

Courageous Conversations  
Tips for Engaging in Positive Dialogue

VisionSpring  
Inclusion Learning Loop

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## Tips for Engaging in Positive Dialogue

We are living in turbulent times where people tend to sit on opposing sides of an issue. With the constant barrage of news feeds, tweets and blog posts it's almost impossible to keep discussions regarding charged topics such as politics, religion, immigration, gun control and women's rights from permeating our workplaces. It can be tricky to navigate topics like these at work. But, with some basic ground rules, these discussions can be enlightening—no matter which side of the issue you are on.

- **Create a Safe Space** – Respectful, meaningful conversations on divisive issues requires creating a safe space where participants can express their honest opinions without fear of attack or ridicule. Set some ground rules that shape respectful interaction between you and the other people engaged in the conversation. Hateful language and personal attacks should not be tolerated in any discussion.
- **Listen Actively** - Sometimes we fail to listen because we're focused on formulating our next point. Listen to learn and deepen understanding rather than to respond. If you focus on hearing what others have to say the conversation will be much more positive and productive.
- **Acknowledge and Respect Differing Opinions** – Above all maintain civility. Be respectful of opinions that differ from your own and be open to hearing and understanding others' perspectives, even if you don't agree with them. Express your own attitudes and opinions as just that, using language like "in my opinion" or "from my perspective," instead of expressing your view as an absolute truth.
- **Be Open to New Ideas** – Everyone engaged in the conversation should be willing and capable of empathy towards others' beliefs, feelings, and attitudes. Empathy is not about agreeing with the opinions of others but, rather, about trying to understand their perspective. When we are able to identify with the feelings and thoughts of others we are able to open ourselves up to differing perspectives and more deeply understand both sides of the issues at hand.
- **Share Personal Experiences** – Sharing personal stories is the best way to deepen understanding because it exposes us the experiences and emotions that are driving the beliefs and opinions of others. You may not fully understand each other's experiences, but you can respect that others' experiences are real for them. Use this time not only to explore people's feelings and emotions but also to deepen understanding of why individuals may feel the way they feel.
- **Know your Triggers** – Before engaging in a conversation make sure you understand and own your opinions and feelings about the topic and what's informing or motivating those opinions. This type of self-awareness can help you regulate your emotions and also help identify topics that are off-limits or when a conversation has gone too far.
- **Expect and Accept Non-closure** - When the conversation starts to move into uncomfortable territory, away from discussion and toward complete disagreement, it's time to end the conversation. Agree to disagree and end on a positive note. "I value our relationship more than proving either of our points in this discussion. I appreciate you taking the time to hear me out and I do value your opinion, but I think its best if we end this here."

## Self Discovery: Planning Your Conversation

What are my feelings or opinions about this topic?

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Why do I feel this way?

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What are my Triggers

How will I Manage my Emotions

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What's off Limits

Strategies for Positively Ending the Conversation

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Goal for Conversation

Personal Action Steps

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