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# Communicating Effectively Through Crisis: Up, Down, and Across Hierarchy

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# Disclosures

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*Get ready...*





“Trust is earned and trust takes time.”

- Denise Davis, MD



<https://www.discprofile.com/fac-sup/fac-tips/model>

# Group Agreements

Speak for self; be mindful of others

Confidentiality

Engaged attention: devices aside / silenced, keep interruptions short

Share the air

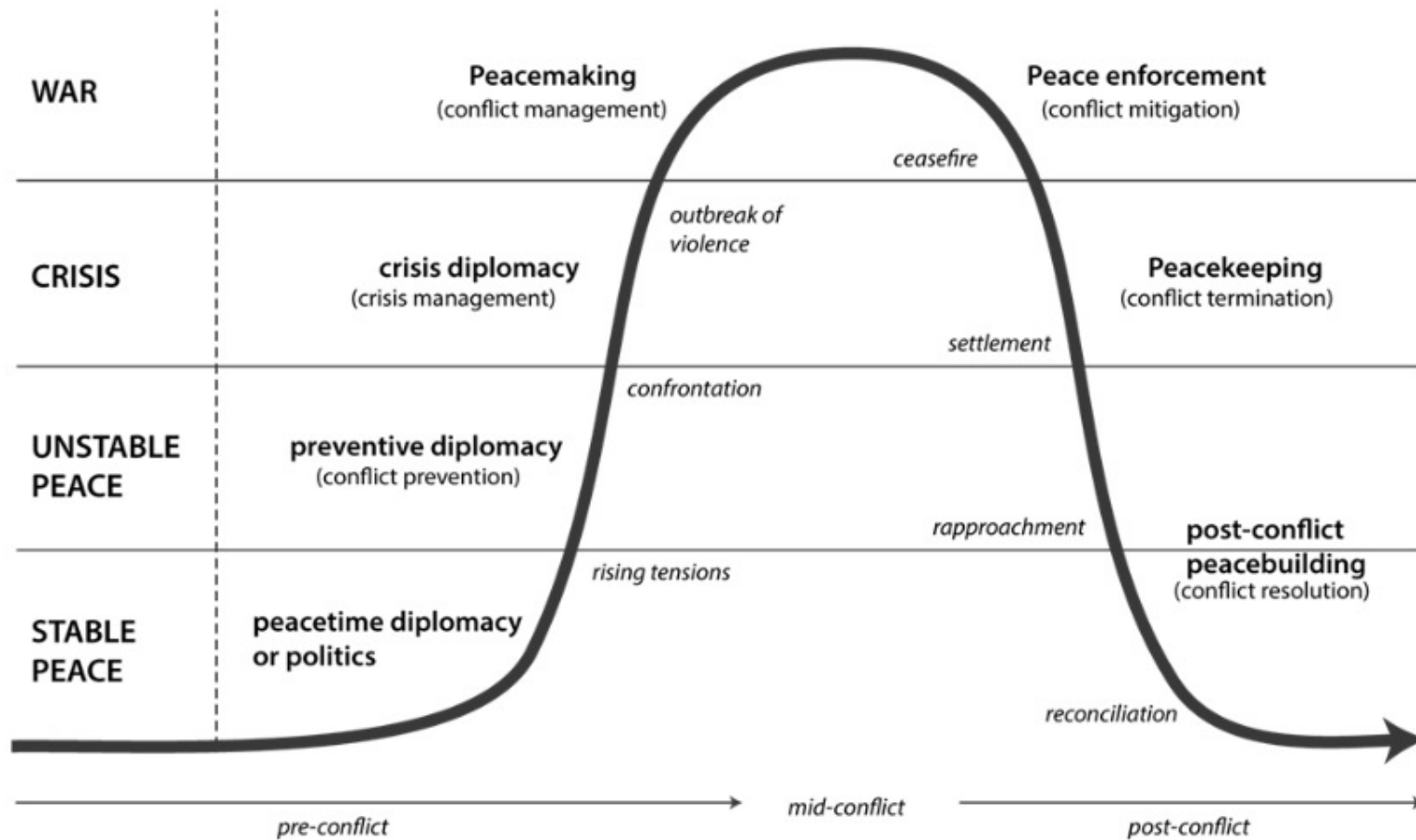
Everyone has meaningful experience already, and we are all here to learn



# Learning Objectives

1. Identify key contributors to healthcare team conflicts & crises.
2. Reflect on personal strengths & hot buttons in crisis at work and apply tools for engaging with skill.
3. Consider hierarchy within healthcare teams and learn strategies for effective partnerships up/down/across.
4. Apply skills for exploring perspectives in order to gain context, create alignment, and facilitate buy-in.
5. Leverage relationship-centered strategies to make a compelling ask.
6. Apply effective leadership skills for conflict to participants' own cases.

Figure 1: Conflict Stages



source: Eva Gross 2013:12 (Chaillot papers #130)



# conflict noun

con·flict | \ 'kän-ˌflikt  \

// an armed *conflict*

- 2 a** : competitive or opposing action of incompatibles : antagonistic state or action (as of divergent ideas, interests, or persons)

// a *conflict* of principles

- b** : mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external or internal demands

// His conscience was in *conflict* with his duty.

# Common Sources of Healthcare Team Conflict

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**UTSouthwestern**  
Medical Center

- Environment
- Task
- Process
- Role
- Relationship★



# Current Healthcare Crisis: Macro to micro

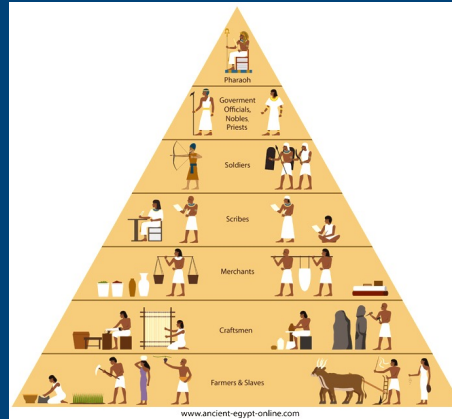
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- Emphasis on downstream intervention vs prevention
- Ineffective coordination & non-transparency
- Incomplete training
- Opioid epidemic
- Inequities
- Regulatory burden
- Inadequate infrastructure



## Positional Hierarchy

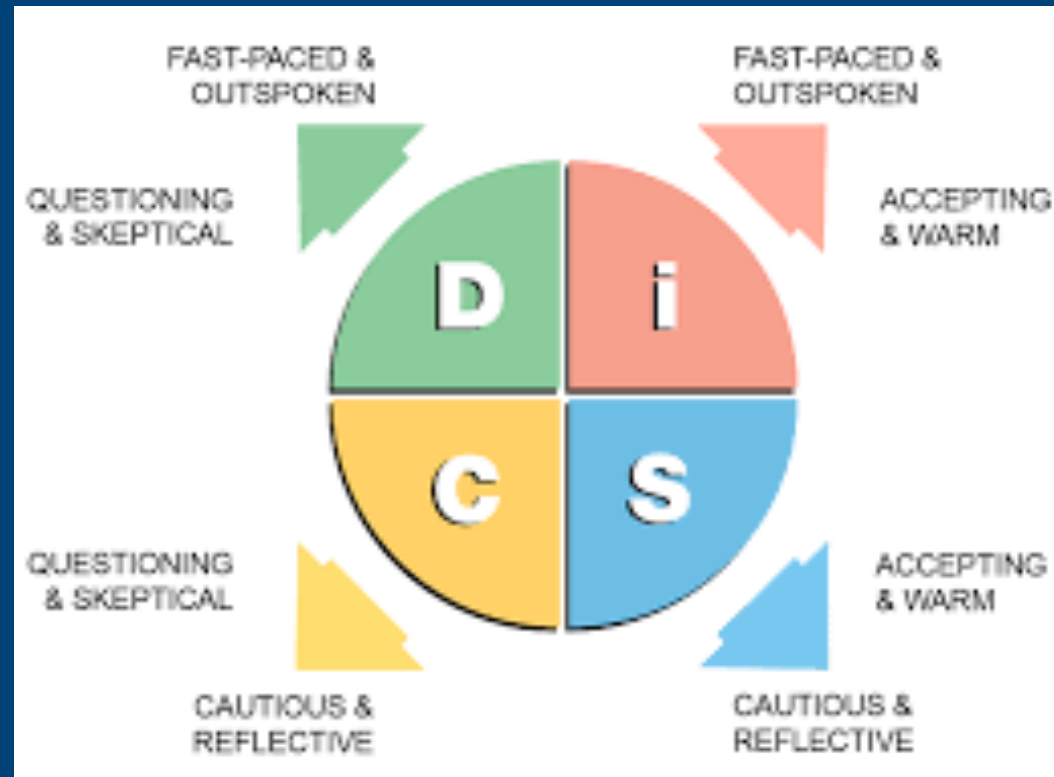


## Personality

- Intra/Extraversion
- DISC
  - Task vs People
  - Slower vs Faster
- Skepticism/Optimism

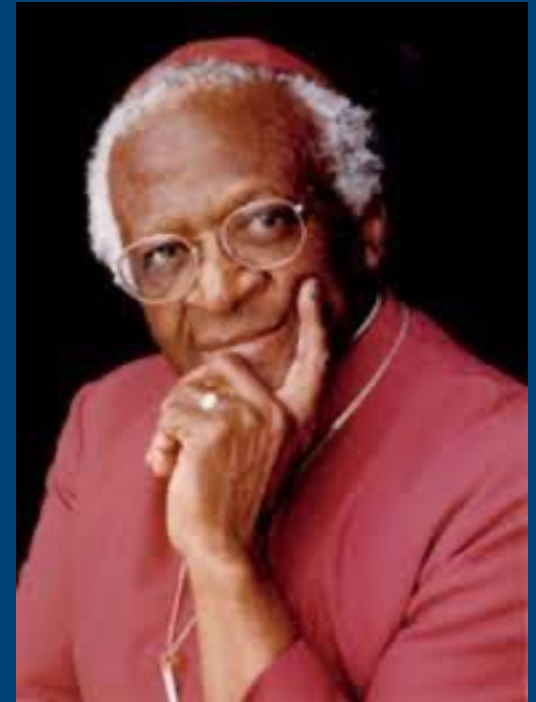
## Identities

- Age/generation
- Gender
- Race / ethnicity
- Background
- Sexual orientation
- Political affiliation



Differences are not intended to  
separate, to alienate. We are  
different precisely in order to realize  
our need of one another.

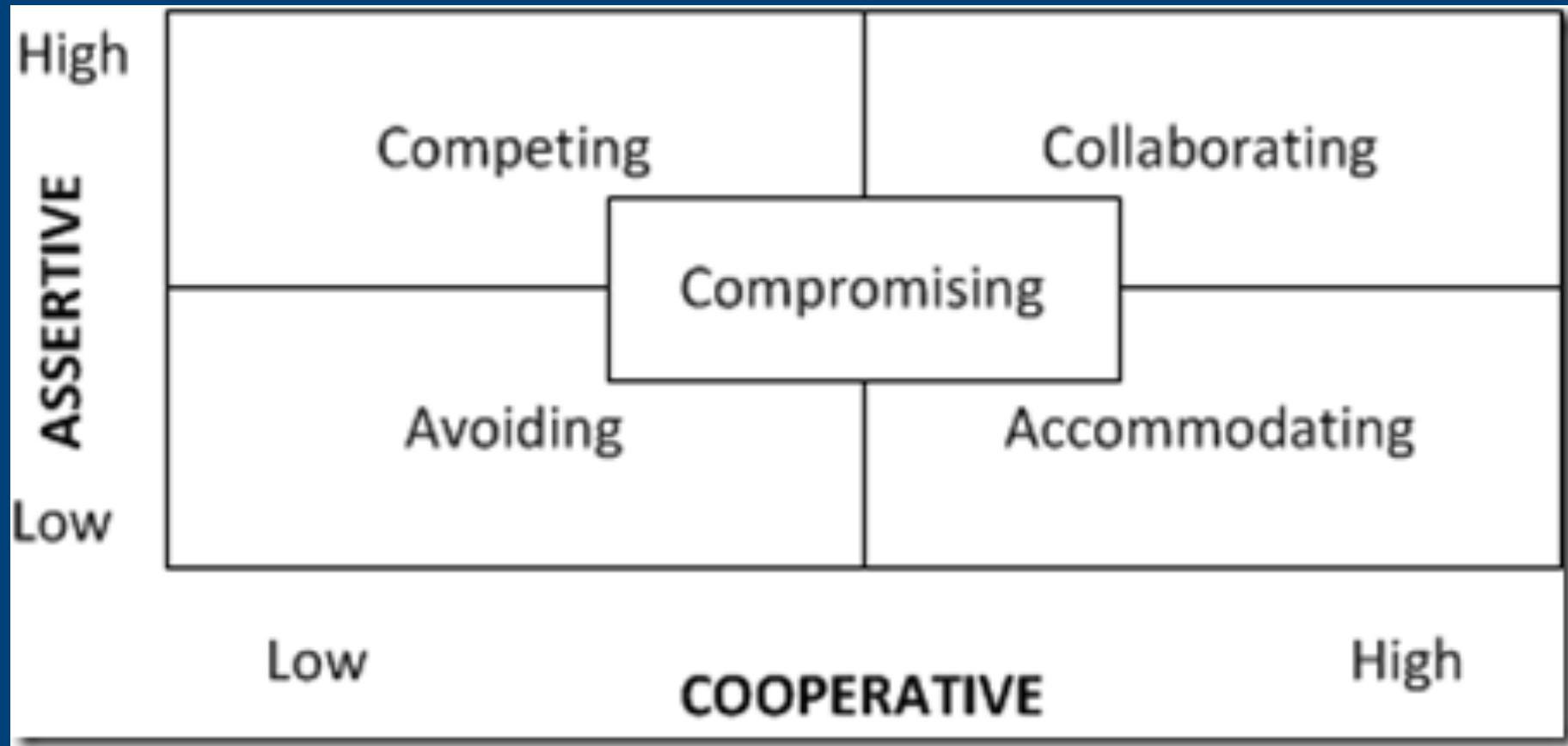
— *Desmond Tutu* —



**NOTICE**

**JUST REMEMBER  
WHEREVER YOU  
GO THERE YOU ARE**

# Conflict Styles



Pause to consider the recent conflict you were involved in at work...

- What is your position within that team hierarchy?
- What apparent identities were present (yours / others')?
  - Race/ethnicity, gender, age/generation, etc
- What personalities do you think were present?
  - DiSC – slow/fast, task/people, open/cautious
- What were the apparent default work conflict styles?
  - Avoiding – Accommodating – Compromising – Competing – Collaborating



# Amygdala hijack

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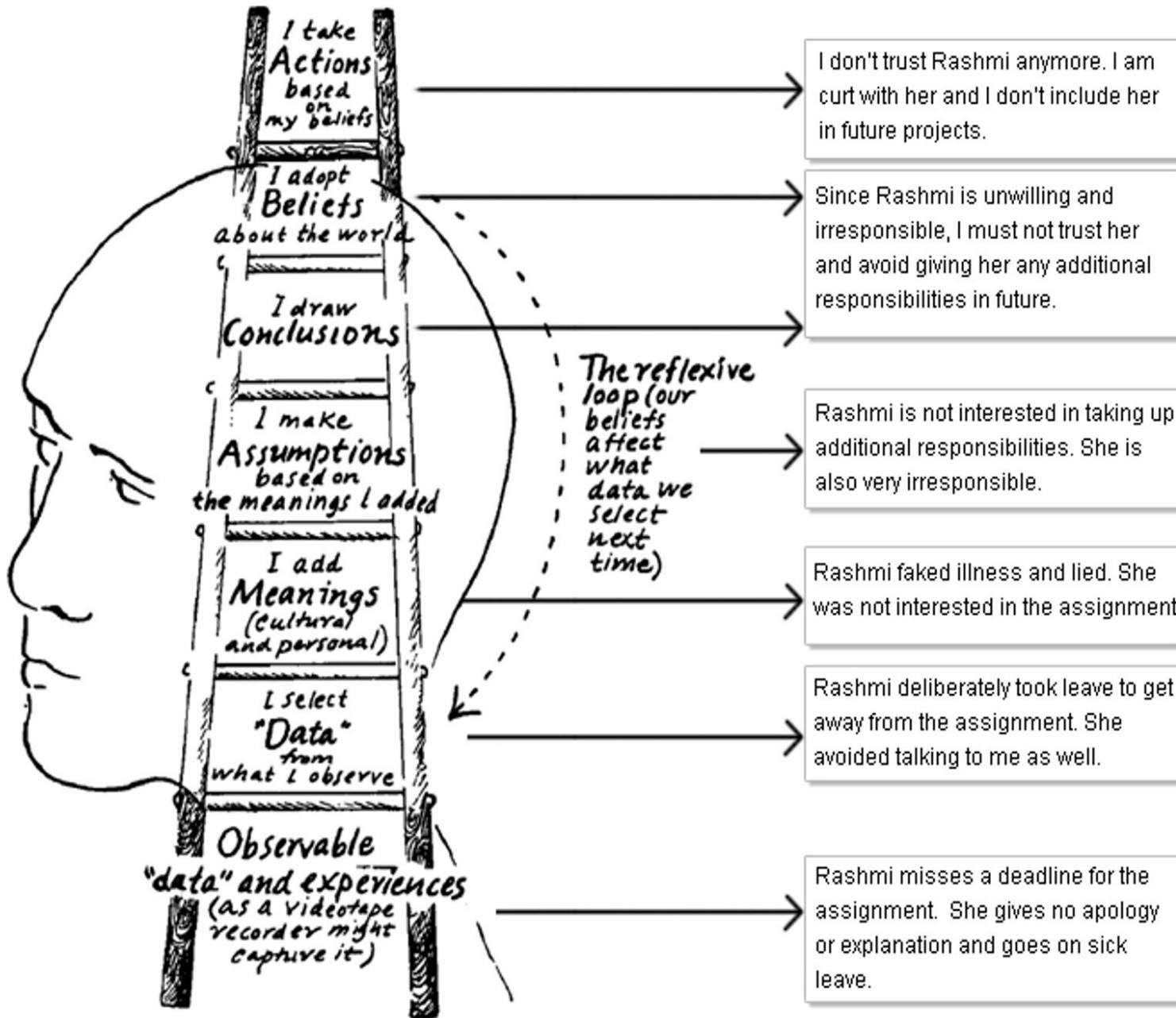
Understand your own anger +/- other feelings  
***before*** engaging in a difficult conversation

Ask yourself:

- How is this conflict making me feel?
- What assumptions am I making?
- ***What story am I telling myself*** about their intentions?



# Ladder of Inference



(Source: The Fifth Discipline By Peter Senge)

C. Argyris. *Overcoming Organizational Defenses: Facilitating Organizational Learning*, 1990





Positions  
VS  
Interests

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20%

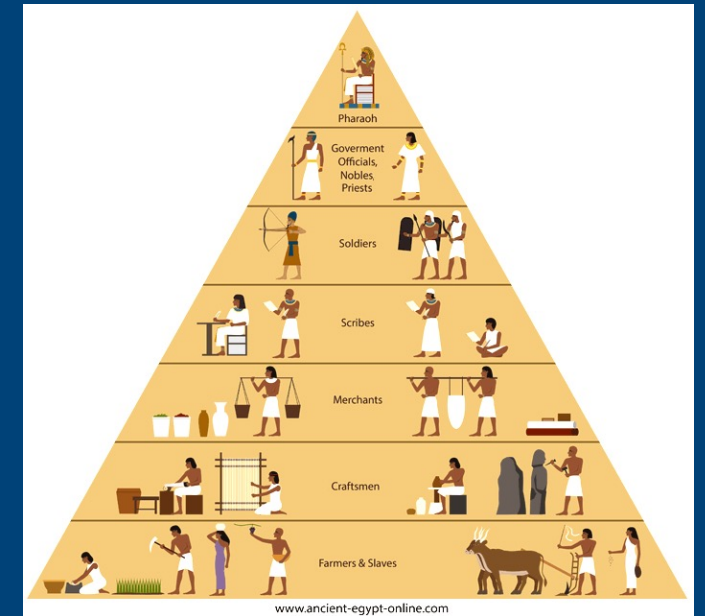
*“I can’t work past 5:30p today so don’t even ask.”*

80%

*“If I am late to pick up my son one more time, I will get fined \$150.”*

# Hierarchy: Mitigating Negative Impact

- Small talk before big talk
  - How has your day been going?
  - Is now an ok time to talk?
- Collaborative agenda setting
  - I'd like to discuss... What is on your list?
  - Of those, what can we accomplish in the time we have?
- Explore Perspectives through dialogue: ask and tell
- State your commitment to relationship & shared goals
  - I know we both want to see our team succeed



"Courage is what it takes to  
stand up and speak.  
Courage is also what it takes  
to sit down and listen"

- Winston Churchill



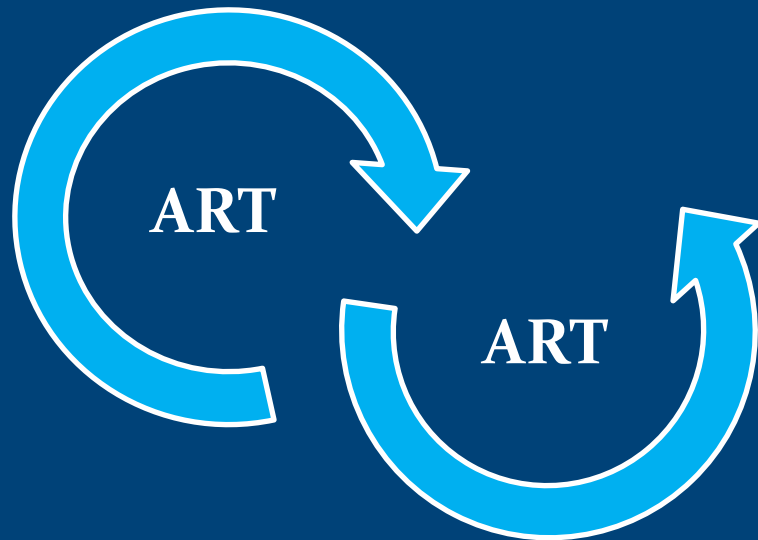


“While language is a gift,  
Listening is a responsibility.”

- Nikki Giovanni

# ARTfully

## Approaching Conflict



### The **ART** ©

#### **A**sk

Seek perspective  
Open-ended question(s)

#### **R**espond

Depends on active listening  
Reflect back to ensure  
understanding

#### **T**ell

Your own perspective  
Stay near the bottom of the ladder

# ASK

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## **Active Listening:**

Listening to Understand  
Without Judgment

*“Tell me more...”*

*“Help me understand...”*

***Avoid*** thinking about:

Reloading  
Correcting  
Rebuttal



# ASK

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## Seek Perspective

### Ideas

*What **ideas** do you have about the challenges with our current workflow?*

### Concerns

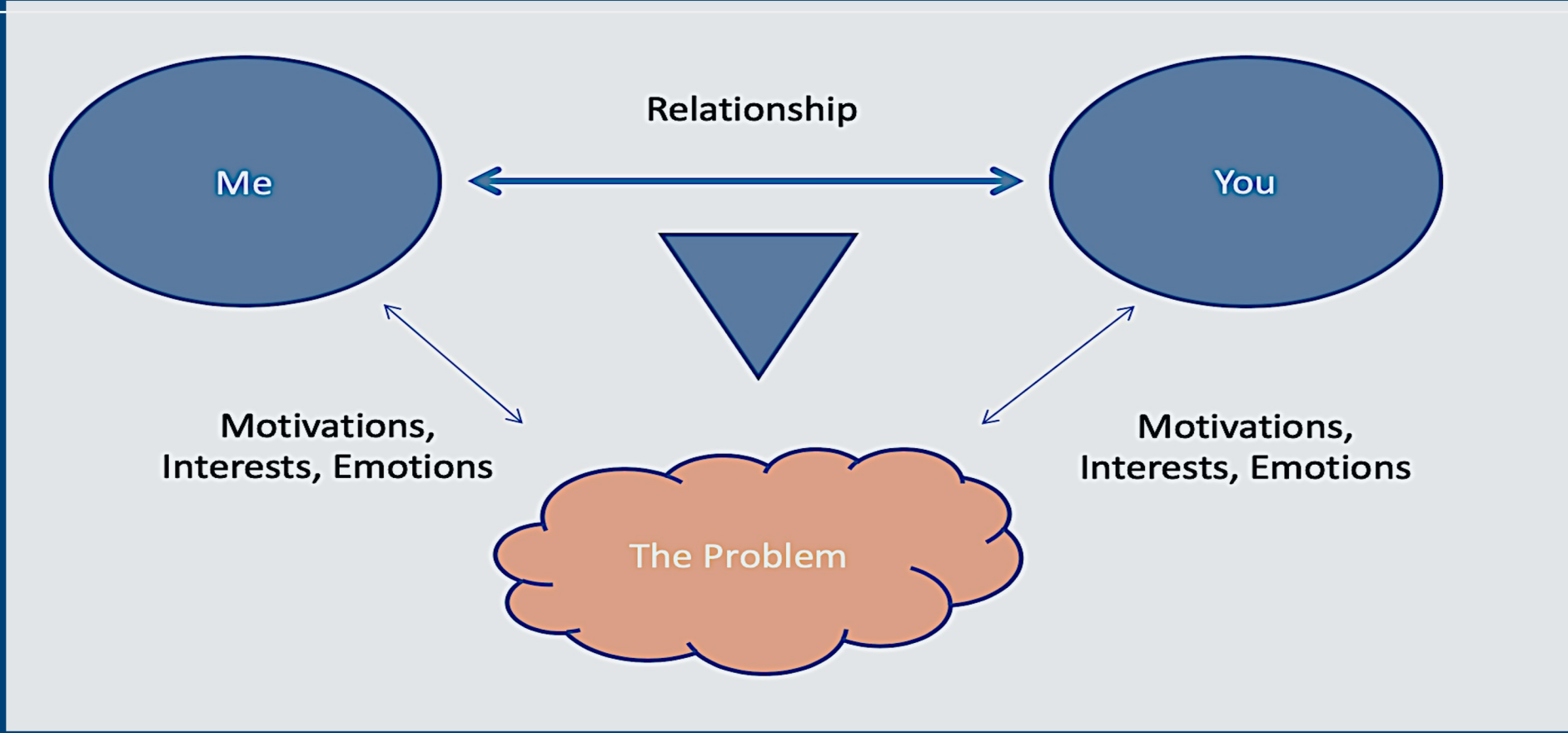
*Could you tell me your **concerns** about moving to a new office?*

### Expectations

*What are your **hopes** for your schedule next year?*



Separate  
the  
PERSON  
from the  
PROBLEM



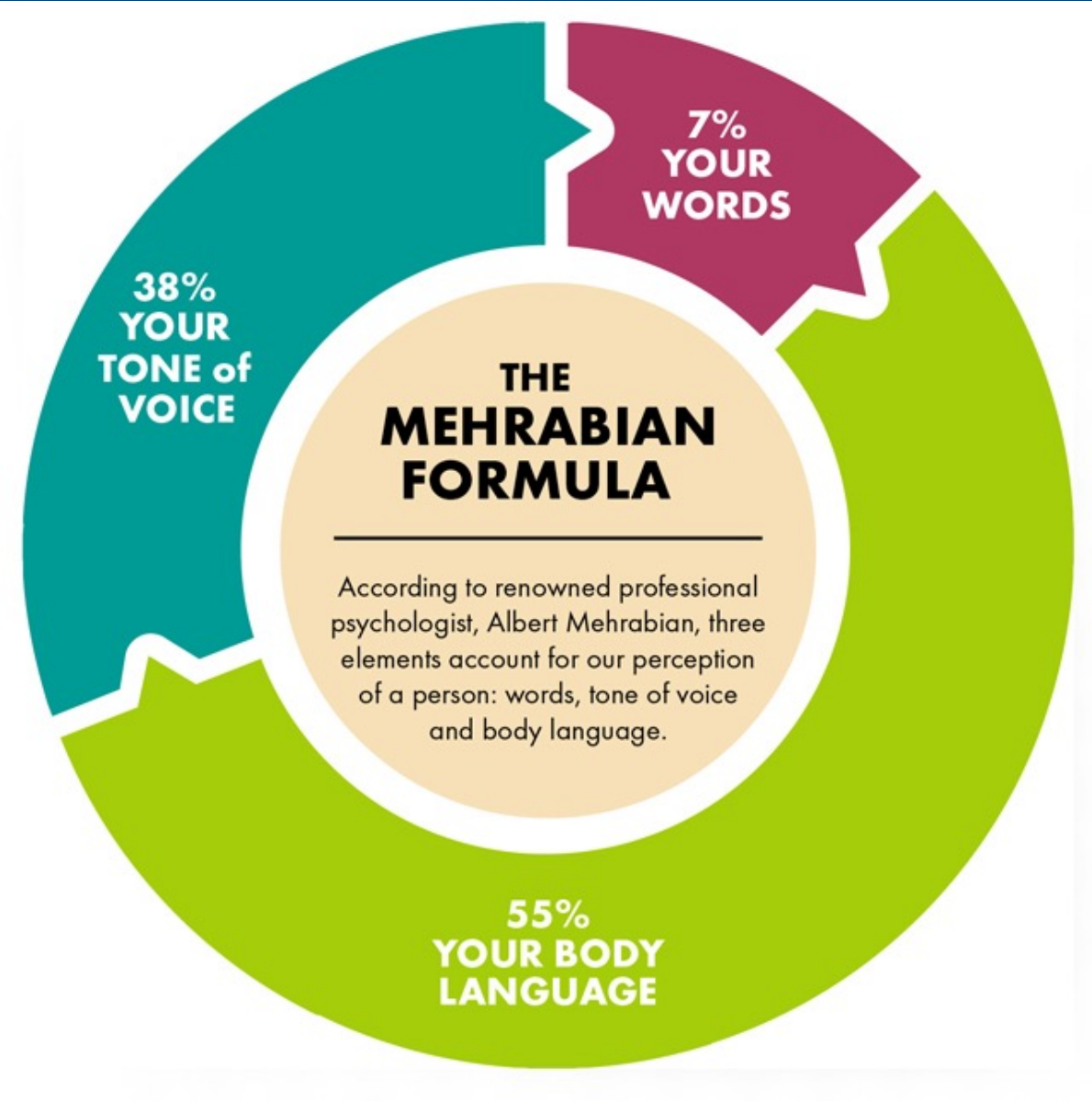


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”I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

- Maya Angelou





Nonverbal  
communication  
matters



# RESPOND with PEARLS<sup>©</sup>

*(before Tell)*

**P** Partnership

*I'll work with you to meet your goals.*

**E** Emotion

*This sounds very overwhelming.*

**A** Acknowledgement

*I'm sorry that you've had this challenging experience.*

**R** Respect

*I respect your commitment to the team through all of this.*

**L** Legitimization

*I think anyone in your position might feel this way.*

**S** Support

*I'm here for you and I want you to succeed.*



# TELL your perspective

Transition statement - ask permission

*“Would it be ok if I share my thoughts?”*

State Commitment to Relationship and/or Shared Goals

*“I appreciate how hard you have worked to advance this project.*

*And I know it’s important to both of us that we stay budget neutral this FY.”*

Tell your perspective using “I” statements

*“I am concerned that completely eliminating the budget for professional development this year will deeply impact morale and result in higher turnover.*

*That will be more expensive in the long run.”*

Rosenberg, M. *Nonviolent Communication*

Fisher, R. Ury, W. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In*

# Shared Decision- Making

Recall their interests  
Consider your own interests  
Name aligned goals/values

*“It sounds like we both want patients to get the care they need and for staff to feel their schedule is respected.”*

Consider what *you* feel and your needs

*“It feels disrespectful to me and to our patients when staff leave for the day before checking in to see if I need any support. I would like to find a solution that ensures staff coverage until the last patient’s needs for that encounter are clear.”*

Inquire / Offer a mutually-beneficial pathway

*“Would it be possible to have a rotating late shift so that staff have a predicable schedule and patients and providers have staff support at all times?”*

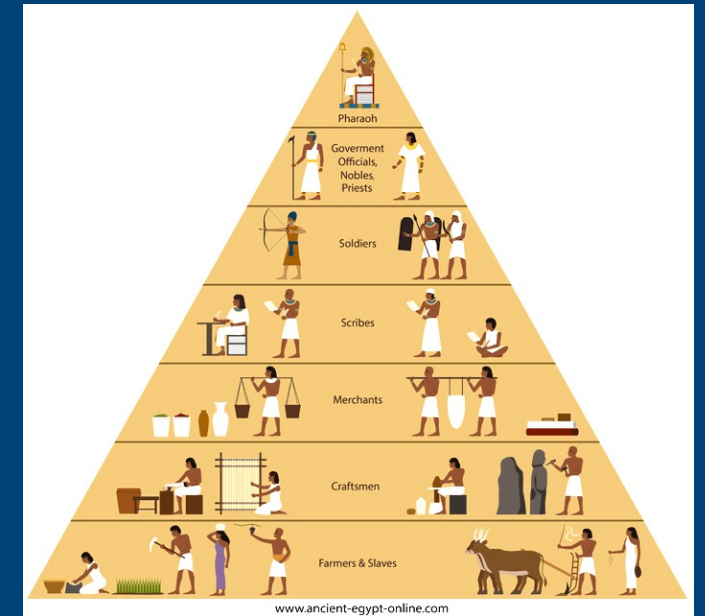
Burton, John. (ed.) 1990: *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*

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## A few more tips...

 ~~but.~~ → **AND...**

 ~~ways~~  
~~letter~~

• “Tell more more...”

• *“What would you want me to know about you to help us be even more effective in our future work together?”*

• *“I wish that bias didn’t exist in healthcare or in our teams. Unfortunately, it does. There may be ways you’ve already experienced inequity in our work together, and I want to know. I will be checking in, because I want to do better.”*

Gittell., JH. 2006

Cordero and Davis. *J Patient Exp.* 2020.

Davis and Chou. *J Gen Int Med.* 2019.

# Session Summary

**Consider relative values in the crisis**  
(relationship, task)

**Know your baseline conflict style's strengths** and consider which is optimal for each particular situation

**Check in with yourself** first

- Get out of amygdala hijack
- Climb down the ladder of inference
- Consider what hierarchy & identities might be relevant

**Ask** for the other person's perspective

- Interests –vs- Positions
- ICE open-ended questions


Separate the person from the problem

- Listen to understand
- **Reflect** back with empathy PEARLS

**Tell** your perspective and seek solutions

- Start with a commitment to relationship and/or shared goals





“the single biggest  
problem in  
communication is the  
illusion that it  
has taken place”

-George Bernard Shaw

Questions?

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