

THE DREADED CONVERSATION WORKBOOK

Participate in
Dreaded Conversations
With Ease



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Participate in dreaded conversations with ease

Imagine being able to have a civilized conversation with that person who really just gets under your skin, who you avoid talking to. What if there was a way to shift from locking horns to engaging in a meaningful exchange? And what if it could be done without dragging the other person to a mediator or enrolling them in a communications course? In this workbook you'll learn techniques to help you feel empowered in even the most difficult conversations. This workbook is designed to get you a breakthrough in recurring unpleasant conversations, but it can also help you deepen communication skills and work on conversation techniques.

Most people I've encountered have at least one person who they dread having a conversation with. The conversation never seems to go the way they want it to. They get frustrated, they get into arguments, they never get a chance to say what they hope to say or they keep quiet in order to "keep the peace." Sometimes people just feel like the only thing they can do is brace themselves for a conversation and hope to survive without totally breaking down in front of the other person.

Why are some conversations so dreaded? In my experience it's because we're trying to balance on a tight rope between maintaining a relationship or social contract and expressing values that we hold dear. What leaves people frustrated about dreaded conversations is that they feel like they've lost their balance and are totally unprepared. The other person seems to always pull the rug out from under their feet. If only there were a way to get our footing back so that we could feel like we're standing on solid ground, no matter the conversation. Well, that's precisely what we'll get to below. But before we get to that, I thought you might be interested in hearing a bit from people that I've worked with to help them get their footing in dreaded conversations.

"It's about time someone wrote a practical workbook about dreaded conversations! We all come across these in our lives. Yet, few of us seem to be armed with the tools to exit these conversations in a peaceful manner. Marianne breaks down what would normally seem like an insurmountable hurdle into simple and manageable steps. In the past, I've entered into dreaded conversations with absolutely no preparation, and either let emotion take over culminating into a screaming fight or conversely completely shut emotion out, creating an impregnable ice barrier. This has only led to regret on my part. Thanks to this workbook, I will now carefully prepare for these dreaded conversations in the same manner one would for an interview." -*Juliet Perrachon*

"Marianne is a trusted and valued member of the Jewish Dialogue Group's team of facilitators. Over the past few years, she has organized and conducted successful dialogue sessions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in synagogues, colleges, and other venues. She has led training workshops to enable people to facilitate dialogue programs in their own institutions and communication skills workshops that

empowered synagogue members to communicate more effectively with friends and family members about challenging issues. Participants in the programs that she conducts benefit greatly from her leadership.” –*Mitch Chanin, Director at the Jewish Dialogue Group*

“Conversation is one area where nearly everyone needs a bit of help to facilitate good working relationships with each other. This workbook is short and concise yet covers the subject thoroughly and gives very practical steps to take to develop the skill of navigating conversations that are anticipated to have the potential to go badly. I anticipate using this workbook with my clients frequently.” –*Gregory Lease, Executive Leadership Coach, Suscipio Coaching*

I also used to dread certain conversations. I couldn’t stand getting into a conversation with my uncle-the-asshole. He’d always want to talk to me about global politics (maybe because that’s what I majored in in college) and pick a really hot topic, push all my buttons and leave me flustered, irritated and pissed off. It got to the point that if we were both at lunch at my grandparents’ place, I’d purposefully sit at the opposite end of the table so I wouldn’t have to talk to him. Or if we were both going to be staying there, I’d either change my plans so I wouldn’t be there at the same time as him or find another place to stay. That’s how intolerable talking to my uncle-the-asshole got for me.

But then I got a masters degree in Peace and Conflict Studies (yes, you can study peace!), learned a couple different communications techniques, and became a dialogue facilitator specializing in tense political conversations. I saw how these communication techniques helped others navigate difficult conversations and gain clarity and confidence. So I applied the strategies to my own life. The result is that the last time I saw my uncle, we both stayed at my grandparents’ place for a whole week... and got along! We had plenty of conversations about our respective jobs and projects, about family stories, about our travels, and none of them exploded or left me feeling irritated and some of them were even tender and sweet. I’m even considering going to visit him at his place!

To illustrate the point in a professional setting, I used to do a lot of interpreting at immigration court. One judge had a reputation of being a total bitch. The other interpreters had the most awful stories about how she’d thrown them out of her courtroom, made lawyers cry and humiliated government prosecutors. So of course I was dreading the day I would be assigned to Judge B. And after a few months it happened. The second I walked into Judge B’s courtroom she snapped at me, and caught me off guard, but because I had the techniques I’ll teach you below at my disposal, I was able to regain my footing and hang on for the ride. I kept getting re-assigned to her (perhaps because the other interpreters were doing everything they could to avoid her) and after I’d interpreted a handful of cases for her, Judge B said to me, “Marianne, I think you’re actually the best interpreter I’ve had in my courtroom.” “Really? The first day I walked in here you told me I was completely

unqualified,” I said with a smile. No one had ever heard of Judge B being nice, much less of paying anyone a compliment.

So how did it happen?

I’ve distilled the process that has taken me years to perfect in this workbook. By the end of it you’ll know what options are available to you ahead of a tense conversation and you’ll be able to pick a course of action. But first, let’s take a look at a few common myths we have about conversations and, really, about our relationships.

Myth #1: The dreaded conversation has always happened like this, so it is doomed to repeat itself.

One of the biggest obstacles we have to making change is that we’ve accumulated so much evidence in the past that things can’t change. We’ve been locked in patterns and seen them repeat for as long as we can remember, and so obviously they’re just going to keep perpetuating themselves.

The wonderful thing about human beings though is that we are malleable and adaptable. And making the decision to break a pattern is just as important as figuring out the strategy. Of course, making that decision can be a lot easier if we have clarity about what we can do instead of the same-old, same-old. That’s what we’ll cover below.

We can also look at these past dreaded conversations as an important source of information. As we’ve been through them so many times, we can analyze them to better understand what types of things trigger us and trigger others. We can also look for hints about what might create connection.

Myth #2: Nothing is going to change unless the other person makes an effort too.

In our society, we very much have an attitude of “everybody has to do their part,” especially when it comes to contributing to positive change. So it’s easy to tell ourselves, “I’m not the only one responsible for this conversation going so badly. The other person has a part in it too. So why should I be the only one making an effort? They should also make an effort/ sign up for a communications course/ be willing to have an arbitrator/ stop being so pigheaded/ read this workbook...”

That can be very disempowering because if the conversations are already going badly, then it’s going to be hard to convince the other person to “do their part.” And in many situations (especially professional ones) we can’t tell the other person (a boss or a client) that they need to improve their communications skills. This also contributes to us feeling like victims and that we are at the mercy of the other person.

If, however, we want to change how a conversation is going, it is much more empowering to see what strategies we can implement by ourselves. Antagonistic

conversations act like a tug-of-war. Each side can pull as hard as they can to try to force the other person over to their side or show the other how weak they are, but if one side just lets go of the rope, then the other will topple over. And there won't be any more tension in the rope. So now let's take a look at how we can take the tension out of the rope of a dreaded conversation.

I'm effectively giving you a life hack so you don't have to go through as much pain and suffering as I went through. But basically the whole process comes down to:

- Getting clear on what you want out of a conversation
- Identifying what's needed to have the kind of conversation you want
- Rehearsing, implementing and adjusting

The easiest way to go through this process is to fill out the worksheets that I've provided for you:

page 14 – Pre-Conversation Worksheet

page 18 – Post-Conversation Worksheet

page 19 – Deepening Practices

Note: all these worksheets have input fields, so you can fill them out directly on your computer using Adobe Reader. If you don't have Adobe Reader on your computer, you can download it for free at <http://get.adobe.com/reader/>. Obviously, if you prefer to print them out and fill them out by hand, you may do that as well.

You are also welcome to make copies of the worksheets so that you can work through one conversation multiple times, or work through different conversations. It is recommended to only work through one conversation at a time per worksheet.

I find these exercises so powerful, that I still use them even though I no longer dread conversations. They help me clarify what I want out of a conversation and help me come up with some objectives and a strategy.

In the coming pages are tips and clarifications about the worksheets. You may want to refer to the worksheets as you read this section.

Pre-Conversation Worksheet – page 14

As you might have guessed, this sheet should be filled out before a dreaded conversation. It is meant to get you grounded and help you identify the options you have for a conversation ahead of time.

The person you will be talking with:

The person you will be talking to can be a specific person like “my uncle-the-asshole,” Judge B, or a category of people like: service personnel, colleagues in the IT department, childhood friends.

When and where this conversation will happen:

The time and place of the conversation can be as specific as “next Thursday at seven at my co-op meeting” or contingent on something else: the next time a company doesn’t properly fulfill my order, when I run into my neighbor in the elevator, or when I’m home for an event.

How satisfied are you with the outcome of conversations like this in the past?

This can be either the most recent time this conversation has occurred or it can be an average rating for the multiple times you’ve had versions of this conversation.

The topic(s)/ attitude/ action you dread will come up:

In my experience, it is often a specific topic or set of topics that create the trigger for a dreaded conversation, but it may be a specific attitude or action that the other person takes which is the triggering event.

How the conversation usually goes:

When describing how the conversation usually goes (and it may well be a debate, argument or monologue), try to record it as accurately as possible. How would a fly on the wall hear the conversation? What would be the transcript of the conversation? Try to refrain from mixing in your feelings or judgments. We’ll get to that shortly. If there are multiple variations of this conversation, try to capture either the prototype or the version that comes up most often. For example:

My uncle-the-asshole (MUTA): So Marianne, are you still an Arab lover?

Me: What?!

MUTA: Well, I hear you’re planning a trip to Pakistan. If I were you, I wouldn’t go.

Me: Actually I already went. I was there in—

MUTA: Because you know what happened to Daniel Pearle. Those savages decapitated him.

Me: I’ve already been there and b—

MUTA: Those people really can’t be trusted.

Me: Which people?

MUTA: Arabs.

Me: But, they’re not Arab in Pakistan. And besi—

MUTA: Well. Muslims. You know what atrocities they’ve been committing?

Me: M—

MUTA: Let me tell you! ...

This exercise can be quite challenging. To be honest, it took me several rounds of edits to get to this distilled version which I think is what a fly on the wall would have heard. It took some effort to leave out my feelings and interpretations. You’ll note that I didn’t put down the whole conversation because there’s already enough in these first few lines for me to dread the conversation itself and everything that will come next.

With Judge B, I was dreading my conversation with her even before I'd met her, so I couldn't exactly write a transcript of our conversation. But I could write down what others reported her as saying.

Interpreter: Mr. X says blah, blah, blah.

Judge B: That is not at all what Mr. X just said in his language! You are totally unprofessional and incompetent! I shouldn't have to catch your errors!

Lawyer: We are still waiting on Exhibit D, the final report from Bellevue Hospital.

Judge B: Why are you wasting my time? You've had 8 months to do it! This is total disrespect for the court process!

I had to do some research to find out what it was that Judge B had said because the other interpreters were always adding on their layers of the story. So I pared it down to the refrains that seemed to come up most often.

What do you want to get out of this conversation, to prioritize, to set aside?

What strategies are likely to help you meet your objective?

Thinking about what you want out of a conversation can help you understand why (perhaps on a subconscious level) you've engaged with a person in a particular way. It can also help you explore other strategies to meet your objectives in the future. In the free response area, you may also want to write down which objectives or strategies you might want to let go of in order to prioritize ones that might seem more workable.

If we go back to the conversation between my uncle and me, when I dropped the objective of trying to win an argument using the strategy of trying to speak more and instead tried the objective of demonstrating respect by speaking less and listening deeply, it actually opened up the conversation more. It made me realize how important it is for my uncle to feel respected and to share his experience and once that is established, he is open to hearing what others have to say. It then meant that I got to speak more!

With Judge B, my priority was just to be professional. I didn't want to start tearing up in the courtroom if she yelled at me. So I made sure to review my vocabulary lists, especially with the technical terms that were more complex so that I'd be able to interpret those accurately. I also brought my glossaries and dictionaries so that I would have them handy in case I was drawing a blank on a word. And I printed out the interpreter's protocol guidelines so that I could review them right before going into her courtroom and have them available in order to be able to refer to them. Finally, I made sure to get to the court house extra early so that I'd have plenty of time to get ready.

One or more of the suggestions in the list might work well for you and/or there may be others that are not listed. The strategies are simply steps that can help you meet your objectives. Once you're feeling more confident, you may want to tinker a bit

with the objectives and the strategies and see what kind of response you get from the person you're speaking with.

What do you need to do to prepare for this conversation?

Taking time to prepare ahead of a dreaded conversation can help it go much more smoothly. Just as you might prepare for a job interview or a presentation, designing a conscious preparation strategy for a difficult conversation will help you pre-empt some of the challenges that are likely to come up. You may want to use one or more of the preparatory techniques in an order that makes sense to you. There are additional resources listed on pages 20 to 22.

What are your triggers? What does the other person say or do that triggers you?

Identifying your triggers ahead of time can help you mitigate your reaction in the moment. Triggers are things that the other person says or does that elicit some kind of strong reaction of discomfort, irritation, fear, anger, vulnerability or related feelings. Look at the transcript of the conversation you wrote above and see where you had to try the hardest to leave out feelings. That's probably where your triggers are.

If we refer to the conversation above between me and my uncle-the-asshole, I realize that one of my pet peeves is when people mix the term "Arab" and "Muslim." I get extremely irritated by it and I have a knee-jerk reaction. Whenever I hear people doing that, I just want to give them a lecture about how Arabs are an ethnic group originating from the Mediterranean and Levant and that there are Christian Arabs. "Muslim," however, refers to a religious group and in fact the largest Muslim populations are outside the Middle East, namely in Indonesia, Pakistan and India. I also get really triggered when a group is treated monolithically (i.e. All people from Group X are like this...) In thinking about it, I realize that part of the reason I get so irritated about these things is because in college I spent a lot of time studying and living and traveling in the Middle East and Muslim countries and learning about Islam and the cultures in these various countries. I get frustrated when I perceive that people don't understand all the nuances that I learned about in my college courses and tend to reduce things to negative stereotypes.

With Judge B, I didn't know what she might say that would trigger me. But from the information I had it seemed like people's professionalism and qualifications were what she got the most irritated about. And sure enough, the first thing she said to me was, "Who are you?" "Hi. I'm Marianne, I'm the interpreter assigned to this case." "You can't possibly be the interpreter! I have people who come from the region who do a pitiful job. You're from a different continent and expect to be able to do this?"

Understanding your triggers ahead of time can help you manage them during the conversation and can also inform how you want to prepare for the conversation. So after exploring this question, you may want to revisit the question about preparation.

What feelings come up most often for you around this difficult conversation?

In our culture, it can be very difficult to think about feelings, as we are not trained to do so, especially not in a nuanced way. In a conversation like the one with my uncle-the-asshole, I would feel flustered and frustrated, but would also have a sense of injustice and self-righteousness. With Judge B, even before the conversation, I was feeling tense and anxious and I anticipated that under pressure, I'd feel unnerved and irked.

To help you identify your feelings, you can use the list on pages 23 and 24. The list is used in the field of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), one of the communications techniques in which I've had extensive training, and which I find particularly helpful in clarifying feelings. In NVC, there is a lot of emphasis placed on decoupling feelings from thoughts, judgments and others' actions. You'll notice that flustered, frustrated, injustice and self-righteousness are not on that list, so it can be helpful to "peel the layers of the onion" and discover what feelings are underneath those. Flustered and frustrated for me are connected to some of the feelings listed under "disquiet," "confused" and "tense," like baffled, rattled and distressed. Injustice and self-righteousness are a little trickier, but when I think about those words, for me they are related to feeling indignant, resentful, exasperated, contempt, and discouraged.

Pick one feeling. When you feel that way, what body sensations do you have? How do you carry your body?

These questions about body sensations can help you use the signals your body is giving as clues about what is going on for you emotionally in the heat of a conversation. Often times, in the middle of a conversation it might be hard to track our emotional state, but it can be easier to notice what is going on in our body.

Body sensations are simply what you feel in your body (as opposed to emotionally). Examples include:

- Contraction and expansion
- Different frequencies of heart beat
- Hot and cold
- Pressure
- Lightness and heaviness
- Hardness and softness
- Itching and tingling
- Sharp pains
- Numbness
- And all other sensations we perceive within the body

For example, when I feel rattled and distraught, the tip of my nose gets numb. Frustration expresses itself in my body as very tense shoulders and neck. When I feel emotionally tired or drained, I feel hunger in my body.

What body sensations do you experience when you have an opposite or completely different feeling?

Sometimes, it's difficult to notice or recall a body sensation that is associated with a particular feeling, so it can be easier to recall the opposite feeling and body sensation. For example, when I think about being exasperated, I can't quite pinpoint the body sensations that I have. So instead, I can think about what I feel like I'm fully expressed: my whole face relaxes. I smile with my eyes when I feel inspired. I realize then that exasperation for me expresses itself as pursing my lips. This can help me go back and answer the previous question.

It could also be our goal to feel these body sensations the next time we are in a difficult conversation. Thinking about positive body sensations can be a useful preparatory technique to get you grounded in your body or connected with yourself ahead of a dreaded conversation.

Which body sensations signal to you that you've had enough of the conversation and need to get out of it?

When you pay more attention to body sensations (which often come up before you are conscious of your emotions), you can make conscious decisions about how to address those feelings rather than getting pulled along by them. So now when the tip of my nose goes numb during a conversation, I know to mentally check in with myself and think about why I'm feeling flustered and consider whether I want to stay in the conversation or get out of it.

What's your opening move? What tone do you want to set for the conversation?

In order to have a sense of control during the conversation, it can be helpful to think about how you want to start the conversation. In some cases, the conversation might be sprung on and you might consider what you want to make sure you do at the beginning of the conversation. For me, taking three deep breaths before I walked into the room where my uncle was helped me begin to shift our conversations.

When Judge B immediately questioned my qualifications, it really got me off balance, but since I was anticipating that she was going to say something that would trigger me, I just didn't expect it to be based on my appearance rather than my performance, I was prepared enough to remember to take a deep breath. I reminded myself that I wanted to set a civil and professional tone. And in that time that it took me to inhale and exhale, I was able to formulate an appropriate response, "I passed the qualifying exam and I have been interpreting for the past 6 months for other judges in this courthouse. None have had any complaints about my performance." I went and sat at my place, tried to push aside everything I would have liked to have said about stereotypes and appropriate workplace interactions and instead focused on being as professional and accurate as possible in my interpretation task.

Your opening move can go a long way in setting the tone of the conversation. Consider what reaction each strategy is likely to elicit from the person you're speaking with.

What's your exit strategy?

Sometimes the best way a conversation can go is for it to stop. Despite your best efforts at shifting it, it may still not go the way you want it to, so plan an exit strategy. Be clear on what your triggers are and what it feels like in your body when you've had enough of the conversation. Having an option to get out of it safely is truly like having a life raft. While there might be a perception that leaving or cutting short a conversation is "weak," it can be very beneficial for your mental health and can help preserve the relationship. With my uncle-the-asshole, my exit strategy was to go help someone that was in another room. With Judge B, I planned to excuse myself to go to the bathroom to collect myself.

It is in fact very empowering to realize when a conversation is no longer serving you and to have a way to close it and move on to something else. If successful entrepreneurs can have an exit strategy for transitioning out of their start-ups, there isn't any reason why successful conversationalists shouldn't have an exit strategy for transitioning out of a conversation. There are some resources related to exit strategies in the appendix on page 22.

When you're done filling in the pre-conversation worksheet, take the time to review it and edit as necessary. Mulling over it will help you absorb its contents and may give you some insights that didn't come up the first time around. Once you're satisfied with its contents, be sure to set a reminder to read it right before the difficult conversation so that what you wrote is fresh in your mind. If it's a conversation that doesn't have a set date and time to take place (perhaps it depends on a chance meeting or some other factor), then setting a reminder to review it at regular intervals (once a week or once a month) can help you keep your objectives and strategies fresh. In order to review how the conversation went and to make future adjustments, remember to fill out the Post-Conversation Worksheet.

Post-Conversation Worksheet – page 18

This worksheet is meant to help you assess how your dreaded conversation went after you prepared for it with the Pre-Conversation Worksheet and consider how much more energy you want to devote to it. Reviewing the conversation in a structured way may give you some powerful insights into which strategies worked and which ones didn't. It will also help you determine which changes you might want to make for future conversations. Remember you and the person you spoke with are just human beings, each with all your joys, sorrows, needs and imperfections. That can sometimes be the hardest thing to remember. Bearing that in mind, it may take several attempts before the conversation goes the way you would like it to. It can be hard to break out of old patterns. Though you did or said something differently, the other person might have reacted the way they always do or, maybe even more unsettling, thrown you for a loop and reacted in a totally unanticipated way. Just be patient with yourself and give yourself kudos for trying to improve the conversation.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with the outcome of the conversation?
By rating your satisfaction with how the conversation went, you can assess whether this is a conversation that you feel needs more of your attention or is now satisfactory for you. If you decide that it is a conversation that still needs your attention, then you may want to keep track of how satisfied you are with the outcomes after several rounds of doing the first worksheet and implementation.

What worked best in the conversation? What didn't work at all? How did it go?
The first step is to make observations about the conversation. Make note of where you saw some positive change in the conversation. Then reflect on what would be useful to work on. You may also want to write about what you noticed went differently from previous versions of this conversation, which feelings came up for you, where you felt stuck or what you want to remember to do in the future.

If you think this conversation (or a version of it) is likely to occur again in the future, how would you like it go? (If necessary, redo the pre-conversation worksheet.)
You can use this space to write out your ideal version of the conversation. Depending on how different that is from the previous version, you may want to revisit the Pre-Conversation Worksheet. Redoing the Pre-Conversation Worksheet will give you an opportunity to go into greater depth with the skills and strategies you want to develop for this particular conversation. There is no shame in reviewing previous efforts and learning from our experience. In fact, that is what permits us to become our best. You can also develop your skills and ideas further by filling out the Deepening Practices Worksheet.

Deepening Practices Worksheet – page 19

The Deepening Practices Worksheet is meant to help you determine which skills and issues you might want to focus on. You can use the conversation you worked through in the previous two worksheets as a guide, but you may also want to focus on other challenges that you experience when engaging in conversations. This worksheet has you consider more generally what skills you want to acquire to have better conversations and which strategies and steps will help you achieve your goals. There are some resources you might find helpful in the appendix on pages 20 to 22. If you have clarity about what you want to develop and a plan for how to do it, then you are more likely to actually achieve it. Remember to make a note in your calendar to remind yourself to carry out the actions that you plan.

Tips for Success

The worksheets in this booklet will help you clarify your options and pick a course of action. The exercises will work best if you remember these tips:

- Pick a specific conversation with a specific person
- Give yourself as much lead-time as possible to do the pre-conversation worksheet
- Find someone you trust to role-play the conversation with you ahead of time

The biggest mistake people make when seeking to develop communications strategies is taking a general approach, trying to work on their overall communication skills rather than addressing particular dilemmas. But conversations don't happen in a general way. They happen with specific people at specific times about specific topics. If you're reading this workbook, it's because you've had at least one conversation that went badly in the past and you are trying to prevent its recurrence. If you're stuck about which conversation you want to work on, pick a conversation that you can easily replay in your head. And if you've got a couple conversations you want to work on, just make copies of the worksheets and complete one for each conversation.

Give yourself as much lead-time as possible to fill out the pre-conversation worksheet. If possible, give yourself at least a couple days to mull over the questions and run through possible scenarios in your mind. And if you fill it out more than a week ahead of time, review it right before you go into the conversation so that your options are fresh. Or if it's a conversation that happens at random times (like when you bump into someone you know on the street), put a reminder in your calendar to revisit this worksheet regularly (once a week, once a month, a day or two ahead of when you're likely to be bumping into people...) so that your strategy is clear and you feel prepared.

As anyone who has mastered a skill will tell you, the way to become good at something is practice, practice, practice. So the best way to be prepared for a dreaded conversation is to practice it ahead of time in a role-play with someone you trust. This can be a conflict transformation expert, a dialogue facilitator, a therapist, a friend etc. I find it easier to do role-plays with people who don't know the other party, but sometimes having first-hand knowledge of the other person can be useful. If you don't have anyone to role-play with, you can record yourself playing both roles and review your recording. Not only will you get to practice what you want to say, you'll also get to see how good your impersonation skills are!

Now you're ready to tackle this dreaded conversation! Think of a particular conversation with a specific person that you are dreading and fill out the Pre-Conversation Worksheet. If you don't have time to do it right now (I recommend spending at least 20 minutes on it), block some time in your calendar for when you can get to it. While you have your calendar out, set a reminder in your calendar to fill out the Post-Conversation Worksheet and the Deepening Practices Worksheet.

Peace on!

I am curious to hear how it goes and which exercises you found most useful. Let me know at: contact@peaceissexy.net

**THE DREADED CONVERSATION
PRE-CONVERSATION WORKSHEET**

The person you will be talking to:

When/ where this conversation will happen:

How satisfied are you with the outcome of how the conversation has occurred in the past? (1 - Very unsatisfied, 10 - Very satisfied)

The topic(s)/ attitude/ action you dread will come up:

How the conversation usually goes:

What do you want to get out of this conversation, to prioritize, to set aside?

Build or maintain a connection	Learn about the other person
Be honored	Teach about the facts
Be professional	Connect with the other person
Demonstrate respect	Explain your values
Win an argument	Share your feelings, hope, or fears
Strike back at someone	Gain approval or respect
Be liked	Speak for people whose voices need to be amplified
Show affection	Speak truth to power
Gain an ally	Comfort, encourage, or motivate someone
Appear smart	Be challenged
Be understood	Other purposes:
Learn about a different point of view	

What strategies are likely to help you meet your objective?

Listen deeply	Speak about your values
Ask more questions	Change the location of the conversation
Improve your foreign language skills	Speak with a different person
Speak more	Be less emotional
Speak less	Find an ally
Bring written information / other materials	Reflect back
Share your personal experiences	Describe areas of agreement
	Other strategies

What do you need to do to prepare for this conversation?

Prepare talking points	Get your feelings under control
Sign up for communications or foreign language training	Find an object or amulet to remind you to notice your feelings
Engage in an introspective process	Think about what questions the other person will likely bring up
Record and review your ideal version of the conversation	Rehearse with a friend, teacher, coach or counselor
Research the other person's point of view	Other preparatory measures:

What are your triggers? What does the other person say or do that triggers you?

What feelings come up most often for you around this difficult conversation?

Pick one feeling. When you feel that way, what body sensations do you have? How do you carry your body?

What body sensations do you experience when you have an opposite or completely different feeling?

Which body sensations signal to you that you've had enough of the conversation and need to get out of it?

What's your opening move? What tone do you want to set for the conversation?

Address the controversial topic
Be professional
Be cheerful
Ask the other person to shut up and listen
Pretend nothing is wrong
Ask the other person a question
Explain that this conversation has been difficult for you in the past
Bring an ally
Explain why this is important to you

Take a deep breath
Connect with the other person
Write the person a letter
Bring a mediator
Immediately bring up a topic of your choosing
Be vulnerable
Share your feelings
Relax your body
Thank the other person for talking with you
Other opening move:

What's your exit strategy?

Volunteer to help with something/ someone else
Have a joke handy
Start singing
Arm wrestle
Suggest an alternate activity
Request time to process your feelings/ the information

Ask to continue the conversation another time
Have someone call you at a pre-agreed time
Purposefully schedule something right after the conversation to keep it short
Other exit strategy:

NEXT STEPS:

- Read through this worksheet a couple times ahead of the conversation and make any adjustments that are needed.
- Mark your calendar to re-read the work sheet right before the difficult conversation.
- Add another reminder in to review the next worksheet after the conversation.

**THE DREADED CONVERSATION
POST-CONVERSATION WORKSHEET**

After you've had the conversation, answer the following questions:

The person you talked with:

When and where this conversation took place:

How satisfied are you with the outcome of the conversation?
(1 - Very unsatisfied, 10 - Very satisfied)

What worked best in the conversation? What didn't work at all? How did it go?

If you think this conversation (or a version of it) is likely to occur again in the future, how would you like it go next time? If necessary, redo the pre-conversation worksheet.

THE DREADED CONVERSATION DEEPENING PRACTICES

What skills do you need to work on in order to have better conversations in the future?

Active listening	Patience
Asking better questions	Showing gratitude
Speaking more	Vulnerability
Speaking less	Identifying triggers
Speaking personally (using “I-statements”)	Connecting with the other person
Researching information	Empathy
Preparing talking points	Reflecting back
Identifying feelings	Creating a safe space
Expressing feelings	Improved fluency in a foreign language
Admitting to uncertainties	Other skills:

What strategies will help you acquire these skills?

Practicing with a buddy or friend	Meditating/ praying
Working with a coach/ mediator	Journaling
Taking a communications class	Learning about feelings
Reading a book/articles about interpersonal communication	Signing up for a language course
	Other strategies:

What steps do you need to take in order to implement the strategies above?

- Buy a journal
- Do some research on the internet
- Ask a friend for recommendations
- Go to the bookstore or library to get a book, CD or DVD
- Check the resource section on the next page of this workbook
- Other steps:

When will you take these steps? (Date and time)

RESOURCES

BOOKS

In the Tiger's Mouth by Katrina Fields

Getting to Yes by Roger Fisher and William Ury

Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life by Marshall Rosenberg

Verbal Aikido - Green Belt: The art of directing verbal attacks to a balanced outcome
by Luke A. Archer

Connecting across Differences: A Guide to Compassionate, Nonviolent Communication
by Jane Marantz Connor and Dian Killian

Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most by Douglas Stone and
Bruce Patton

The Culture Map by Erin Meyer

Conflict Mastery: Questions to Guide You by Cinnie Noble

ONLINE RESOURCES

Center for Nonviolent Communication – www.cnvc.org

The Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC) is a global organization that supports the learning and sharing of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), and helps people peacefully and effectively resolve conflicts in personal, organizational, and political settings. CNVC's mission is to contribute to more sustainable, compassionate, and "life-serving" human relations in the realms of personal change, interpersonal relationship and in social systems and structures, such as business/economics, education, justice, healthcare, and peace-keeping.

Languages on Skype – www.languagesonskype.com

The way we study foreign languages nowadays is changing. Not only do we look for a certified language consultant who will improve our language skills, but we also want someone willing to share their own professional and cultural expertise. The LOS team is excited about our students' long-term professional growth and about developing the language confidence and ease which lead to continued success.

Verbal Aikido – www.verbal-aikido.com

Verbal Aikido is a means of communication that is based on the aikibudo philosophy and martial way. It is a style of conflict management and resolution that involves treating the 'attacker' as a partner rather than an adversary. The techniques practiced by Aikidoists aim at restoring a balanced interpersonal dynamic and/or reaching a positive emotional result in an exchange.

COACHES, MEDIATORS AND TRAINERS

While these organizations and individuals are generally based in a particular city, many of them travel and/or offer training and consultations over the phone or online. Please contact them directly to find out more.

Klaus Surya Kontis (Stockholm, Sweden)

Mobile: +46 733-197010

Email: surya@ganeshyoga.se

Kontis has been working with nonviolence and conflict management for more than 20 years and is a wizard in the field. He is a much appreciated yoga teacher (www.ganeshyoga.se) and give trainings and workshops in a number of contexts concerning both inner peace, relationship tools and Peace written large.

Peace in the City (London, UK)

<http://www.peaceinthecity.me/>

Peace in the City is a secular organization which combines ancient wisdom with practical contemporary scientific research, to provide strategies, solutions and experiential events that raise awareness of the value of meditation for our modern lives.

Conflict Management Coaching: CINERGY Coaching (Toronto, Canada)

www.cinergycoaching.com

CINERGY Coaching's mission is to build conflict intelligence and help make conflict an opportunity for strengthening relationships so that interpersonal discord does not erode the purpose and vision of all concerned.

Valia Glytsis, Founder (New York City, USA)

The Paradox of Leadership

valia@theparadoxofleadership.com

www.theparadoxofleadership.com

The Paradox of Leadership is a boutique leadership education firm based in New York City and serving clients globally. Specializing in Executive training, speaking and coaching, we work with leaders and organizations that yearn for a more meaningful and impactful way of working, communicating and leading. The work delivers subtle yet profound mindset shifts that revel in the paradox of leadership—it all begins within.

Dian Killian (New York City, USA)

Collaborative Communication Trainer

www.workcollaboratively.com

Certified trainer with the international Center for Nonviolent Communication, a certified life coach and former faculty member with the distance learning Coaching for Transformation program, Dian offers coaching and training to diverse

organizations from small and large NGOs to multinational and Fortune 100 companies.

Shawna Emerick, E-RYT, CPC, BS (New York City, USA)

Your Wellness Navigator

www.ShawnaShakti.com

As your Wellness Navigator, I believe you are creative, limitless, and that you can manifest and live the inspired life you desire! What you hold within you is so special. Let us journey together, revealing your True Light.

Ike Lasater and John Kinyon (Texas, California and Connecticut, USA)

Mediate Your Life

<http://www.mediateyourlife.com/>

Mediate your Life helps people bring more peace into their relationships. We train participants to navigate and resolve conflicts by developing awareness, presence, and choice in “fight-flight-freeze” moments. With this training they may create more peaceful relationships with themselves and others.

Pattie Porter, Founder and Host (Texas, USA)

Conflict Connections: <http://www.conflictconnections.com/>

Texas Conflict Coach: <http://www.texasconflictcoach.com/>

We help businesses, organizations and individuals reduce the anxiety, distress and litigation caused by destructive conflict, aggressive behavior and abrasive leadership. Our coaching and consulting services reduce conflict and systemic team problems, enhance team performance, boost morale, improve communication, and build leader competency in managing conflict and constructive behavior.

Greg Lease, Founder (Oregon, USA)

Suscipio Coaching and Consulting LLC

Phone: +1 (253) 459-4958

greg@suspiocoaching.com

Specialized in executive leadership coaching with nonprofit/NGO leaders and coaching women who have awakened to the fact that they have been living for everyone else, and want to find and live the life that they have buried inside them, women that want to be released into their own power and unique identity.

EXIT STRATEGIES

List of jokes: <http://www.jokes4us.com/miscellaneousjokes/cleanjokes.html>

Arm wrestling techniques and training: <http://www.armwrestling-supersite.com/training.htm>

Easy, fun activities: <http://www.realsimple.com/work-life/family/family-activities>

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION (NVC) LIST OF FEELINGS

The following are words we use when we want to express a combination of emotional states and physical sensations. This list is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people.

There are two parts to this list: feelings we may have when our needs are being met and feelings we may have when our needs are not being met.

Feelings when your needs are satisfied

AFFECTIONATE

compassionate
friendly
loving
open hearted
sympathetic
tender
warm

ENGAGED

absorbed
alert
curious
engrossed
enchanted
entranced
fascinated
interested
intrigued
involved
spellbound
stimulated

HOPEFUL

expectant
encouraged
optimistic

CONFIDENT

empowered
open
proud
safe
secure

EXCITED

amazed
animated
ardent
aroused
astonished
dazzled
eager
energetic
enthusiastic
giddy
invigorated
lively
passionate
surprised
vibrant

GRATEFUL

appreciative
moved
thankful
touched

INSPIRED

amazed
awed
wonder

JOYFUL

amused
delighted
glad
happy
jubilant
pleased
tickled

EXHILARATED

blissful
ecstatic
elated
enthralled
exuberant
radiant
rapturous
thrilled

PEACEFUL

calm
clear headed
comfortable
centered
content
equanimous
fulfilled
mellow
quiet
relaxed
relieved
satisfied
serene
still
tranquil
trusting

REFRESHED

enlivened
rejuvenated
renewed
rested
restored
revived

Feelings when your needs are not satisfied

AFRAID

apprehensive
dread
foreboding
frightened
mistrustful
panicked
petrified
scared
suspicious
terrified
wary
worried

ANNOYED

aggravated
dismayed
disgruntled
displeased
exasperated
frustrated
impatient
irritated
irked

ANGRY

enraged
furious
incensed
indignant
irate
livid
outraged
resentful

AVERSION

animosity
appalled
contempt
disgusted
dislike
hate
horrified
hostile
repulsed

CONFUSED

ambivalent
baffled
bewildered
dazed
hesitant
lost
mystified
perplexed
puzzled
torn

DISCONNECTED

alienated
aloof
apathetic
bored
cold
detached
distant
distracted
indifferent
numb
removed

uninterested
withdrawn

DISQUIET

agitated
alarmed
discom-
bulated
disconcerted
disturbed
perturbed
rattled
restless
shocked
startled
surprised
troubled
turbulent
turmoil
uncomfortable
uneasy
unnerved
unsettled
upset

EMBARRASSED

ashamed
chagrined
flustered
guilty
mortified
self-conscious

FATIGUE

beat
burnt out

depleted
exhausted
lethargic
listless
sleepy
tired
weary
worn out

PAIN

agony
anguished
bereaved
devastated
grief
heartbroken
hurt
lonely
miserable
regretful
remorseful

SAD

depressed
dejected
despair
despondent
disappointed
discouraged
disheartened
forlorn
gloomy
heavy hearted
hopeless
melancholy

unhappy
wretched

TENSE

anxious
cranky
distressed
distraught
edgy
fidgety
frazzled
irritable
jittery
nervous
overwhelmed
restless
stressed out

VULNERABLE

fragile
guarded
helpless
insecure
leery
reserved
sensitive
shaky

YEARNING

envious
jealous
longing
nostalgic
pining
wistful

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