



MASTERING TOUGH CONVERSATIONS AT WORK



High-Level **Overview**

- 1. Prevention
- 2. **A Structured Approach**
- 3. De-Escalating

**“You can’t
take it
personally”**



**Specific,
Observable,
Repeatable
Behaviours**



**“Then you
chuck the
yeast in...”**



Conflict Styles



Avoidance
40%



1

Prevention


Ask vs Tell

TERRY WILLIAMS 
THE PEOPLE ENGAGEMENT **EXPERTS**



Pull & Push Motivators - The **WIIFM** Grid

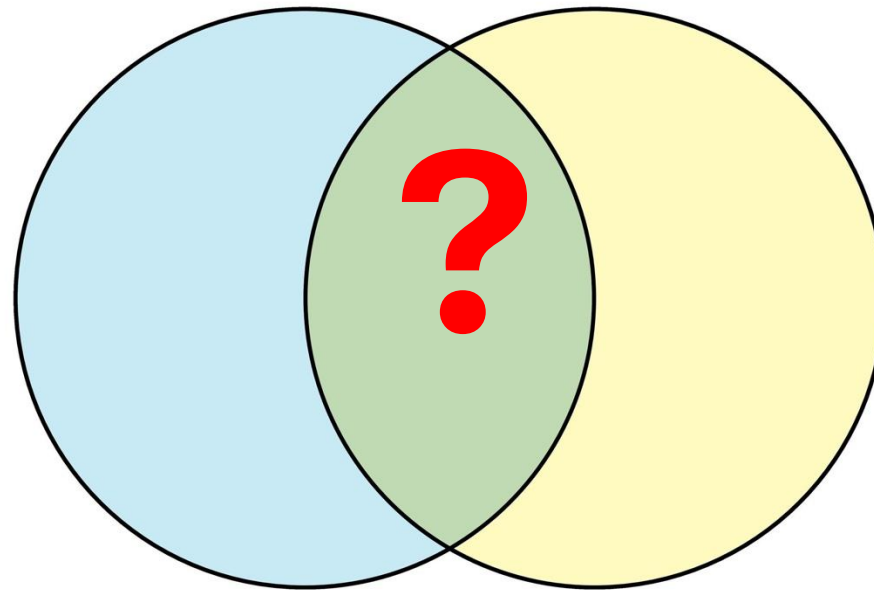
	What do they stand to gain if they do?	What do they stand to lose if they don't?
Professionally		
Personally		



**The average person hears
for meaning at only half
the speed at which the
average person speaks.**

kmh

Rapport has Value





2

The Structured Approach

Communication Frames



D.E.N.B.A.

X.Y.Z.

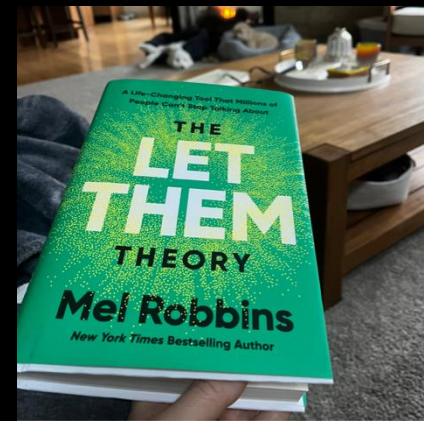
W.I.S.H.

S.B.I.

Mel Robbins

4 Steps

1. Acknowledge my responsibility
2. Define the desired outcome
3. Listen & validate
4. Restate the actual outcome



Frame 1: BRIDGE (Mediating Interpersonal Conflict)

Scenario 1: Interpersonal Conflict Between Two Employees

Process Name: The BRIDGE Framework for Conflict Facilitation

(BRIDGE = Bring Together, Reflect, Identify, Define, Generate, Execute)

This framework helps HR facilitate a constructive dialogue between employees experiencing unresolved tension or interpersonal conflict.

Step-by-Step Script Using BRIDGE

1. Bring Together (Initial Invite – Private 1:1s)

“Thanks for taking a few minutes to chat. I wanted to check in because I’ve picked up on some tension between you and [Name]. You’re both valued here, and I want to make sure we can address anything that might be getting in the way of a positive working relationship. Would you be open to a facilitated conversation to explore this?”

(Repeat similarly with the second employee. Ensure both consent.)

2. Reflect (Opening the Facilitated Conversation)

“Thank you both for being here. The goal today is to understand each other’s perspectives, not to assign blame, but to figure out what’s going on and what needs to change so you can work effectively together. I’ll help guide the conversation, and I’ll ask each of you to listen to understand, not just to respond. Is that something you’re comfortable with?”

3. Identify (Surfacing Perspectives)

“Let’s start by hearing from each of you about what’s been happening. [Name], would you be willing to go first and share your experience of what’s been difficult, keeping it focused on behaviour and impact, not intention or character?”

(Paraphrase and ask the second person to respond. Repeat in the other direction.)

4. Define (Clarify the Core Issues)

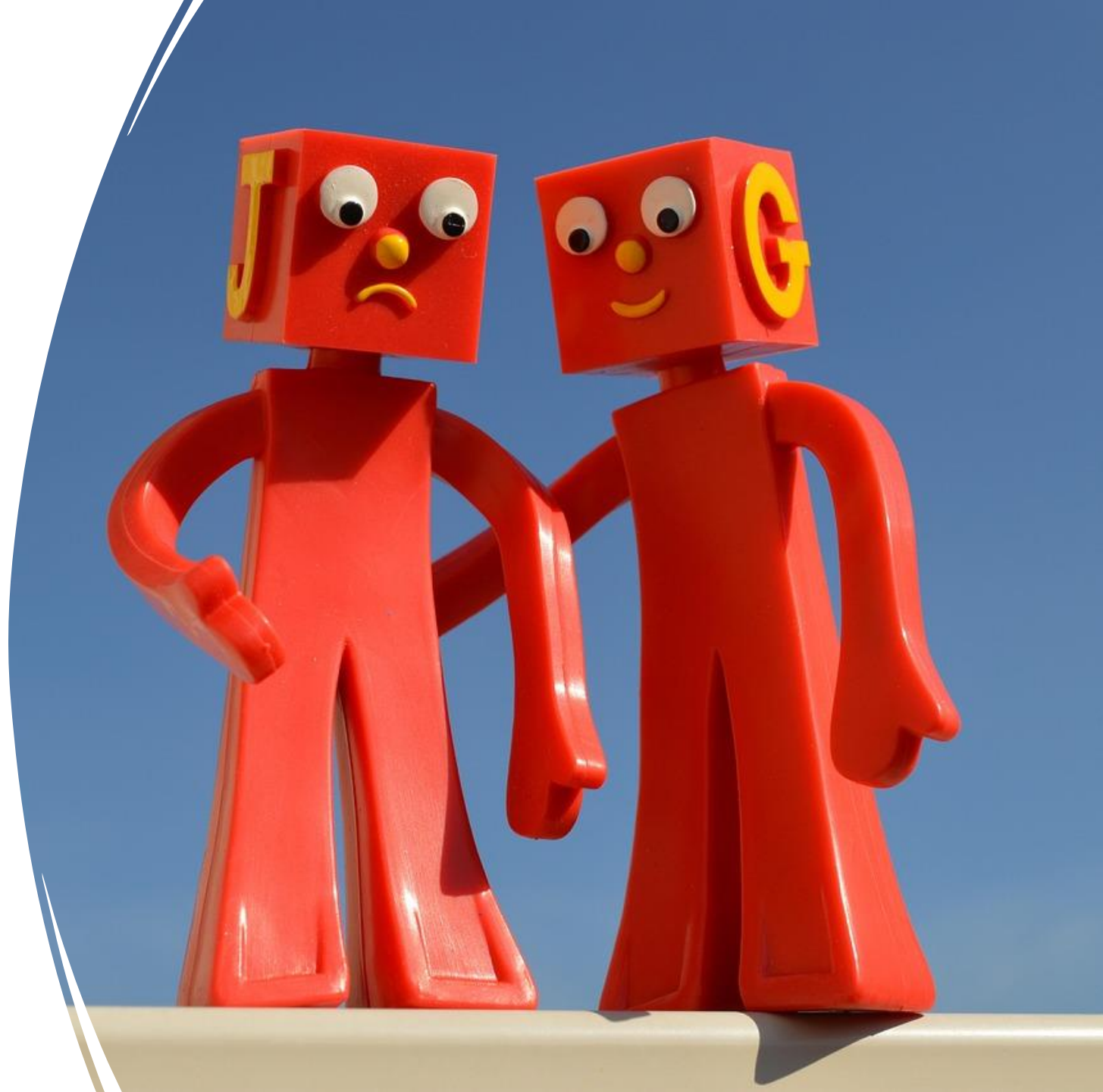
“I’m hearing that some of the key concerns are [list themes: miscommunication, tone in emails, avoidance, perceived disrespect]. Do those sound accurate? Is there anything important I’ve missed?”

5. Generate (Explore Solutions Together)

“Let’s look ahead now. What would ‘better’ look like in your day-to-day interactions? What specific behaviours or agreements would help you both move forward in a more constructive way?”

6. Execute (Confirm Agreements and Follow Up)

- “Thanks, that’s a really constructive start. Here’s what I’ve noted as the key agreements you’ve made... [List 2-3 specific agreements]. I’ll check in with each of you in a week and again in a month to see how things are going. If things go off track, let’s agree now to flag it early.”



Frame 2: CLIMB (Repeated Performance Improvement Failures)

1. Clarify (Set the Context of the Conversation)

“Thanks for meeting with me. I wanted to talk today because we’ve now had a few rounds of conversations about performance, including setting targets and supporting you with improvement plans. It’s important we take stock of where we’re at and what the path forward realistically looks like.”

2. Listen (Invite Reflection from the Employee)

“Before I go further, I’d like to hear your perspective. How do you feel things have been going since the last PIP? Are there any barriers you feel are still getting in the way?”

(Let them speak. Use silence and empathy, but also redirect if they become vague.)

3. Indicate Expectations (Name the Pattern + State Impact)

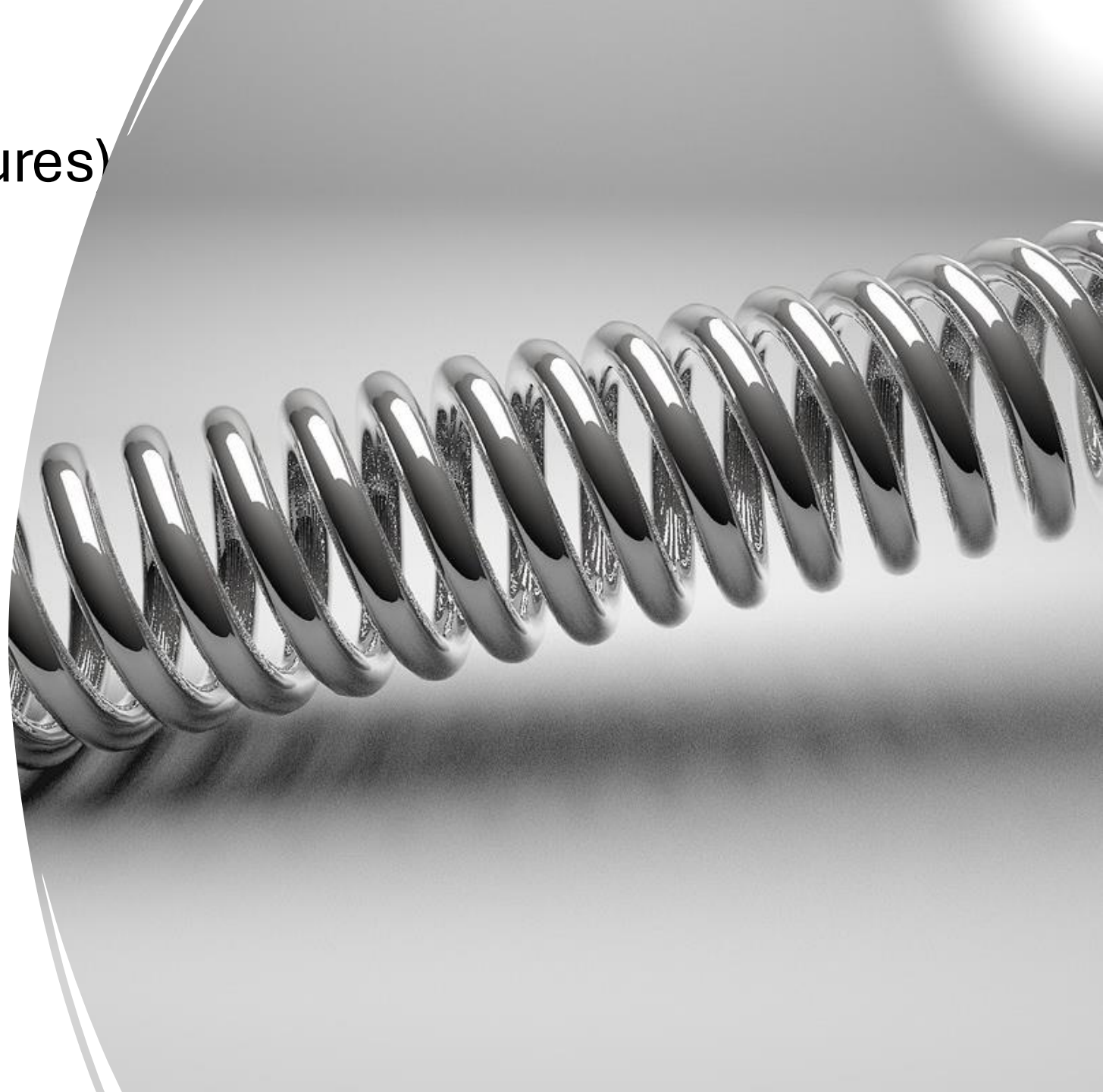
“I want to be transparent. What we’ve seen is a pattern: targets are set, support is offered, but the targets aren’t being consistently met. From an organisational point of view, we need sustained change, not just temporary lifts. When that doesn’t happen, it impacts the team and our ability to plan reliably.”

4. Map Next Steps (State Consequences + Options)

“At this stage, we need to be clear: if there isn’t consistent performance over the next [X] weeks, we may have to consider formal disciplinary action, up to and including termination. That’s not a decision made yet, but we’re approaching a point where we need a definitive outcome. Here’s what needs to happen... [Reiterate performance expectations clearly].”

5. Build Accountability (Confirm Agreement and Follow Up)

- “Do you understand what’s expected and the consequences if this doesn’t change? I’ll summarise this conversation in writing, and we’ll schedule weekly check-ins. I truly hope to see a shift — but it’s important we both understand where things stand.”



Confident Conversations Principles: S.E.L.E.C.T.S.

- S** – Shared purpose
- E** – Emotional regulation
- L** – Looking forward
- E** – Experiential learning
- C** – Curiosity
- T** – Traction
- S** – Specifics




3

DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES

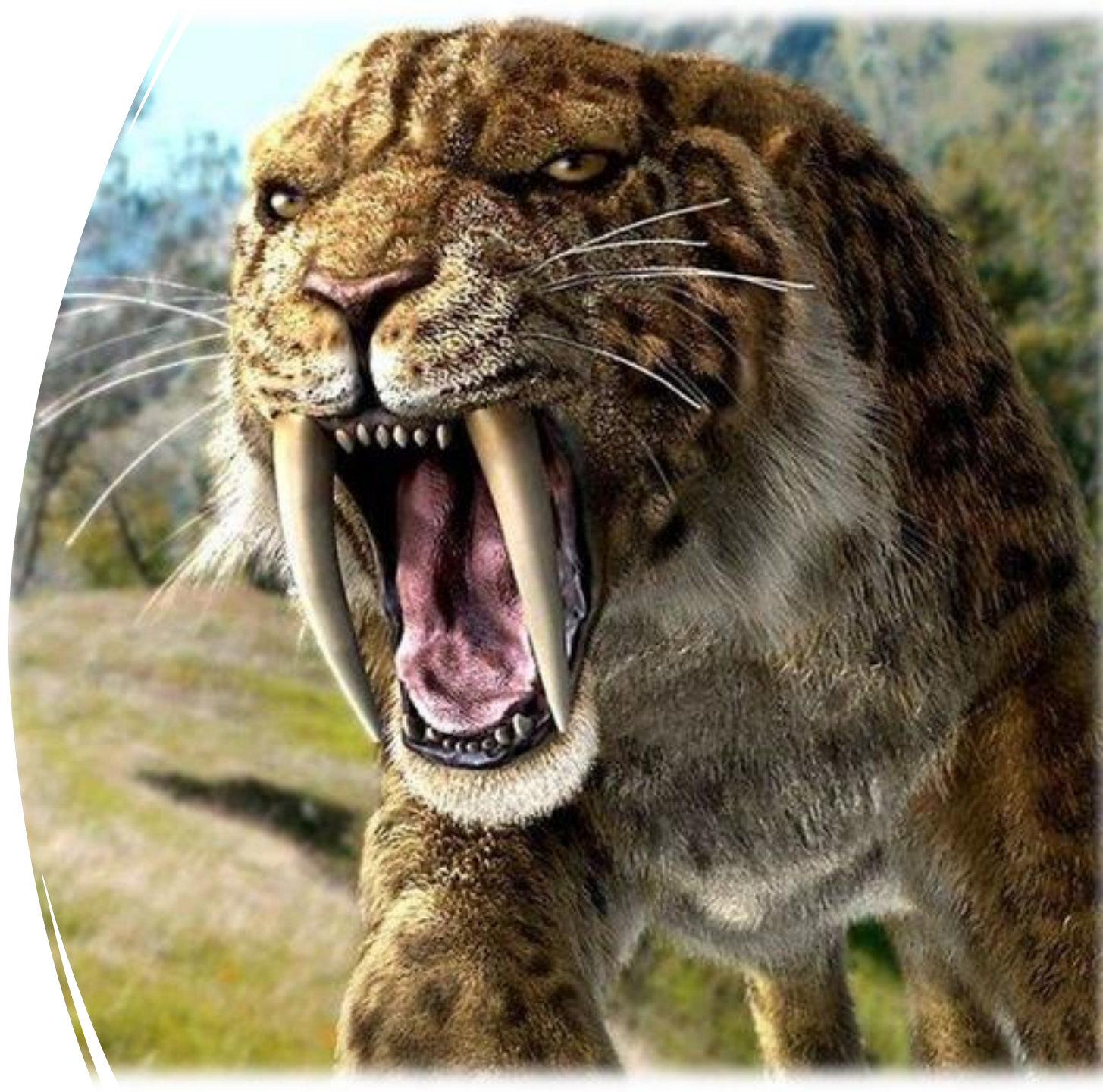


GOALS OF THIS SECTION

- Learn ways to try to keep situations from becoming dangerous
 - Know how to control yourself in dangerous situations
 - Know when and how to de-escalate highly charged situations
 - Learning safe options when managing agitated people.
- 

CONCEPTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- De-escalation techniques are ABNORMAL
- We are driven to freeze, fight or flee when scared. However, in de-escalation, we can do none of these.
- Reasoning with an enraged person is NOT possible.
- The FIRST and MOST IMPORTANT objective is to reduce the level of arousal so that discussion becomes possible.



WAYS THAT HELP KEEP SITUATIONS FROM ESCALATING

- Take a deep breath...It will help you calm down.
- Appear calm, centered and self-assured even though you don't feel it. Anxiety can make the client feel anxious and unsafe which can escalate aggression.
- Use a calm, low monotonous tone of voice (normal tendency is to have a high-pitched, tight voice when scared)
- If you have time, remove necktie, scarf, hanging jewelry, religious or political symbols before you see the client (not in front of them).



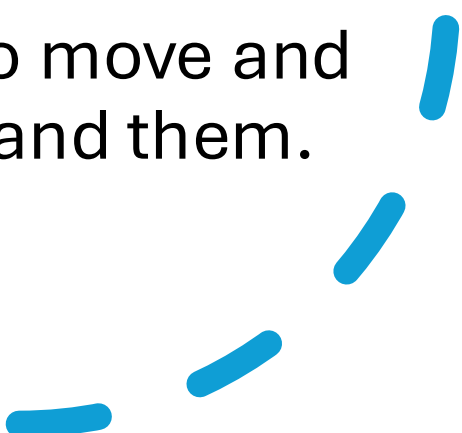
WAYS THAT HELP KEEP SITUATIONS FROM ESCALATING

- Move the situation outside or to another room, if possible. It makes it less likely other clients will get involved or become an audience for the agitated client to play to.
- This also creates a quieter environment and may help in de-escalating the client, especially when unknown mental health issues may be involved.



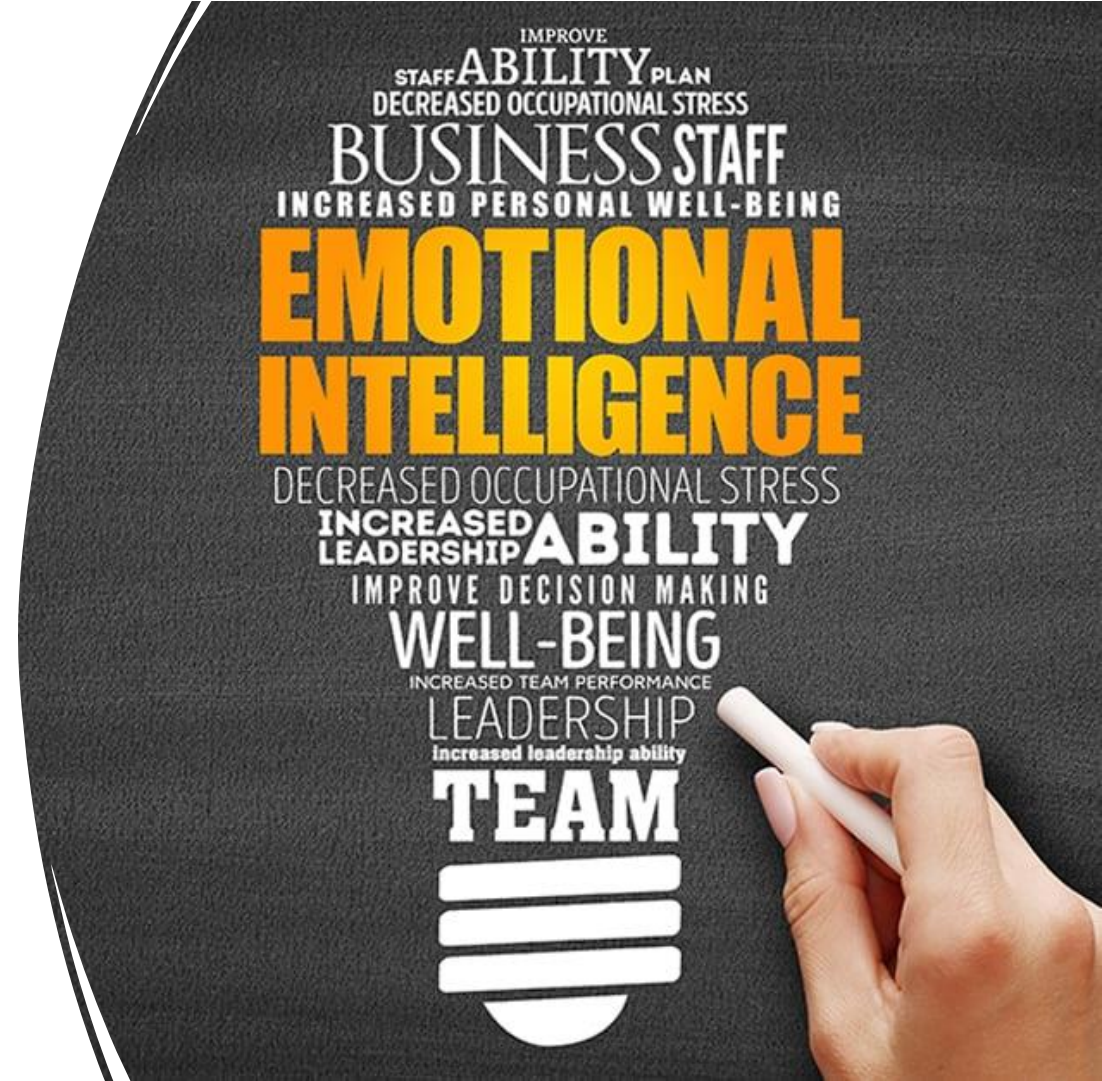


CONTROL OF SELF

- Take a deep breath...this will calm you
 - Do not be defensive...even if the comments or insults are directed at you.
 - Be aware of any resources available for backup.
 - Be very respectful even when firmly setting limits or calling for help.
 - Give the client plenty of room to move and significant space between you and them.
- 

Emotional Intelligence is...

- Emotional Intelligence is the ability to ***identify*** and ***manage***:
 - your own emotions, and
 - the emotions of others.



Metaphor: **'Sabre-Tooth Tigers'**



The space between stimulus and response...





What's the Difference?

~~I am afraid.~~
I am feeling afraid.

EMOTIONAL **AGILITY**

SUSAN DAVID

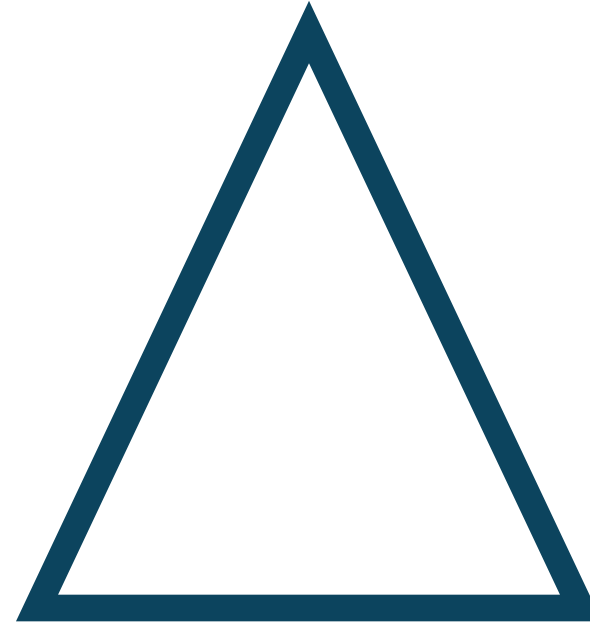
3 x a day x 21 days

1. How specifically am I feeling right now?
2. What specifically is causing that feeling?
3. What might I do about it, now or later?



Triangulation + D.E.N.B.A.:

Assertively Requesting Behaviour Change



THE DE-ESCALATION DISCUSSION

- Remember there is no content except trying to calmly bring the level of arousal down to a safer place. Use simple, clear language.
- Do not get loud or try to yell over a screaming person. Wait until he/she takes a breath...then talk.
- Address the client by name, it helps to ground them.
- Respond selectively: Answer only informational questions, no matter how rudely asked (e.g. “Why do I have to fill out these #\$%^ forms?”). DO NOT answer abusive questions (e.g. “Why are all the staff *\$%#@s?”).



THE DE- ESCALATION DISCUSSION

- Explain limits and rules in an authoritative, firm, but always respectful tone.
- Give choices where possible in which both alternatives are safe ones (e.g. “Would you like to continue our meeting calmly or would you prefer to stop now and talk later or come back tomorrow when things can be more relaxed.”)
- Empathize with feelings but not with the behavior (e.g. “I understand that you have every right to feel angry, but it is not okay for you to threaten me or others.”).

THE DE- ESCALATION DISCUSSION

- Do not solicit how a person is feeling or interpret feelings in an analytic way. Instead talk about how you know the client wants to be in control; ask how you can help the client do this.
- Do not argue or try to convince.
- Wherever possible, tap into the client's cognitive mode: DO NOT ask, "Tell me how you feel." INSTEAD ask, "Help me to understand what you are saying to me." People are not attacking you or themselves while they are teaching you what they want you to know.

THE DE- ESCALATION DISCUSSION

- Suggest alternative behaviors where appropriate (e.g. “Would you like to take a break and have a cup of water?”)
- Give the consequences of inappropriate behavior without threats or anger.
- Represent external controls (rules) as institutional rather than personal.



THE DE- ESCALATION DISCUSSION

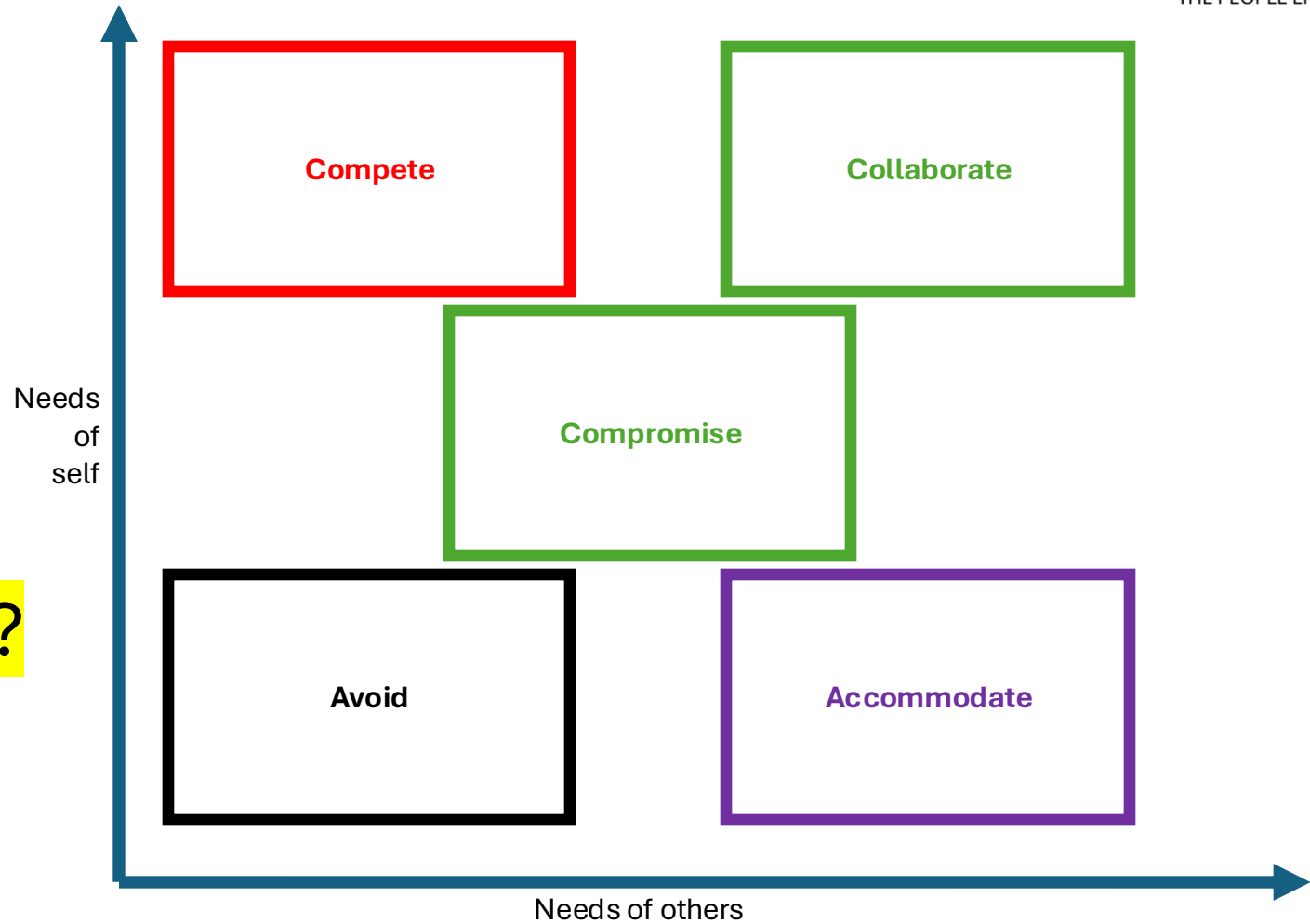
- Trust your instincts! If you assess or feel that de-escalation is not working...STOP! Tell the person to leave, escort him/her to the door, call for help or leave yourself and call police.
- There is nothing magical about talking someone down. You are transferring your sense of calm, respectfulness, clear limit setting to the agitated person in the hope that they actually wish to respond positively to your respectful attention.



Conflict Styles

Needs?

- Time
- Relationship?
- Consequences?



Conflict **Styles** Survey (& Slides to download)



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THE PEOPLE ENGAGEMENT **EXPERTS**

THANK YOU

peopleengagementexperts.com

