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# Challenging (*& Compassionate!*) Conversations with Colleagues

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# Disclosures

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# Learning Objectives

1. Identify common points of conflict in healthcare teams.
2. Reflect on personal hot buttons in challenging conversations at work and apply tools for engaging with skill.
3. Consider hierarchy within healthcare teams and learn strategies for establishing psychological safety and effective partnership.
4. Practice gaining perspective through open-ended question-asking, active listening, and responding with compassion.
5. Apply tactics for shared decision-making in challenging conversations with colleagues.

# Conflict

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Conflict is normal.

Conflict is an opportunity for change & growth.

And conflict is *stressful* for most of us!

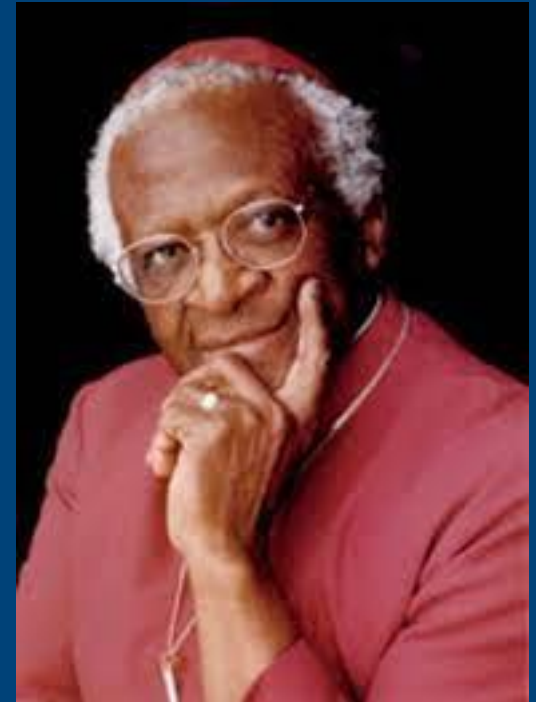
# Common Sources of Team Conflict

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- Environment
- Task
- Process
- Role
- Relationship

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

— *Desmond Tutu* —



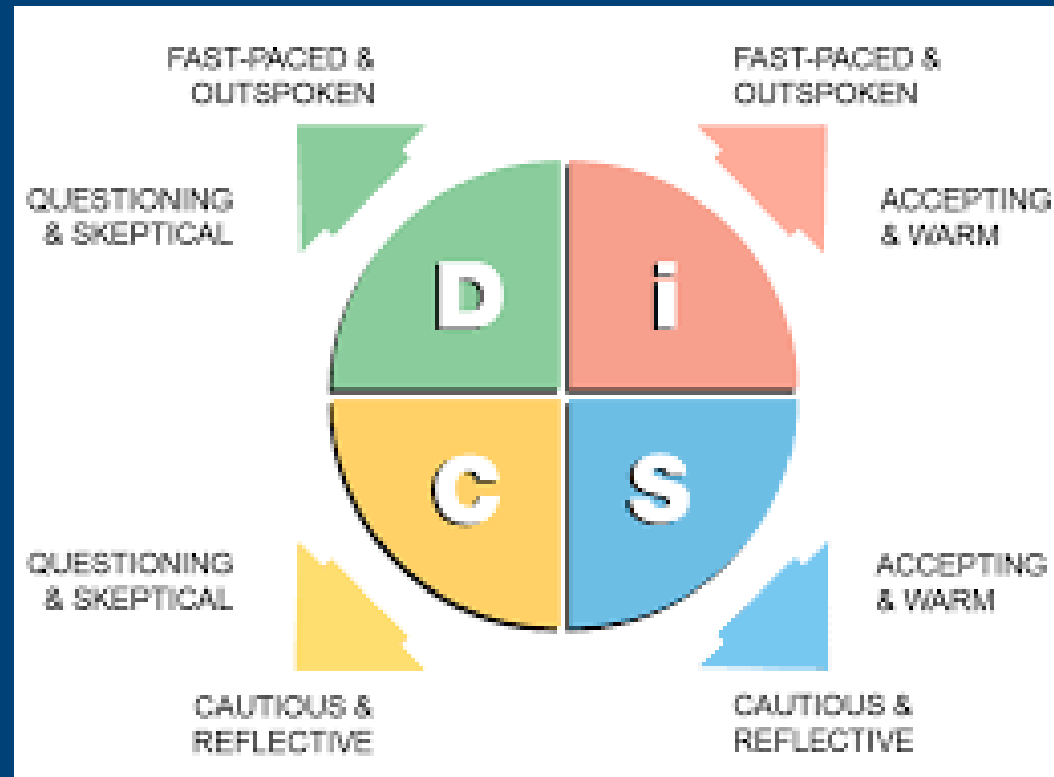
## Hierarchy

## Personality

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

## Identities

- Age/generation
- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Background

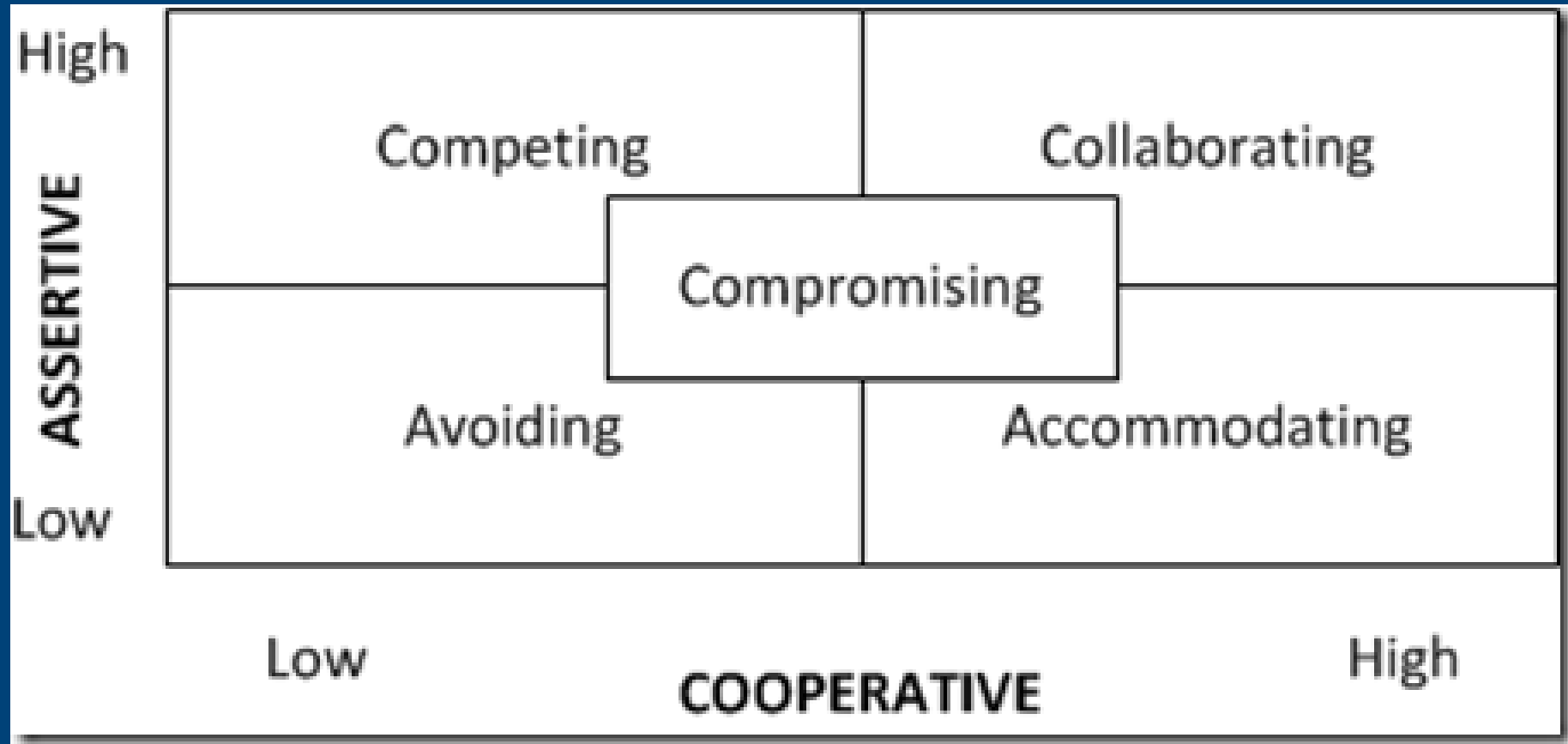


**NOTICE**

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



# Conflict Styles



# Amygdala hijack

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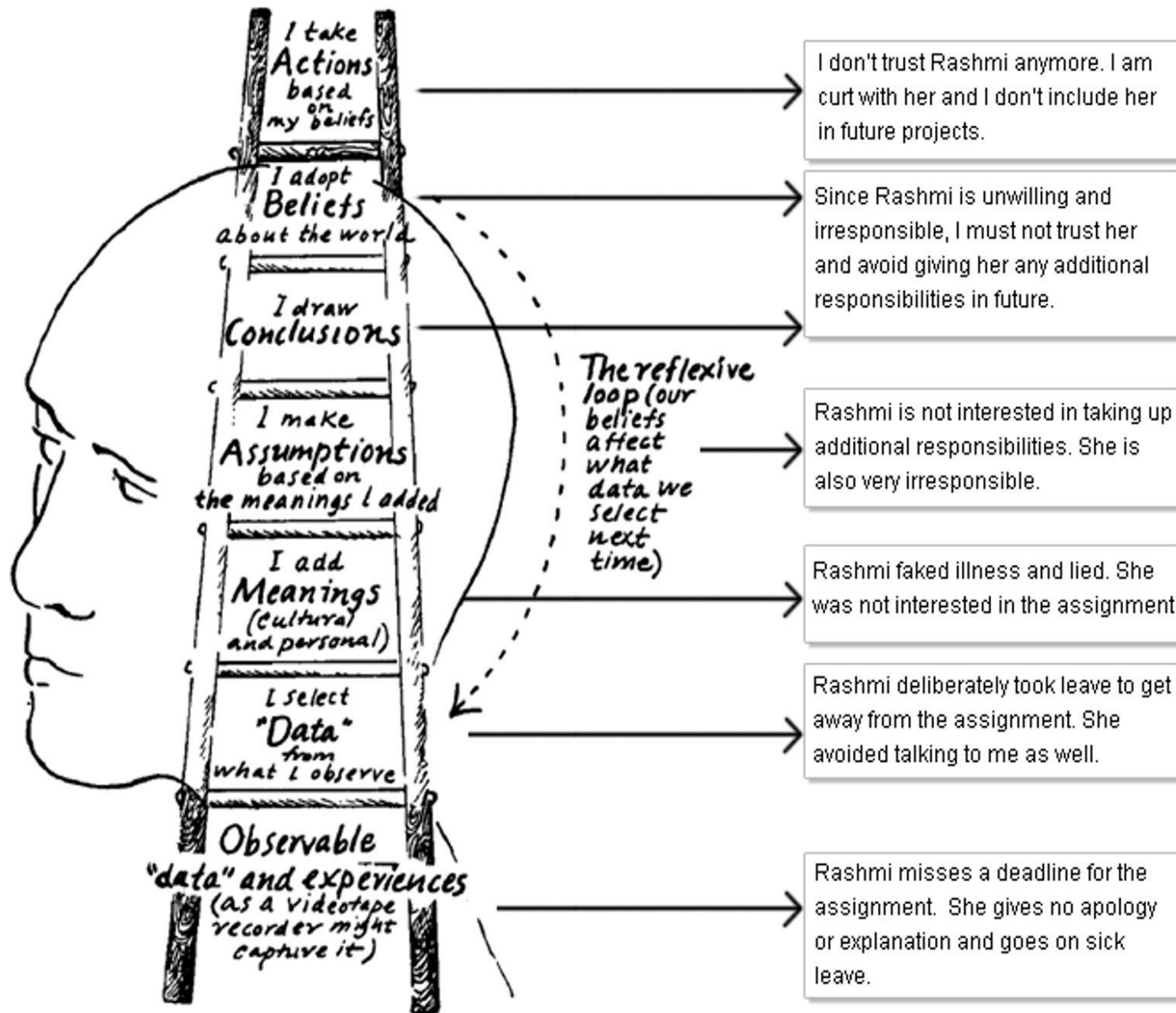
Understand your own anger +/- other feelings  
***before*** engaging in a difficult conversation

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

**UT Southwestern**  
Medical Center

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."*

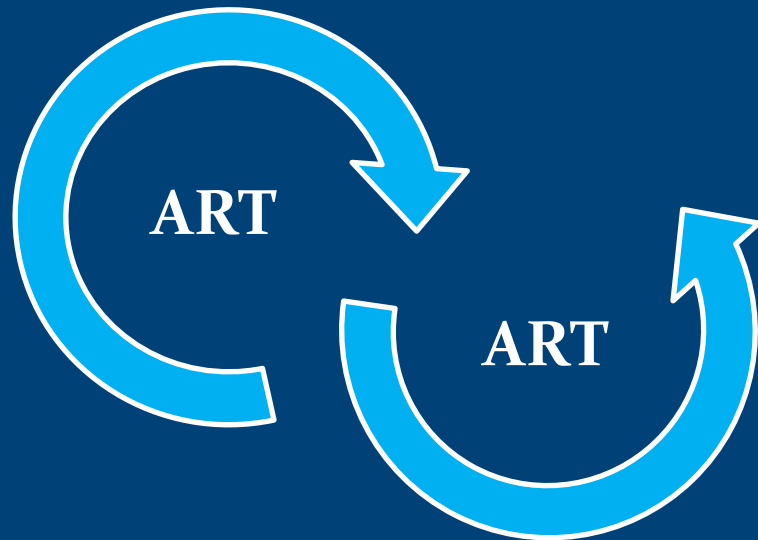
"Courage is what it takes to  
stand up and speak.  
Courage is also what it takes  
to sit down and listen"

- Winston Churchill



# 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...”*

## **Not** thinking about:

Correcting

Rebuttal

Reloading

# 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?

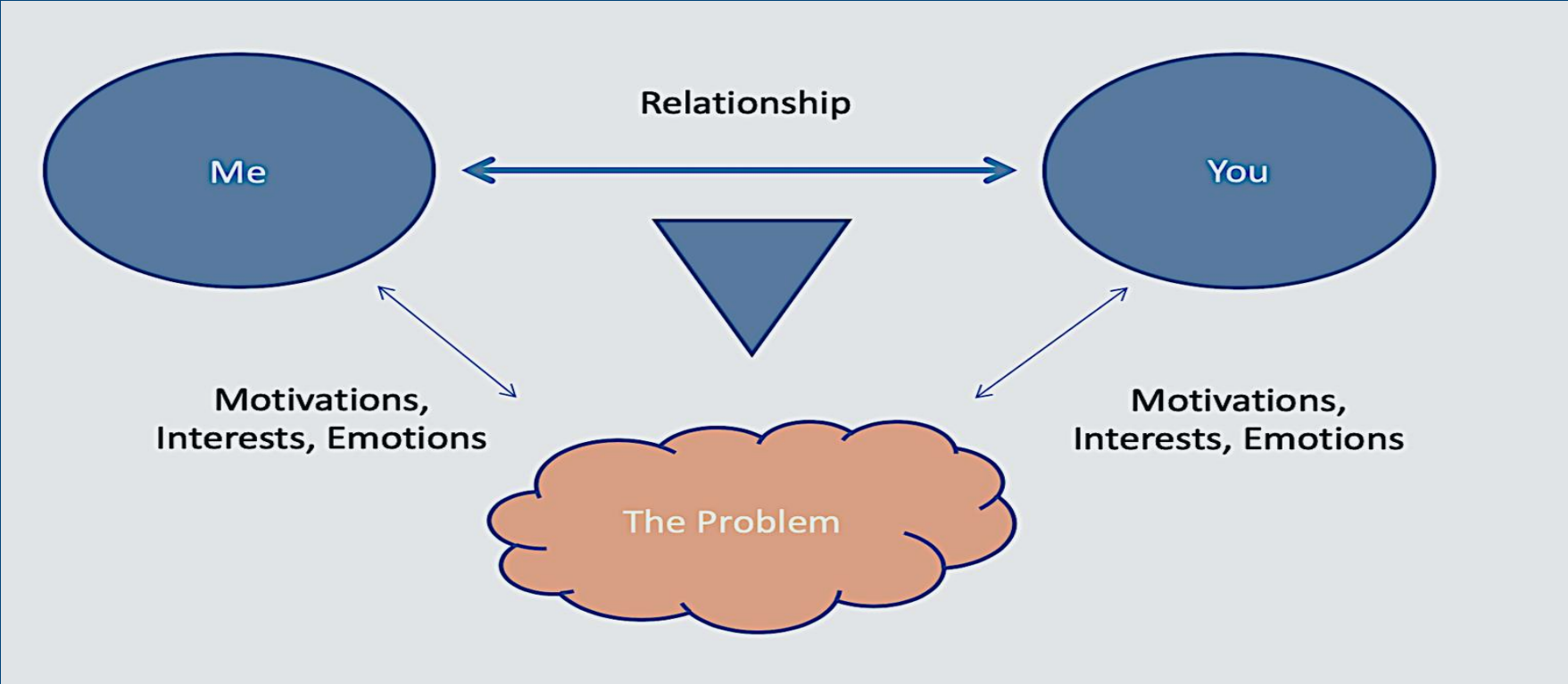
### Expectations

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



# 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 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.*

*I know it's important to both of us that we stay budget neutral this FY."*

Tell your perspective using "I" statements

*"I observe that there has been tension between us. I am concerned that this is distracting from us taking excellent care of our patients.*

*What can I do to help us find a solution together?"*

Rosenberg, M. *Nonviolent Communication*

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

## A few more tips...

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but... → **AND...**



- Always
- Never

- “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. If there are ways you’ve experienced inequity in our work together, please let me know, because I want to do better.”

# Take Aways

## **Consider relative values**

(relationship, task)

## **Know your baseline conflict style**

Consider which is optimal for a particular occurrence

## **Check in with yourself** first

- Get out of amygdala hijack
- Descend the ladder of inference

## **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

## **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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Annual ACH CME meeting

Austin, TX – June 10-12, 2022