DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

TOOLS FOR TALKING WHEN THE STAKES ARE HIGH

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2 SCENARIOS

• First hand – you have a direct and urgent issue with someone or a situation
• Second hand – others come to you with a major problem about someone else or situation.
Rule #1 – do not avoid or ignore the situation
FIRST THINGS FIRST:

IS THIS A PROBLEM WORTH PURSUING?

or
HOW DO YOU DECIDE?

1) Is this a personality conflict?

Yes: LET IT GO!
No: go to next question
HOW DO YOU DECIDE?

2) Is a bylaw or standing rule being broken?

Yes: HANDLE ASAP!
No: go to next question
HOW DO YOU DECIDE?

3) Is the toxic level so high you are losing members?

Yes: HANDLE ASAP!
No: go to next question
HOW DO YOU DECIDE?

4) *Chapter so distressed that someone must step in.*

Yes: HANDLE ASAP!
No: keep a watchful eye
HOW DO YOU DECIDE?

5) Unsure but it’s keeping you up at night

Yes: Get a second opinion from upline
No: stop worrying and go back to sleep.
YOU’VE COME TO A YES: HANDLE URGENTLY

Before going in ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the specific goal of the conversation?
- Do I have all of the facts?
- What would the ideal outcome be?
ITS GO TIME!

STAY AWARE AND IN CONTROL

• What assumptions are you making?
• What buttons of yours are being pushed?
• Watch your attitude and body language
5 PHASES OF A CRUCIAL CONVERSATION

• PHASE 1 – INQUIRY
• PHASE 2 - ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
• PHASE 3 - ADVOCATING FOR THE OPPOSITION
• PHASE 4 – PROBLEM SOLVING
• PHASE 5 – IMPLEMENTATION & FOLLOW UP
A FEW REMINDERS

• HOW YOU SHOW UP INFLUENCES YOUR REACTIONS
• ACKNOWLEDGE THE EMOTIONAL ENERGY OF ALL INVOLVED
• STAY FOCUSED ON THE ISSUE
• DON’T TAKE THINGS PERSONALLY
• DON’T ASSUME THEY SEE YOUR POINT OF VIEW – BE CLEAR.
Final Word: If all else fails – get a mediator.

Q&A
THANK YOU!!

This powerpoint and Conversation Openers are available at nawic.org

Email me at angela@calltoactioncoaching.com

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NAWIC'S Unique Groove for Gaining Extra Tidbits
Difficult Conversations (02/19/2020)
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Difficult Conversations Slide Notes

Slide 1: How many of you have ever had a difficult conversation in your life? I don’t even need to see you because I know every one of you has had at least one!! Conflict is a part of life. If you made it to last month’s onboarding session – you heard from Kristy Stewart who talked all about how to handle conflict. Today I’d like to add on to that conversation by going to the next level and making everybody really uncomfortable. Sometimes when a conflict flare-up occurs, it may often be caused by a more serious underlying problem that doesn’t always get addressed. The immediate fire may be put out, but we tend to avoid the source that fanned the flames to begin with. Nobody likes dealing with the big tough issues, so we go on about our business and hope it goes away on its own. This rarely happens.

You are on this call because you are a leader and possibly working towards becoming a Regional Director. Through these webinars you are learning the mechanics of the position and what is expected of you. You are receiving a lot of tools to help you do your job, and those that have come before you will encourage you, mentor you, and support you in your quest.

One of the things no one likes to talk about however, are the difficult conversations you are going to have to have at some point. Nobody likes it, but big problems cannot be ignored. Whether you are chapter president or region director it will fall on your shoulders to tackle a tough issue. It’s not at all fun, but it is a part of being a leader. It’s a skill you will need to develop because, if you don’t, problems get bigger, bad feelings will build up and then guess what happens? BOOM! Just one spark could set off an emotional explosion and then you are going to have a real mess on your hands. Your reaction and response to a high-stakes issue will tell those around you everything they need to know about how you lead in conflict and will determine your reputation as a communicator and problem solver.

To get HERE you have probably already been chapter president and chances are that at some point you had to pull someone off to the side to sort out some drama. This could be someone on your board or within the membership who is causing a disturbance that needs to be dealt with. I’m not talking about everyday conflict where there is a bit of drama- or gossip- or a difference of opinion- - or someone is not getting what they want. I’m talking about the person who is breaking rules, or who has made a habit of dropping balls or someone who is toxic and causing members to leave. Matter of fact, the discussion we are going to have today IS a difficult conversation because it requires us to face the reality of getting someone in line, calling them out and keeping them in check. Sometimes, it even requires an intervention, maybe an ultimatum or even documentation to protect yourself, your board and the chapter. Welcome to Leadership 😊 Some people are very good at this kind of thing, but most of us are not and that is ok. This can be really tough stuff, but we are all big girls here, and we are sisters, so let’s get real with ourselves. I really want you to open that door for a few minutes today and have the hardest conversation that you don’t ever want to have. With Yourself. There will come a point where you are going to have to stand up and say something.

I think this is a really important issue. I’ll tell you a personal story: I’ve not served as a Director, but I have been President of my chapter I and continue to be engaged as an active leader. I’ve run other people’s companies and owned my own subcontracting company and now I am a Leadership Coach & Consultant working with business owners and their leaders on how to effectively lead
their teams -so I have learned to be well versed in this issue at this point. I have a low tolerance for unaccountable people because honestly, it’s not fair to the rest of the group who end up dealing with the fallout. In a voluntary association such as ours, this can be very stressful. In my own year as chapter President, I had to have a very difficult conversation. I had so much dread going into that room that my stomach was upset. I hate dealing with conflict, but I knew if I didn’t deal with the situation quickly and directly, it would have meant disaster for our chapter, and I can tell you, that was not going to happen on my watch. I really had to dig deep and find the most tactful and diplomatic way to approach the person at the root of the problem. My board was watching, but this was the right thing for the chapter and that gave me courage and compassion to do the hard thing because, although my ultimate goal was to fix the issue, it was also very important to me, and to the chapter, to keep this person involved and engaged as member of the board. We didn’t want to lose her. Had I handled it wrong – I can tell you she would have walked out never to be heard from again. Well, it worked, and we were able to settle the issue, but I had to really stretch myself and do the last thing I wanted to do. I’m here to tell you that there are ways to have a frank discussion without offending them.

The cost of conflict can be very high in the business world, but in NAWIC we feel it through a loss of talent and treasure. Over the past 8 years I’ve watched rock stars, who were passionate about NAWIC and very involved, disengage or walk out and never come back because of how a situation was or was not handled. In an association that is doing everything it can to retain and attract members, and whose mantra is to “Build Leaders” – this can be devastating to our efforts. Often the burden of solving problems in our chapters lands on the shoulders of the region directors and so I thought we’d talk today to about the art of having difficult conversations and how to get to a positive outcome.

**Slide 2:** As a Region Director you will have 2 scenarios that lead to a difficult conversation – there is first-hand – where you directly have an issue with someone; and then there’s second-hand, when others come to you with a major problem about someone else. Either way – rule #1 is this:

**Slide 3:** DO NOT AVOID OR IGNORE THE SITUATION!
You are a leader, and no matter how uncomfortable it may be – as Region Director it will be your responsibility to tackle big problems head on. It may seem easy to avoid the issue, hoping it will work itself out over time, but this is rarely the result. It is no secret that in NAWIC, what usually happens, , as in most workplaces, is that the emotions fester and the results turn ugly. People talk, speculate and gossip. They spend lots of time trying to win people over to their side creating ongoing drama and bad feelings, or - some just leave, never to return. If the situation gets bad enough to reach the Region Directors level – how you respond and consequently handle it, can directly impact the decision a member will make when getting involved in the future or even renewing the following year.

So today, I’m going to talk to you about some strategies to help you navigate through the situation, should it come up, and offer some tools to help you have a crucial conversation so you can gain resolution. I’m sure you can use this same process in any situation.

**Slide 4:** As a leader, and in this case a Region Director, the first question you have to ask yourself is “Is this a problem worth pursuing?”
Well, how do you decide? Start by asking the following 5 questions:

1. **Slide 5:** Is this a personality conflict? If yes – LET IT GO … MOVE ON, if no – go to next question
2. **Slide 6:** Is a bylaw or standing rule being broken? – if yes – handle immediately – if no, got to next question
3. **Slide 7:** Is the toxic level so high that you are losing members? If yes – handle immediately, if no – go to next question
4. **Slide 8:** Do you have a chapter that is in distress and it is very apparent that something must be done? This typically shows up as a President who is coming to you for help or it could be her board members who are asking for an intervention. If yes – handle immediately – if no one is coming to you, and you are simply hearing a lot of negative chatter - then this is NOT a problem you need to solve right now, but I would recommend keeping an eye and ear out for ongoing problems.
5. **Slide 9:** If you are not sure and the problem is keeping you up at night, then you should call another experienced member of the national board to run the situation by them. There are a lot of women who have been in your shoes and can offer insight and support. By getting their advice, you will gain clarity and confidence to take care of the issue.

So, what’s next?

**Slide 10:** You’ve been presented with a problem and you’ve decided it IS worth pursuing.

Next, we are going to look at some strategies that will help you prepare to have the difficult conversation:

As we continue, I want you to keep something in mind – YOU will have all of the power in the conversation and it will be up to YOU to keep emotions in check and stay focused on the issue. I know this is easier said than done but this mindset is really important for the best possible outcome.

**Slide 11:** Before going into the conversation, you are going to answer 3 questions to prepare yourself

1. What is the specific goal of the conversation? Usually, it’s to stop the bad behavior and get the other person to recognize that there is an issue that is impacting others.
2. Do I have all the facts? Not hearsay – FACTS – you will have the opportunity to give the other side of the story but make sure your facts are straight before you go in.
3. What would be the ideal outcome? Remember there is only one side of the issue – the RIGHT SIDE. You can hear them out so you understand what has happened, but in the end, you’ve got to get them to recognize that the conflict must end, and resolution must be found.

**Slide 12:** As you prepare to enter into the conversation, try to keep yourself centered and have an awareness of the following:

- What assumptions are you making about this person’s intentions? Are you biased in any way? The key is to remain neutral and objective at all times. Don’t assume anything – ask questions to clarify the issue.
• What “buttons” of yours are being pushed? Are you getting triggered or becoming more emotional than the situation warrants? These can become very emotional discussions and people can become very defensive - very quickly so you must remember not take anything personally and do everything you can to stick to the issues.

• Watch your attitude and body language. If you go in thinking this is going to be horribly difficult, it probably will be. If you truly believe that whatever happens, some good will come of it, then that will likely be the case. Set your intention and stay focused on the solution that will work for everyone. Try and remain positive at all times.

Next, I want to walk you through 5 Phases of this crucial conversation

Phase #1: Inquiry
Time to address the issue head on. This is why you are here. Get to the point: A good start might be “I wanted to talk with you today because there is an issue that’s come up that needs to be resolved and I need your help”. Don’t beat around the bush nervously delaying the inevitable. You could also try: “The problem is X. The effect this problem is having is X. I wanted to discuss it with you, get your perspective and work together to find the best possible solution”.

Be prepared, have your questions ready and Take notes, this will help you stay focused on the issue. Try and create an atmosphere of discovery and curiosity. Ask as many questions as necessary to learn as much as possible about the other person’s point of view. Find out how the situation affecting them, and what are their values and priorities regarding the outcome.

Pay attention to body language and read between the lines, what do they really want? What are they not saying?

Let them talk until they are finished. Don’t interrupt except to acknowledge. Whatever you hear, don’t become reactionary. It’s not about you. Try to learn as much as you can in this phase of the conversation. You’ll get your turn, but don’t rush things.

Phase #2: Acknowledgment
Acknowledgment means showing that you’ve heard them and have understood their position. Mirror back what you think they are saying and follow up with something like “Do I have that right?” and then offer something like “I understand your position.” Something along those lines.

Acknowledge whatever you can, including your own defensiveness if you find you are being personally attacked. For example, “I notice I’m becoming defensive, and I think it’s because your voice just got louder and sounded angry. I’m just trying to get to the heart of the issue.” The acknowledgment helps the other person reflect on their own emotions and gives you both a chance to reset and diffuse rising tension within the conversation.

Remember, Acknowledgment does not mean agreement. It simply means you understand their point of view. “this sounds really important to you,” isn’t the same as “I agree with you”. Does that make sense?
Phase #3: Advocating for the Opposition
When you’ve asked all questions and sense that all details have been expressed on the topic, it’s
now your turn. By now, you should have a clear understanding of what is really going on. Now
you’ve got to convince them of the same. Help them understand the impact they are having on
the situation and all of those involved. Chances are, they may not be aware, chances also may be
that they do not care. Either way – it needs to be stated plainly with a direct request that they
help you solve the problem. Tell them that this MUST happen. Firmly clarify your position
without minimizing or disrespecting theirs.

Phase #4: Problem-Solving
Now you’re ready to work towards a solution. Brainstorming and continued inquiry are useful
here. Ask for their input on what they think might work for all involved. How could things be
done differently to avoid conflict? Lead the way by acknowledging a good idea and building on
it. If the conversation becomes adversarial, go back to asking questions. There may be more
going on than what first came up. Sometimes the problems can be multi-layered. Asking for the
other’s point of view encourages them to engage. If you’ve been successful in staying centered
and positive, and you are promoting an open dialogue with intent to improve relationships,
getting to yes and putting healthy solutions in place will be much easier.

Phase #5: Implement & Follow Up
You have found a resolution and have worked together on a plan for putting solutions in place.
Make sure to Set a weekly date on your calendar to check in and make sure things are staying on
track. Chances are there will be hiccups, so just keep the conversation about the issue and remind
the other person to do the same and stay on task. Keep working towards the positive outcome. If
bad behavior resurfaces – you may have a to have another difficult conversation, but what I’ve
seen , is that problem people end up taking themselves out of the conversation altogether
by….finding opportunities elsewhere. This is not always a bad thing.

Difficult conversations are never easy and never will be, but if the stakes are high, they are
necessary. The art of communication is like any art–with continued practice you acquire skill and
get better and better at communicating even when it’s tough.

Slide 13: Here are some additional Tips and Suggestions:
• A successful outcome will depend on two things: how you show up and how you react . How
you are (centered, supportive, curious, problem-solving, collaborative) will greatly influence
what you say. Use that carefully.
• Acknowledge emotional energy–yours and theirs–and continually direct it toward a useful
purpose.
• If emotions start to run high – remember to focus on the issue.
• Don’t take verbal attacks personally. People can be very reactionary! Remember they are
usually upset about the issue not you. You are just the one they are taking it out on, so you
find yourself on the receiving end of high emotion. Stay grounded. Here them out.
• Don’t assume the other person can see things from your point of view. You must
communicate clearly.
Slide 14: A Final Word – If you are just not comfortable with having any kind of difficult conversation, reach out to someone who you think would be a great mediator. It is possible that you may be part of the problem and a neutral and impartial observer can help both of you to find a way forward.

In closing - Ladies, congratulations! You made it to the end of the webinar, and no one died. It is challenging to do difficult things, but leaders must rise to the occasion and stretch themselves for the betterment of all. Stay grounded, stay calm and always push for the win/win.

Slide 15: Thank you for joining me today – please reach out to me if you have a need. angela@calltoactioncoaching.com.

Slide 16: Board Insurance Coverage

Group Travel Accident Insurance:
• All National Board Members, full-time Employees and National Committee Members are covered while on NAWIC business.
• Business Travel Accident coverage is designed to protect the insured’s while traveling on business for the company. It covers expenses actually incurred by or on behalf of a Covered Person for treatment, services and supplies covered by the Policy. A covered Loss or Covered Losses means an accidental death, dismemberment or other injury covered under the Policy.

Directors and Officers Liability:
• Coverage provides legal liability protection for NAWIC Region Directors, NAWIC National Officers, Employees, Volunteers, Trustees, Committee Members and the organization of NAWIC. It protects insured against suits brought because of any alleged error, omission, misstatement, and breach of duty or other related wrongful acts as covered by the policy.

General Liability (National and Chapters):
• NAWIC has a program of Blanket General Liability Insurance for its members. All chapters and members (when involved in a scheduled NAWIC activity) are automatically insured. This covers bodily injury and property damage.
• Some events are not covered, and they require an additional certificate of insurance. Additional fees may be charged for those events. Chapters should fill out a certificate of insurance form and a quote will be given.