

***DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS:
HOW TO DISCUSS WHAT MATTERS MOST***

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**CONFLICT RESOLUTION
MONTH IN COLORADO**
Listen. Talk. Work it Out.

Each year, Conflict Resolution Month in Colorado recommends a book for the community at large with the goals of spreading information and encouraging conversation on ways to manage conflicts at all levels of society. This year's selection deals with difficult conversations, an aspect of conflict resolution that frequently occurs because these complex interactions take place not only in the workplace, schools, and congregations, but in our private lives from the supermarket to our homes. We are challenged everyday with navigating difficult conversations which influence how our relationships are strengthened or weakened, how we interact with the world, and how we understand our own communication abilities.

Difficult Conversations "explores what it is that makes conversations difficult, why we avoid them, and why we often handle them badly." (p. 8). Often, we think of difficult conversations as asking your boss for a raise, telling your significant other you're unhappy in the relationship, or telling your child that they are changing schools. Difficult conversations encompass many other interactions. These might include asking your coworker to refill the paper tray after it's empty, telling your child they can't play outside after dark, or explaining to your partner why you want to spend the night in.

THE GUIDING IDEA

We all face the challenge of difficult conversations in our lives. This book helps us get better results from these experiences by shifting from a "message delivery stance" to a "learning stance." (p. xxxii). We can improve our ability to listen from the inside out, speak for ourselves with clarity and power, and identify clearer expectations of these "learning conversations" (p. xxx).

THE THREE CONVERSATIONS

Every difficult conversation is dynamic. There's no one conversation that will be like any other. To navigate through these complex dialogues, it's important to know that there are three consistent types of conversation within every difficult conversation.

THE "WHAT HAPPENED" CONVERSATION?

We all see the world differently based on our experiences and information. This influences our behavior, and affects how we perceive others in conversation. Do your difficult conversations frequently lead to arguments? How do you interpret another's intentions in complex dialogues? What information do you use or choose to ignore when thinking about what happened? How does your own bias influence the conversation?

THE FEELINGS CONVERSATION

Managing feelings can be extremely challenging. As a result, we frequently try to ignore them. This can disrupt conversations, and obstruct the quality of our messages. Do you find it difficult to convey your feelings to others? Do you find it uncomfortable to share your feelings for fear of being judged? When do you think it's appropriate to express or suppress your feelings?

THE IDENTITY CONVERSATION

"There are probably as many identities as there are people. But three identity issues seem particularly common, and often underlie what concerns us most during difficult conversations: Am I competent? Am I a good person? Am I worthy of love?" (p. 124).