

# Courageous Conversations

Connecting the Dots Conference  
October 10, 2023

Presenters:

Tina Jordan, Performance Consultant & Educator, Organizational Learning

Steve Vinson, DEI Program Manager, Michigan Medicine



ORGANIZATIONAL  
LEARNING  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

# Session agreements

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- Be present and engaged
- Expect and accept discomfort and joy
- Anticipate unfinished business



# Session goals

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- Define a “courageous” conversation
- Explore principles of courageous conversations
- Consider ways to hold a courageous conversation (guidelines and tools)



# Definition of a “courageous” conversation

Courageous conversations are...

discussions that require you to speak candidly, openly, and about topics that may be sensitive and/or uncomfortable. Courageous conversations have the potential of creating strong emotions.



Scenario:  
Difficult or Courageous Conversation?

## PARTICIPANTS:

Please submit in the Q/A.

What differences did you notice between the difficult conversation and the courageous conversation?

“difficult”

or

“crucial”

conversations



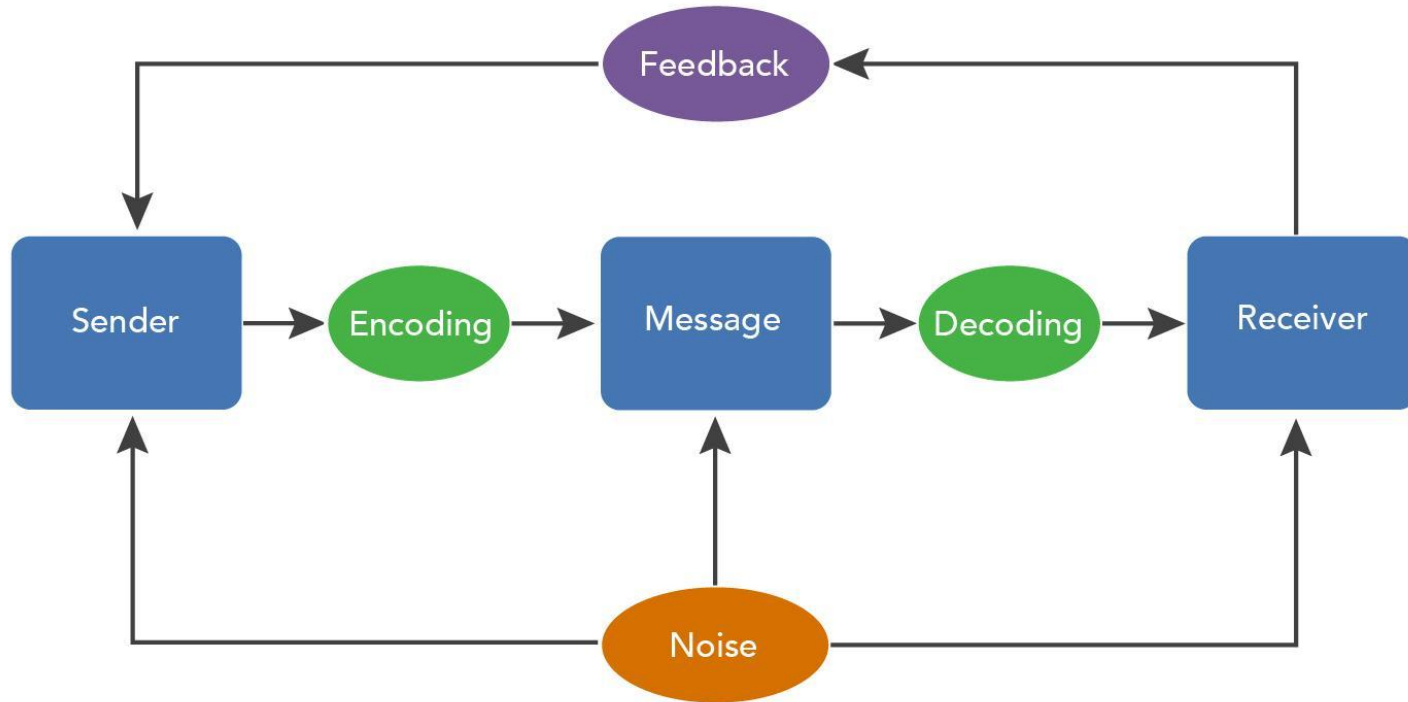
Communication is a **skill** that you can learn...

If you're willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of every part of your life.

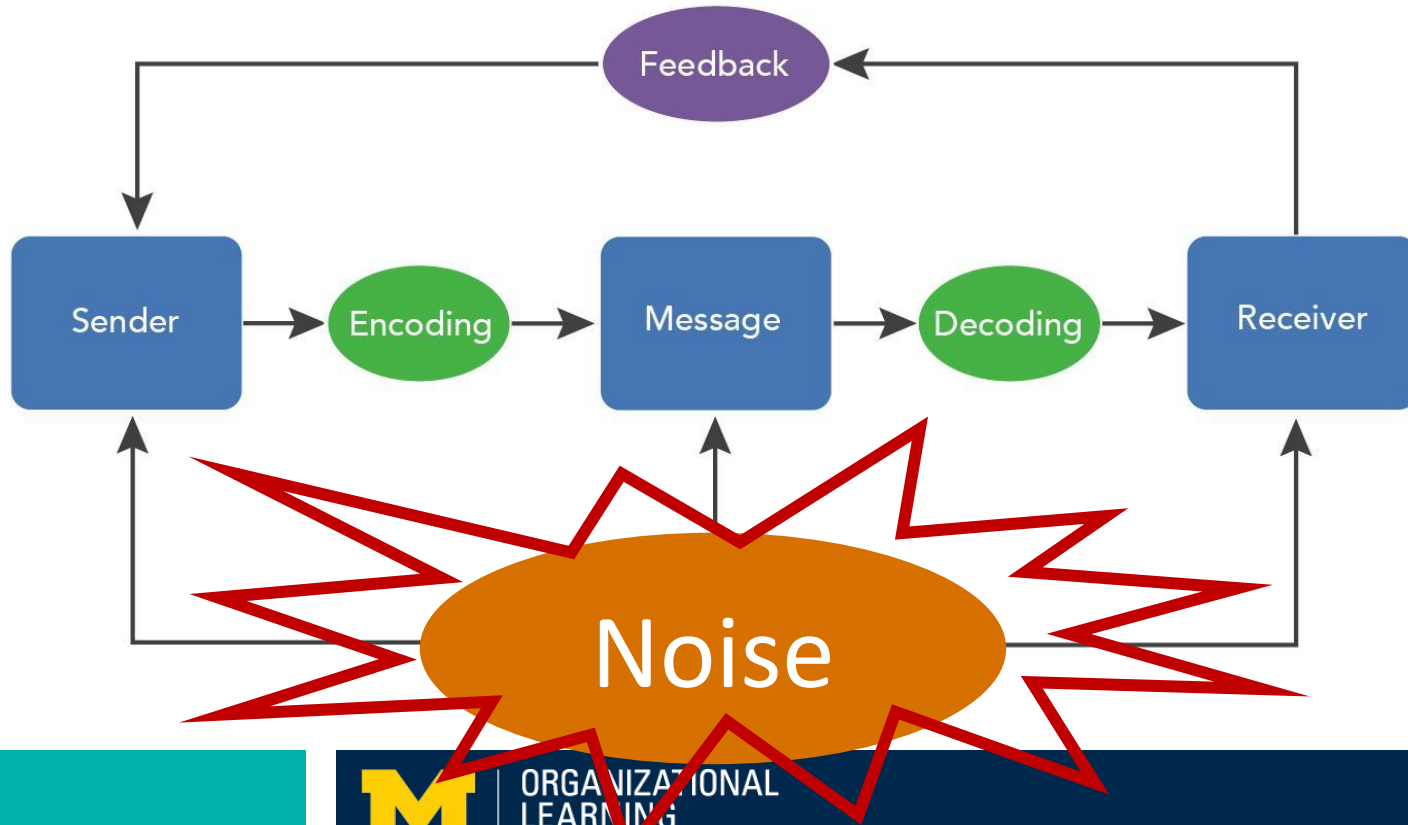
~ Brian Tracy



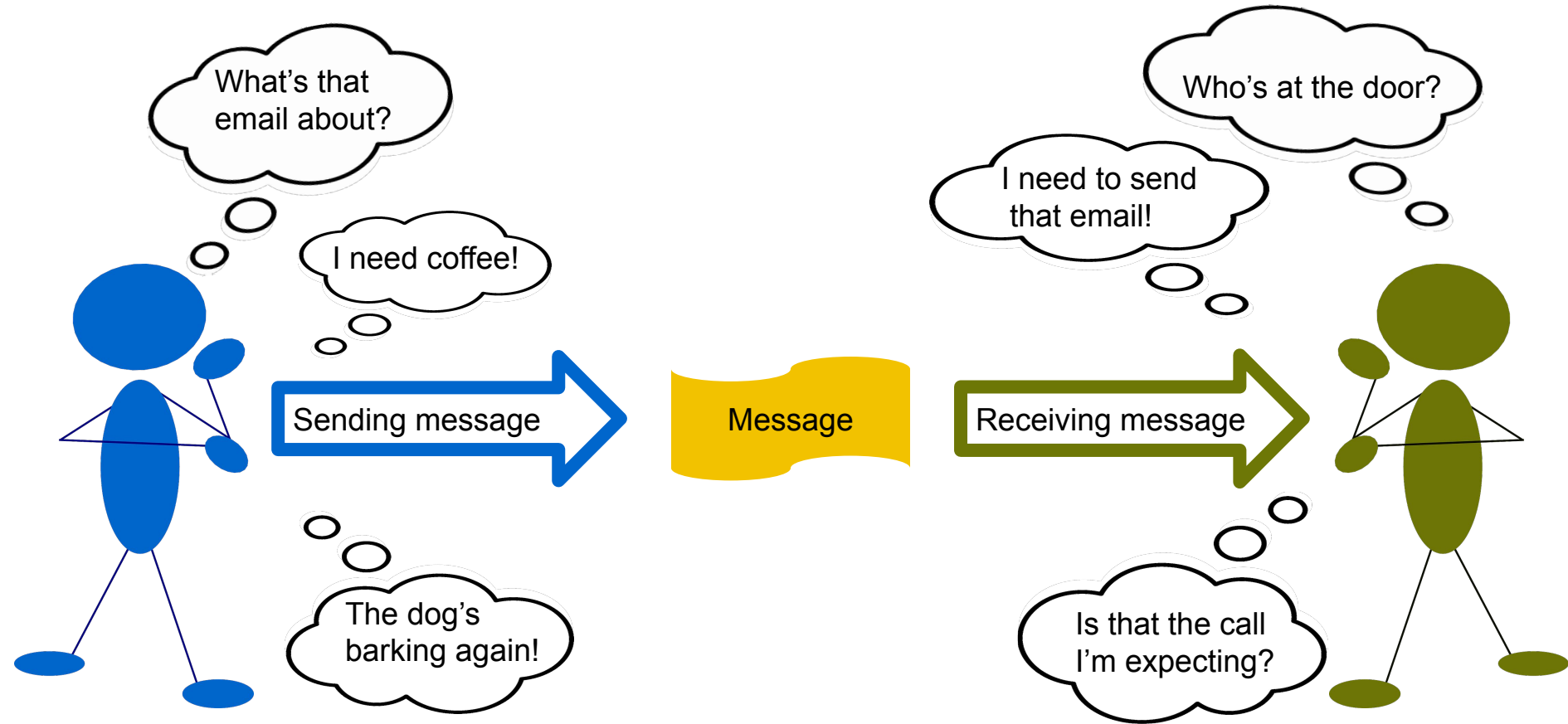
# Communication Process



# Communication Process: Noise!



# Communication Noise



Dialogue	Debate	Discussion
Is about learning without judgment with a view to understand and find places of agreement	Is about listening to find flaws and weaknesses in other people's ideas	Uses listening to find places of disagreement but to avoid conflict. Looks for rationality
Has participants broaden their own perspective, discover shared meaning	Win an argument / prove the other person is wrong	Have a conversation, present ideas, often in academic settings
A form of communication that explores thoughts and feelings, invites differences of opinion and experience	A form of communication between two or more people where an issue is discussed and opposing arguments are put forward	A form of communication where ideas are presented, often in a clear, neutral way
Allows for challenges to preconceived notions and names areas of conflict and difference	Often focuses on individual backgrounds as irrelevant or as cause for disparagement	Ignores the influence of individuals' backgrounds or status in the conversation
Focus is on building relationships, validating other's experiences	Assumes there is one right answer, seeks to prove others wrong and win the argument	Seeks new information, provides answers, avoids conflict and does not seek joint action for change

## Discussion

Uses listening to find places of disagreement but to avoid conflict.  
Looks for rationality

Have a conversation, present ideas, often in academic settings

A form of communication where ideas are presented, often in a clear, neutral way

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Scenario:  
Discussion conversation format

## Debate

Is about listening to find flaws and weaknesses in other people's ideas

Win an argument / prove the other person is wrong

A form of communication between two or more people where an issue is discussed and opposing arguments are put forward

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Scenario:  
Debate conversation format

## Dialogue

Is about learning without judgment with a view to understand and find places of agreement

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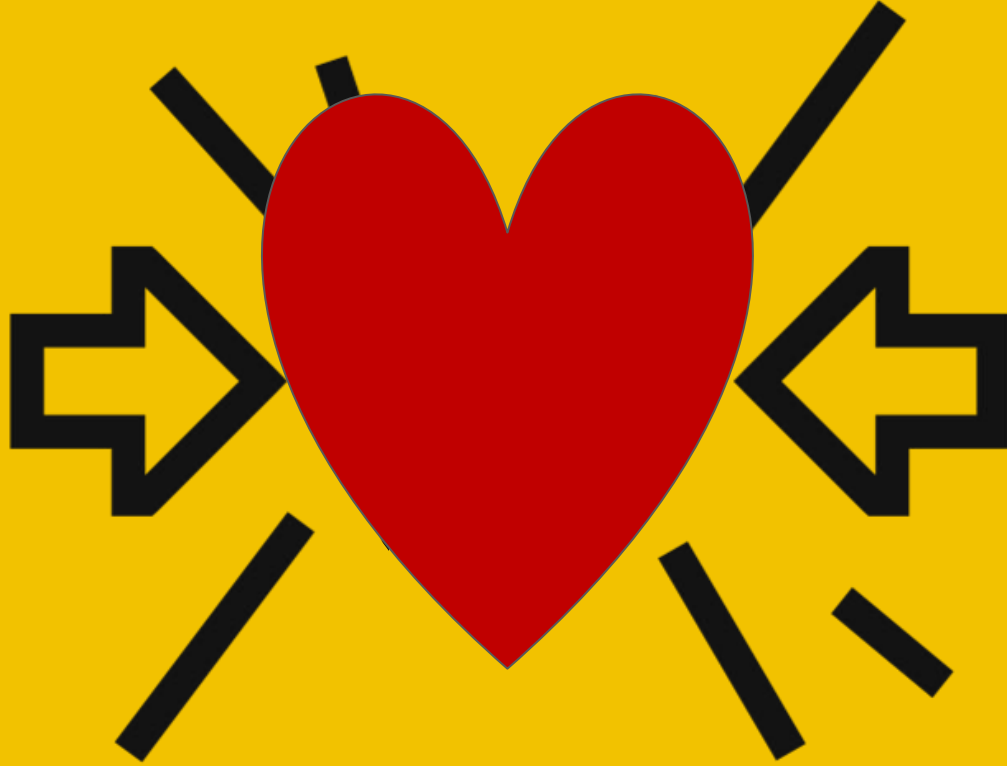
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Scenario:  
Dialogue conversation format

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# Principles of a courageous conversation

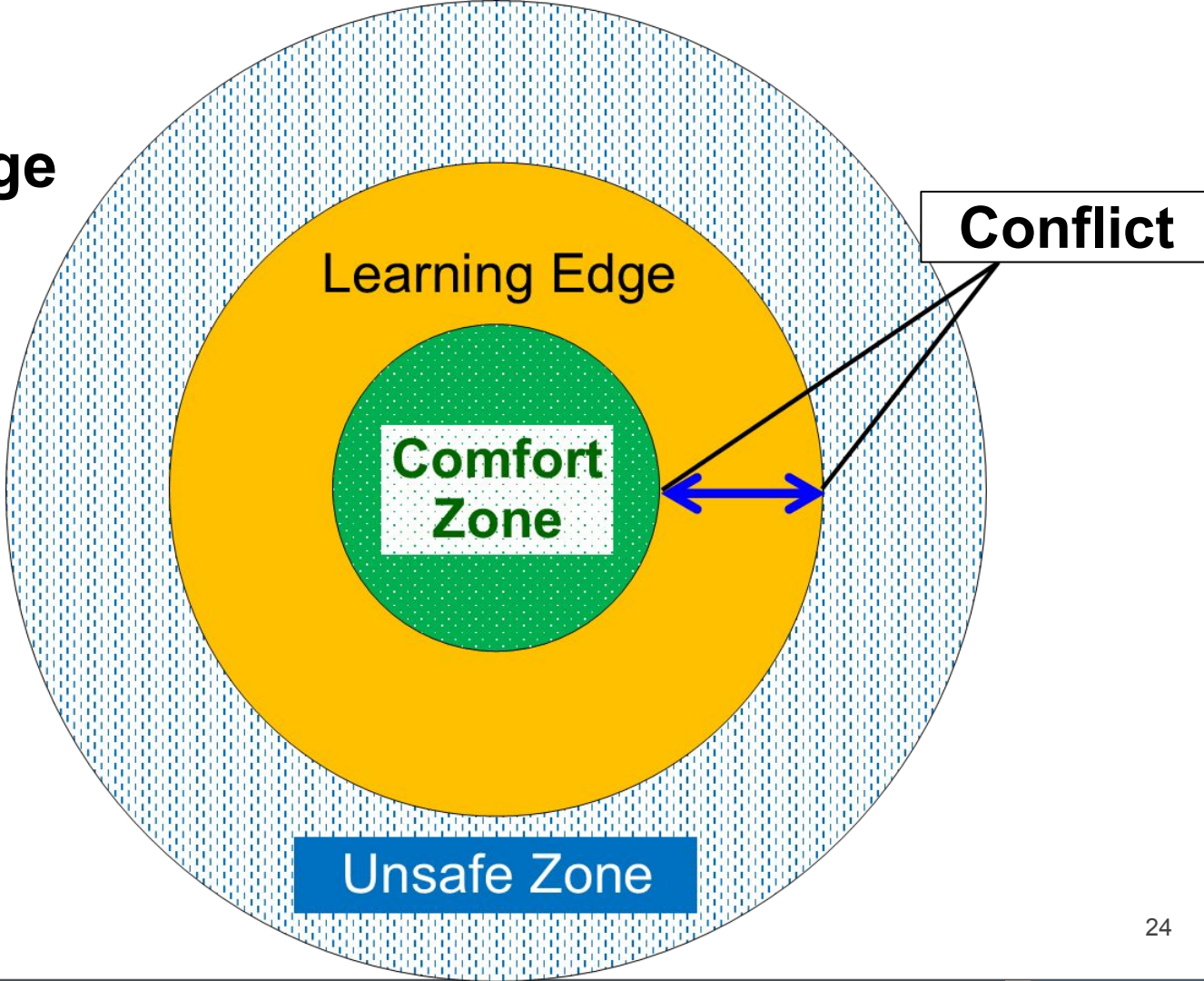
**Conflict is good!**



# Conflict



# The Learning Edge





Scenario:  
Conflict is good!

<b>Positive or Healthy Conflict</b>	<b>Negative or Unhealthy Conflict</b>
Differing views are handled in a productive, constructive way	There is no good-faith attempt to problem-solve
Differences are acknowledged	Differences are ignored in order to make one's point
Seeks to understand; listens to understand	Seeks to change the other's mind; listens to respond and not to understand
Discomfort is communicated respectfully by using "I" statements	Discomfort is ignored/denied or negative emotions are expressed inappropriately and/or hurtfully
Collaboration leads to a resolution	Hostile conflict leads to adverse outcomes

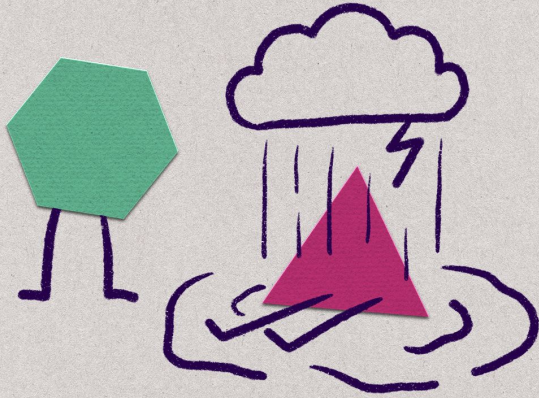
# Zoom Poll

A Colleague says: (sounding exhausted) “I can't believe how much work I have to finish this week. It's overwhelming. It's also my mother's 90th birthday and I'm having a party for her Friday evening.”

What kind of responses are these?

- Sympathetic
- Empathetic
- Compassionate

## Sympathy



I'm sorry you're in pain.

DISTANT

## Empathy



I can practice perspective-taking by imagining what this pain might feel like.

SHARED

## Compassion



You are suffering, and I will do what I can to help.

CONNECTED AND  
ACTION-ORIENTED

Be  
brave

A "**brave space**" is the "creation of a challenging environment that encourages equal participation across representative identities."

Bravery is necessary, instead of safety, because "learning necessarily involves not merely risk, but the pain of giving up a former condition in favor of a new way of seeing things." (Boostrom, 1998)





PsychHub

# WHAT IS CULTURAL HUMILITY?

Scenario:  
Bravery, Cultural Humility



# 4 Positions of Power

Power OVER	Power TO/WITH	Power WITHIN
Uses coercion, authority	Shares power by trusting and empowering	You feel comfortable sharing power
A “knower,” owner of the truth. “I’m right and you’re wrong.”	Offers positive and constructive feedback	You accept mistakes and corrects them
Blames others	“Let’s find the solution together” mindset	You voice questions and concerns
Uses shame and fear	Fosters a climate of respect, trust and openness	You ask for positive and constructive feedback
Criticizes publicly	People feel safe and free to voice questions and concerns	You operate as a learner and work in progress
Tone and volume can be laced with anger and frustration	Clarifies and validates alignment	You are the source of calm in stormy situations
Fights every fight	Stays grounded and listens effectively to opposing views	You are confident in capabilities hold yourself accountable to others/commitments
Punishes others (perhaps emotionally, passive-aggressively)	Recognizes and praises	You ask for help

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# Scenario: Power Dynamics

# You

Be who you choose to be  
no matter who others are or how they act.

# Others

Every person has intrinsic value and deserves respect, regardless of faulty thinking and/or poor behavior.

# How to hold a courageous conversation?





1 Way  
Right Way  
Formula

Plan

Prepare

Practice

Put into effect



Plan

Prepare

Practice

Put into effect

# Purpose and needs assessment

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Consider:

- What is the purpose of holding the courageous conversation?
- What are the risks of having or not having a courageous conversation?
- What are the rewards of having or not having a courageous conversation?
- Where and when would be best to hold the conversation?
- What might come up during the conversation that I should prepare for?

Make a clear and committed choice!

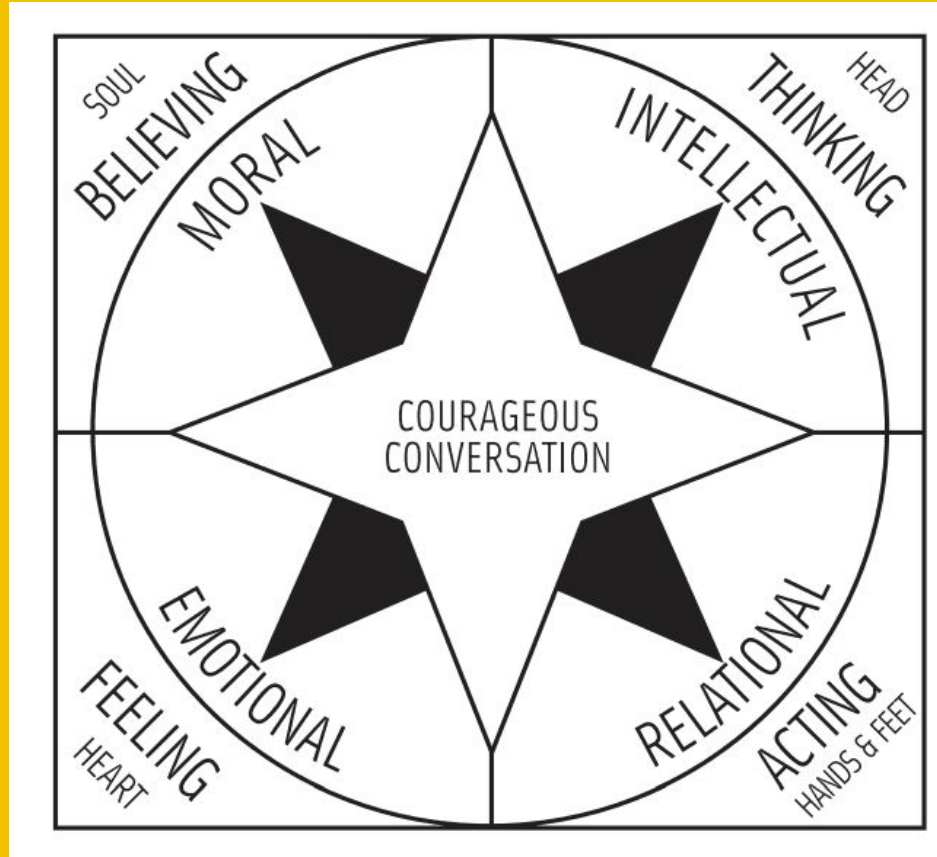


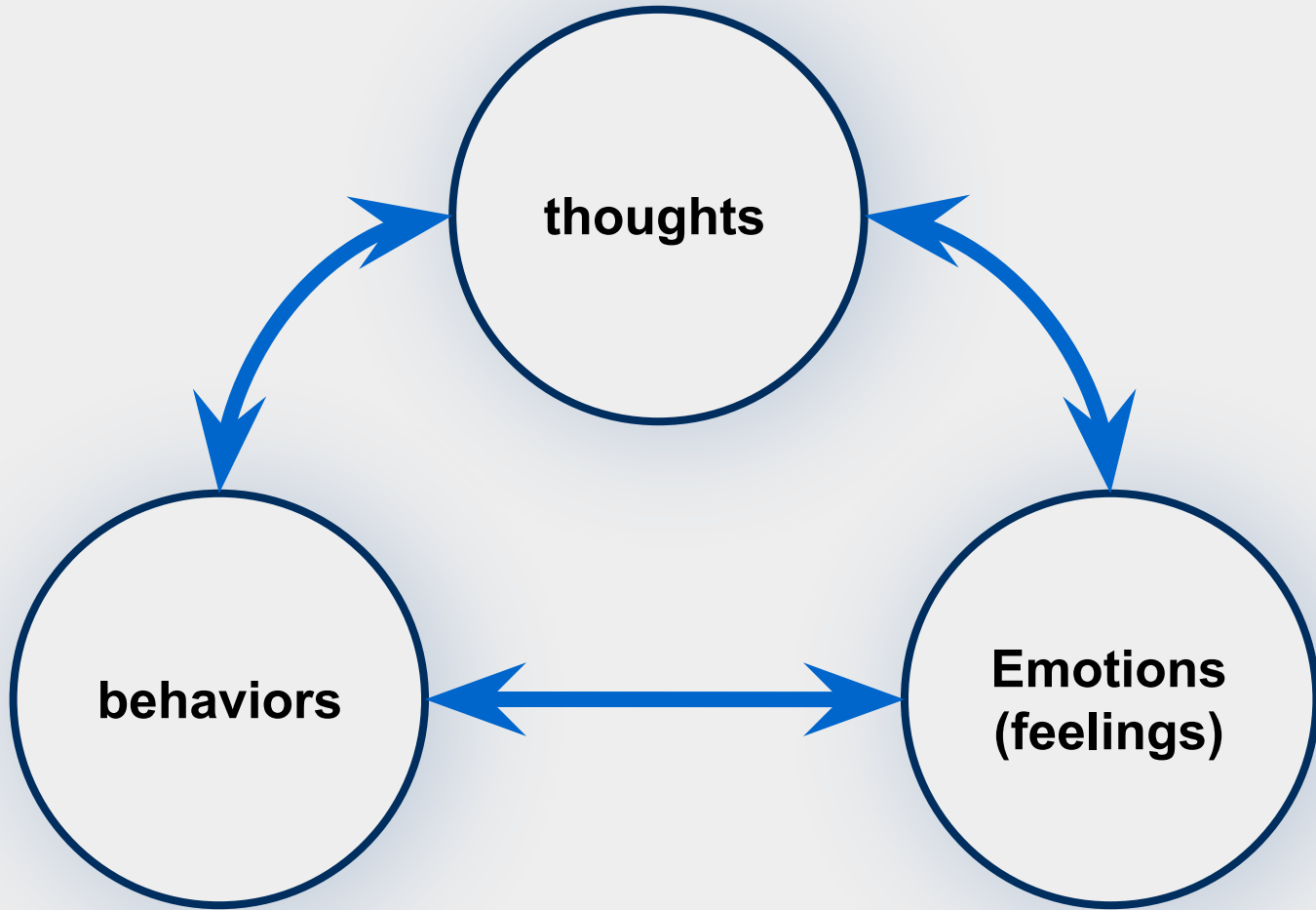
Plan

Prepare

Practice

Put into effect





# Courageous Conversations Invitations

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I'd like to talk about \_\_\_\_\_.  
I think we may have different  
ideas about how to \_\_\_\_\_.

I'd like to talk about  
\_\_\_\_\_ with you, but  
first I'd like to get your  
point of view.

I need your help with what just  
happened. Do you have a few  
minutes to talk?

I think we have different  
perceptions about \_\_\_\_\_.  
I'd like to hear your  
thinking on this.



Plan

Prepare

Practice

Put into effect

# CLARA Method

**Calm and Center:** Internally calm and center yourself before engaging in listening.

**Listen:** Listen with an intent to understand. Listen for underlying principles, cultural values, emotions, and issues behind what is being said. Listen for commonalities. Observe body language and tone of voice which may provide additional meaning. Listen for inherent needs and interests, not just what is said.

**Affirm:** Affirm the principles or issues in what was said, or simply the feelings or emotions that were expressed (“you care strongly about this”). Affirming is not agreeing, it’s acknowledging or recognizing what is shared. This can be done by simply repeating or rephrasing what was said.

**Respond:** Respond to the issues that were raised and the underlying needs behind them. Ask questions about what was said.

**Add:** Add information to the conversation. After seeking to understand, seek to be understood.











Practice!

Practice!

Practice!

Plan

Prepare

Practice

Put into effect

# Courageous conversation agreements

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- Stay engaged and committed
- Expect to experience discomfort
- Speak your truth
- Expect and accept unfinished business
- Care for each other is more important than being right



# Scenario: A Courageous Conversation

PARTICIPANTS:

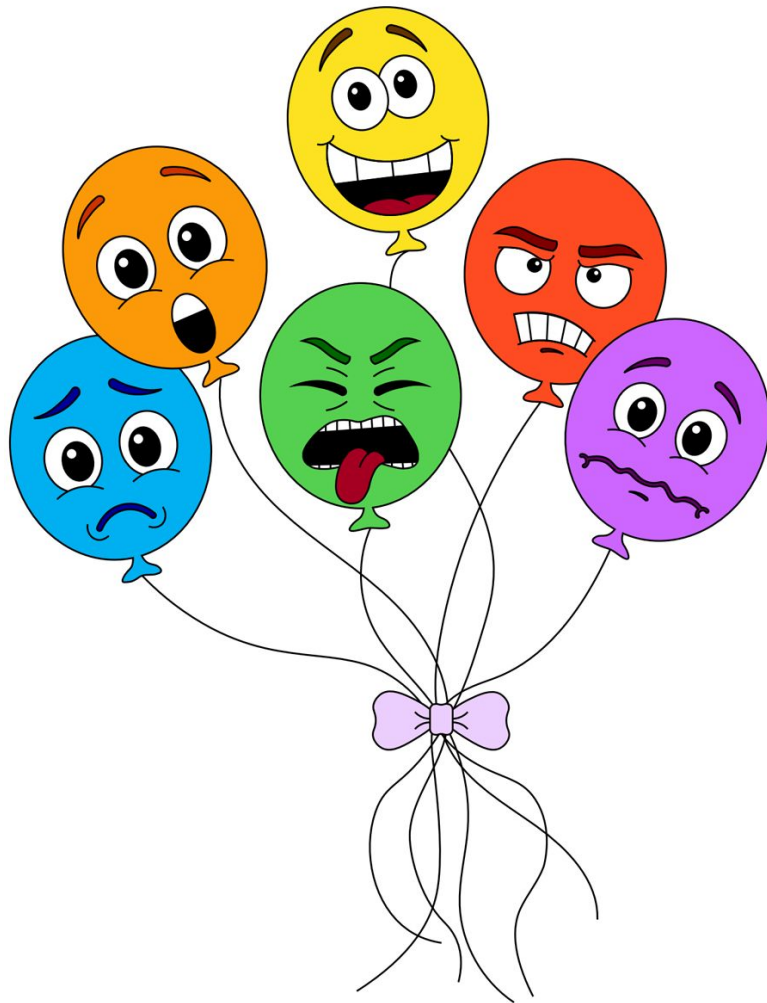
Please submit in Chat.

What Courageous Conversations  
Principles did you notice in that  
conversation?









# Connecting the Dots



## Remember:

- It's okay to be afraid, unsure
- It's more important to DO right than to BE right
- Don't expect perfection, but do work towards growth






We do the best we can with what we know, and when we know better, we do better.

— *Maya Angelou* —

AZ QUOTES



**Q & A**

# Resources

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- **“Establishing Brave Spaces: The Role of Safety/Comfort in Dialogue,”** The Project on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan, 2014 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H-8x9rvMFIVwjp0IKKUeeiOoQakEdSSw/view?usp=sharing>
- **“When an Argument Gets Too Heated, Here’s What to Say,”** by Liane Davey, Harvard Business Review, March 3, 2016 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1k3QMLQtpLEEy-Sq7rTHqWAK5OYxLxZB/view?usp=sharing>
- **“What is Intergroup Dialogue?”** The Project on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan, 2014 [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H86Vrz3RDeS\\_HA9bxtwdzV1tzIDyTSuA/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H86Vrz3RDeS_HA9bxtwdzV1tzIDyTSuA/view?usp=sharing)
- **“Developing Community Guidelines,”** The Project on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GopOcUiFI2m0iF-34aGhNt0z9R2LecHW/view?usp=sharing>
- **“Learning to Listen,”** The Project on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GxW7e\\_JsB\\_DaFerDXga3pWFXgVITARO8/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GxW7e_JsB_DaFerDXga3pWFXgVITARO8/view?usp=sharing)
- **“Ways of Being in Dialogue,”** The Project on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H68xU16GoyTLbgoHxOGTkTV5N-Nsm6Dg/view?usp=sharing>
- **“Connect with Empathy, But Lead with Compassion,”** R. Hougarrd, J. Carter, M. Afton, Harvard Business Review, December 23, 2021, <https://hbr.org/2021/12/connect-with-empathy-but-lead-with-compassion>
- **“What is Cultural Humility,”** PsychHub video, October 5, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c\\_wOnJJFfxE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_wOnJJFfxE)
- **The 4 Types of Power handout,** Brene Brown, 2020, <https://brenebrown.com/hubs/dare-to-lead/> and [https://brenebrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Values-and-Power\\_WebsiteDownload.pdf](https://brenebrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Values-and-Power_WebsiteDownload.pdf)



# Resources (continued)

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- “**LARA: Engaging Controversy with a Non-violent, Transformative Response**,” B. Tinker, 2004. workshop handout available by request from [info@LMFamily.org](mailto:info@LMFamily.org)
- “**Conflict Resolution Guide**,” Office of Student Conflict Resolution, University of Michigan <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Gm9RkxauWVh-KrkgkqvJx0fD5tSLIZPj/view?usp=sharing>
- “**Compassion vs. Empathy: What’s The Difference?**” Masterclass, 2022, <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/compassion-vs-empathy>
- *Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck, Embrace Change, and Thrive in Work and Life*, Dr. Susan David, 2016, <https://www.susandavid.com/book>
- “**How to Develop Successful Conflict Resolution Skills**,” Masterclass, June 7, 2021, <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-develop-successful-conflict-resolution-skills>
- “**How to Develop Problem Solving Skills: 4 Tips**,” MasterClass, June 7, 2021, <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-develop-problem-solving-skills>
- “**Positive Conflict: 4 Benefits of Positive Conflict in the Workplace**,” MasterClass, April 14, 2022, <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/positive-conflict>
- **Compassion Research Lab website**, [drshanesinclair.com](http://drshanesinclair.com), accessed September 2023
- **Making Change Happen: Power; Concepts for Revisioning Power for Justice, Equality and Peace**. Just Associates, 2006, <https://justassociates.org/>





# Resources (concluded)

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- “4 Types of Power: What are Power Over, Power With, Power To and Power Within?” Graeme Stuart, February 1, 2019, <https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2019/02/01/4-types-of-power/>
- “Exploring the 4 Types of Power in Leadership,” Cecilia Calderon, March 2021, Stop At Nothing, <https://www.stopatnothing.com/4-types-of-power/>
- **Courageous Conversations Toolkit**, Robert Glass, 2013, <http://stproject.org/wp-content/uploads/toolkit-files/courageous-conversations-toolkit.pdf>
- ***Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools and Beyond***, Glenn E. Singleton, August 31, 2021 (Third Edition), [https://www.amazon.com/Courageous-Conversations-About-Race-Achieving-dp-1071847120/dp/1071847120/ref=dp\\_ob\\_title\\_bk](https://www.amazon.com/Courageous-Conversations-About-Race-Achieving-dp-1071847120/dp/1071847120/ref=dp_ob_title_bk)
- ***A Provider's Guide to Brief Cognitive Behavioral Therapy***, pg 91, J. Cully, D. Dawson, J. Harner, A Teten Tharp, Department of Veterans Affairs South Central MIRECC, Houston, TX, 2020 [https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn16/docs/therapists\\_guide\\_to\\_brief\\_cbtmanual.pdf](https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn16/docs/therapists_guide_to_brief_cbtmanual.pdf)
- “Tips and Tools for Constructive Conflict Resolution,” Office of Student Conflict Resolution, University of Michigan <https://oscr.umich.edu/article/tips-and-tools-constructive-conflict-resolution>
- ***Humble inquiry*** (Second Edition), Edgar Schein, Peter Schein, February 23, 2021, <https://www.bkconnection.com/books/title/Humble-Inquiry-Second-Edition>

