collaborative conflict resolution, it is important to first establish the goals. It happens often that the parties involved will express similar goals, which then enables us to find common ground early. The goals are future oriented so the discussion about them takes us away from the present, which may be filled with tension and sometimes a lot of anger. What then follows is listening, paraphrasing, and finding common ground. Refer to the goals that you established in Round 1.

Five Conflict Management Styles

According to K.W. Thomas and R.H. Kilmann, there are five conflict management styles:

1. **Avoiding** – This is when you avoid the issue and avoid having the conversation. You aren't helping the other party reach their goals, and you aren't assertively pursuing your own.
2. **Accommodating** – This involves cooperating to a high-degree, and perhaps even at your expense, meaning you may not get what you want or meet your goals, objectives, or desired outcomes. Sometimes, however, it is more important to you to resolve the conflict than get what you want.
3. **Collaborating** – This is where you partner with the other party to achieve both of your goals—to win as much as possible for each party. This avoids the “win-lose” option and seeks a “win-win” outcome.
4. **Competing** – This seeks a “win-lose” outcome—with you being the winner. You act in a very assertive or aggressive way to achieve your goals, without cooperating with the other party, and often not being concerned about the other party's desires. Your win is often at the expense of the other party.
5. **Compromising** – This is sometimes described as the “lose-lose” scenario where neither party really achieves everything they want. This requires a moderate level of assertiveness and cooperation. In some situations, getting some of what you want is more important than getting none of what you want.

Using the Five Conflict Management Styles to Their Best Advantage

1. **Avoiding:** Choose your battles. It's not always worth it to create a conflict just to fight a battle, especially if it is over something that doesn't really matter to you. If the outcome matters to you, then this is not the style to use. This works when the issue is trivial or when you have no chance of winning. It can also be effective when the issue would be very costly. It's also very effective when the atmosphere is emotionally charged and you need to create some space. Sometimes issues will resolve themselves, but hope is not a strategy, and in general, just avoiding a conflict is not a good long-term strategy.
2. **Accommodating:** This works when the other person is the expert or has a better solution. It is also useful if it is more important to preserve the relationship than get what you want on this issue.
3. **Collaborating:** This can be effective for complex scenarios where you need to find a new solution. This can also mean re-framing the challenge to create a bigger picture approach with room for everybody's ideas. The downside is that it requires a high degree of trust and a willingness to work together. Reaching a consensus can require a lot of time and effort to get everybody on board and to find the win-win solution.
4. **Competing:** This approach may be appropriate for emergencies when time is of the essence, or when you need quick, decisive action, and people are aware of and support the approach. This may also be the only approach that is appropriate if for example, there are limited resources or options (either I win or you do). In this case, try marrying this conflict to another limited-resources conflict, so that each party wins something.
5. **Compromising:** It may be appropriate for scenarios where you need a temporary solution, or where both sides have equally important goals. The trap is to fall into compromising as an easy way out, when collaborating would produce a better solution.

If the conflict is in a closed system, competing often becomes the conflict management style that is used. It does not have to be. Accommodating, collaborating, and compromising could also be used. If you use accommodating, you give the advantage to the other person. This can be made to be more equal by "marrying" the conflict to another that exists in a closed system. For instance, you cook, and I'll do the dishes. It could also be resolved using a compromise: you do the dishes this week, and I'll do them next week. You could also use collaborating: you bring the dishes over, and I'll put them in the dishwasher. If the conflict is in an open system, since there is not a limited resource, competing is not necessary. Accommodating, collaborating, or compromising could be used.

Which conflict management style seems most appropriate for this conflict?

Round 8: Brainstorm what solutions are available.

Be sure to get input from all group members as to available and desirable solutions.

Available solutions:

Round 9: Revisit your goals for this conversation, determine which conflict management style will support achieving those goals, and select the solution (or combination) that meets the goals you set and works best for all parties.

Consider using a “weighted vote” rather than giving each person only one vote.

One way to do this is to give each person ten pennies. Write the solutions on separate pieces of paper, place these apart on a table, and have each person vote their ten pennies, putting the most pennies on their favorite solution. When voting, people need to split their ten pennies on at least two or three solutions, so that they don't spend all ten pennies on the solution they suggested. For example, they could distribute the pennies as 8, 1, and 1 if they felt strongly about one solution. If they like a number of solutions equally, they could divide the pennies up evenly on those solutions, i.e., 3, 3, and 4 or 2, 2, 2, 2, 2. The more pennies that are spent on a solution, the stronger the commitment will be to making that solution work.

After the pennies have been placed, this also gives the whole group information about how strongly (or not) a solution is supported. If there is an obvious heavy favorite, go with that one. But if more than one solution has good support, explore whether more than one solution can be applied—if not all at once, perhaps over time other solutions could be implemented. This brings about stronger support for the changes being made, and it is a very transparent way to make decisions.

Best solution or solutions _____

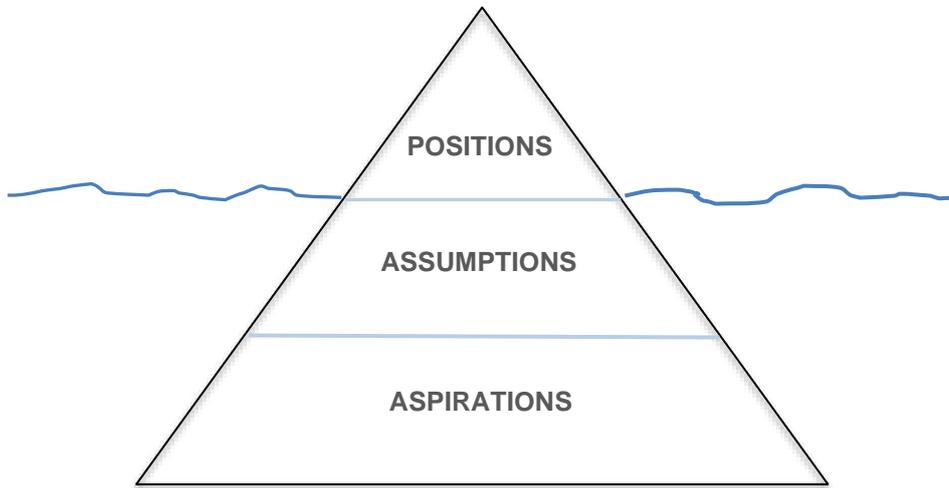
Establish an implementation plan, including follow-up meetings. (If more meetings are needed to resolve any other related issues or the next most important conflict, identify that conflict, and start over with Round 1.)

Concluding the Conversation:

1. Thank participants for sharing and listening.
2. Review what the conflict was that was identified.
3. Review the goals that were set.
4. Review the common ground.
5. Review important points made and what has been agreed to.
6. Review who will be responsible for any actions agreed to and due dates for these actions.
7. Set a follow-up date to check on progress and make sure solutions are working.

Iceberg of Conflict

In his book *Positive Intelligence*, Shirzad Chamine describes a model for **conflict management**: The Iceberg of Conflict. The Iceberg of Conflict has three layers: Positions, Assumptions, and Aspirations.



The iceberg shows that what we see is the **position** that somebody takes, but as with icebergs, we don't see what is under the water—the underlying assumptions and aspirations.

Positions

Position is where conflict often occurs because for every position there is generally an opposite position, and taking a position--especially a strong one--can often generate an automatic opposite position. Resolving a conflict at this level is difficult because it requires one party to give up their position or the two parties have to meet somewhere in the middle (i.e., a compromise).

Assumptions

Explore the assumptions. If you start looking at assumptions, you might find you had the assumptions wrong, or that you misread the intentions. Misreading intentions is a common source of conflict. Be sure to check any assumptions you are making, rather than assuming you know what they are.

Aspirations

This is where the common ground can be found. Aspirations are those big goals we hope to achieve, like world peace. Don't we all want world peace? When we realize we have common ground here, it makes it easier to find common ground in our positions. (i.e., If we all want world peace, it might be easier to agree on a solution to gun control.) You might start by asking, "What do we want to get from this conversation?" or "What do we hope to achieve today by having this conversation?"