

Effective Communication

A Professional Development Webinar for the AAMC Group on Institutional Planning

R. Kevin Grigsby
Sr. Director, AAMC Member Organizational Development

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R Kevin Grigsby, DSW
Senior Director
AAMC Member Organizational
Development

The presenter has no significant
financial or other conflicts of interest
to disclose.

Coming in early 2020 . . .

- Installment three of The AAMC Successful Medical School Department Chair Series

Thriving: New Perspectives and Approaches for Personal and Organizational Success

Objectives

At the end of this webinar, participants will

- Understand how emotional intelligence impacts the quality of communication
- Know how to manage ambiguity by using a solution-focused approach to close the “knowing-doing gap”
- Learn tools for overcoming the “deadly obstacles” often encountered in difficult conversations
- Know some best and promising practices for crafting high-quality messages

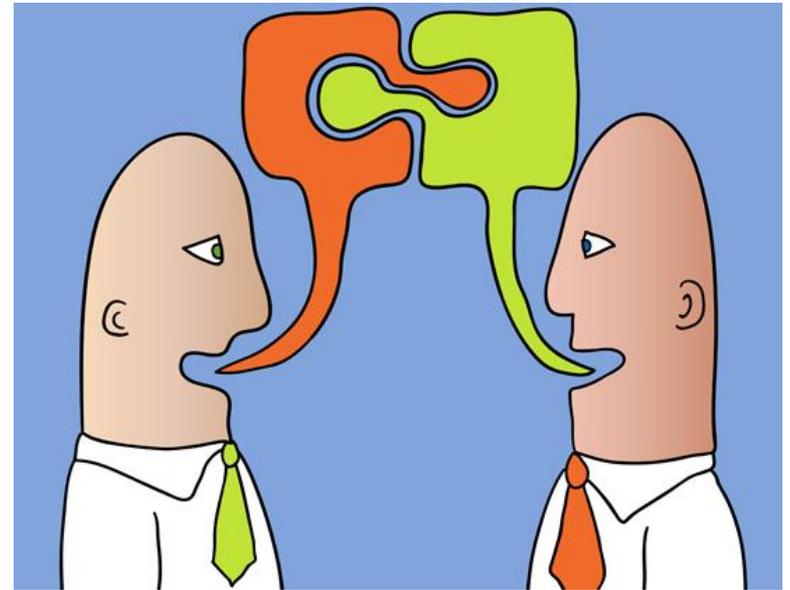
Loosely Coupled, Complex, Adaptive Systems

- Large number of elements
- Self organizing and interactive in nature
- Able to adapt to changing conditions
- Characteristics emerge



What is the purpose of conversation?

- Deliver a message
- Prove a point
- ***Get them to do what you want***
- Express emotion
- Solve a problem
- Connect with them



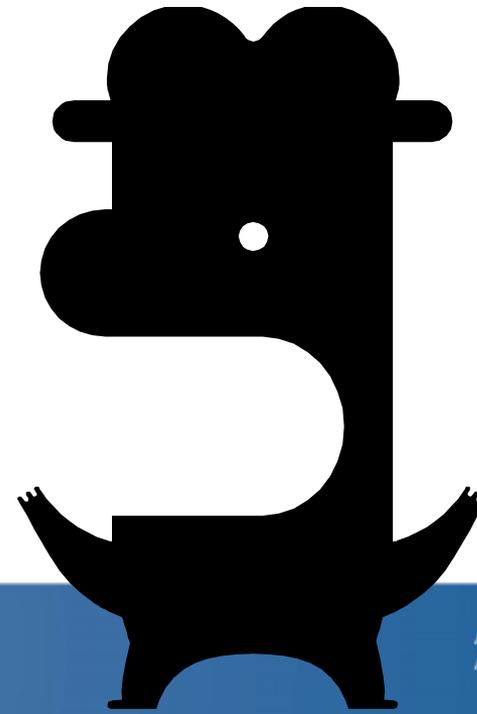
Why are some conversations difficult?

- Important issue – Uncertain outcome
- Self-esteem may be at risk
- One cares deeply about the topic – It's your salary!
- One cares deeply about the other party even if you don't want to - It's your boss!!!



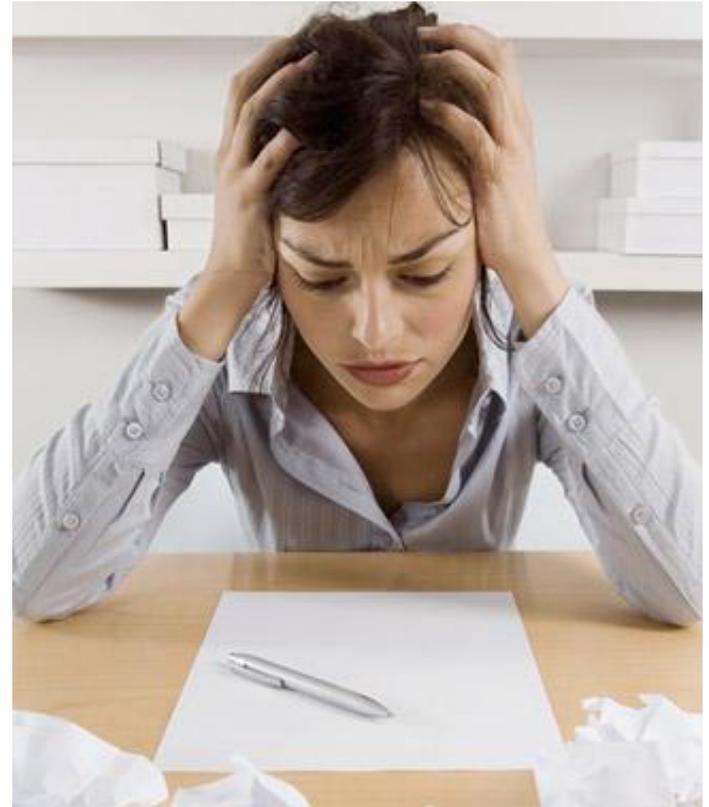
Every time we open our mouths to speak, we are taking a leap of faith – faith that what we say will be understood by our listeners, more or less as we mean it.

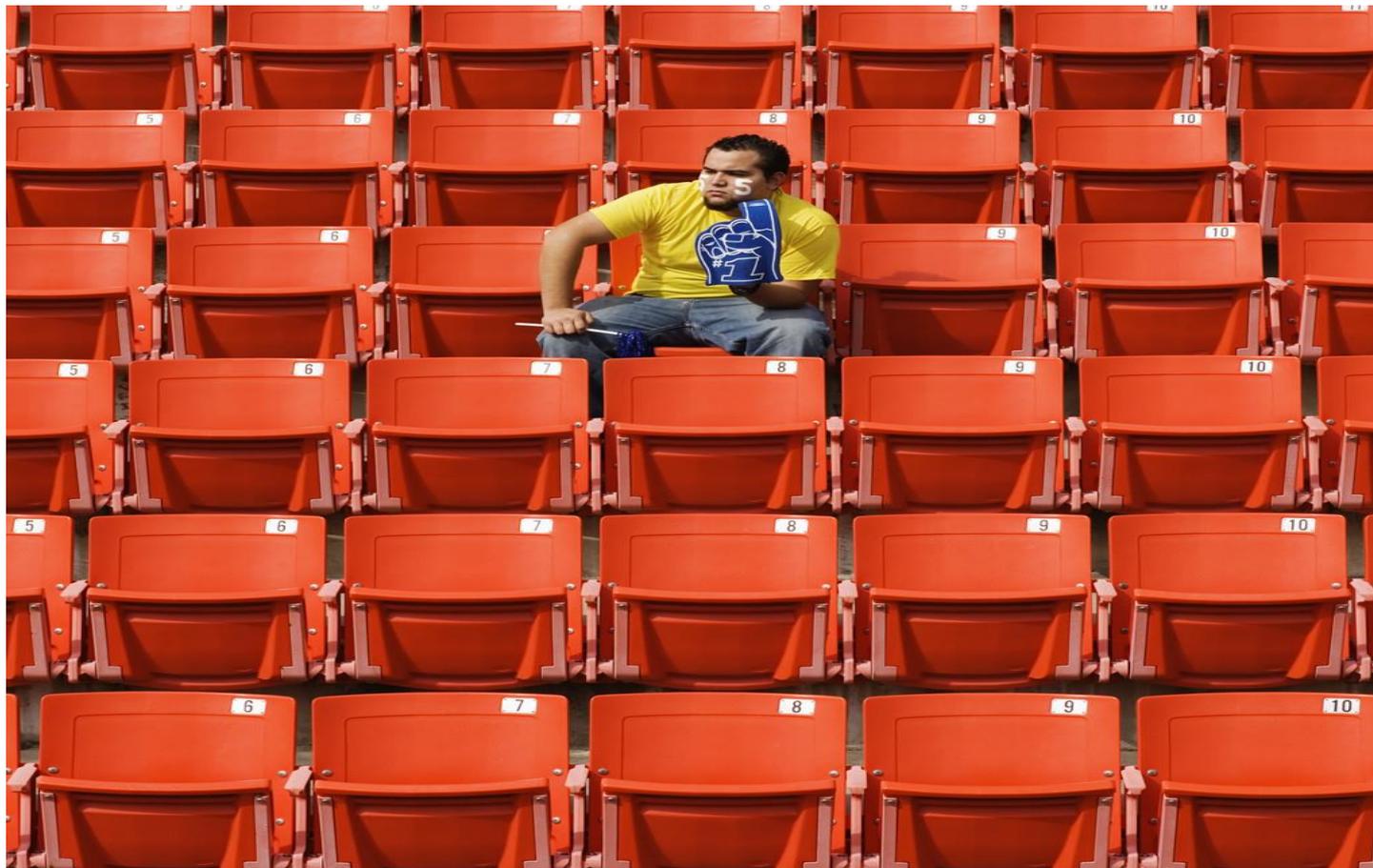
Tannen, 1994.



A sense of doom around conflict . . .

- Too often, conversation focuses on the negative
- Too often, conversation becomes adversarial
- Many of us are uncertain about to change behavior of other persons
- We view conflict as “bad” and feel uncomfortable addressing it





You are not alone!

Take a neutral position

- Conflict is not bad
- Conflict is not good
- Conflict just “is”
- Inevitable in any relationship or set of relationships
- Learn to *embrace* conflict in order to use it constructively

Separate *intent* from *impact*

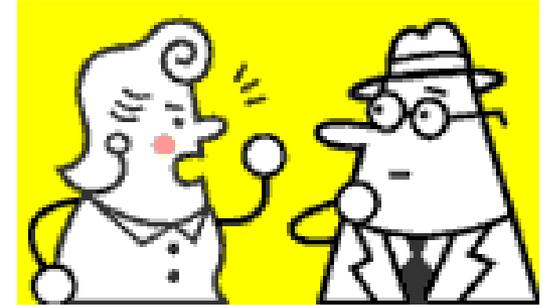
- What you say may not be understood as you intended it to be understood
- The same words may be heard differently
- The impact – whether intended or not – will influence the behavior of the other person



A woman without her man is nothing.

**A woman - without her, man is
nothing.**

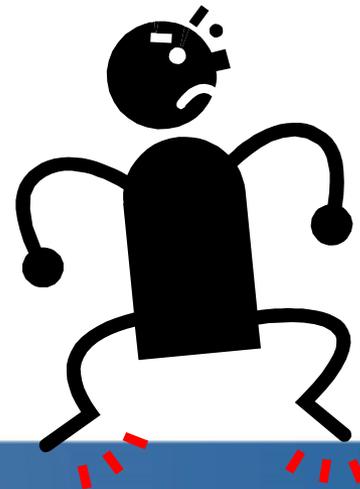
Commit to *problem-solving*



- Why? Because:
 - It's easy to miscommunicate
 - It's easy to perpetuate miscommunication
 - Miscommunication is seldom conscious or deliberate
 - Unless you take deliberate action to manage messages, you may create conflict or allow miscommunication to persist – or get worse!

Temperament matters

- Preferences or styles of communicating vary across temperament groups
- What is very comfortable to one person may be antagonistic to others
- Learning to tolerate and appreciate differences can be very helpful



Consider the possibilities

- You are of a different temperament from someone else
- The same words might have different meaning to each of you
- You may need to try another approach to successfully deliver the message



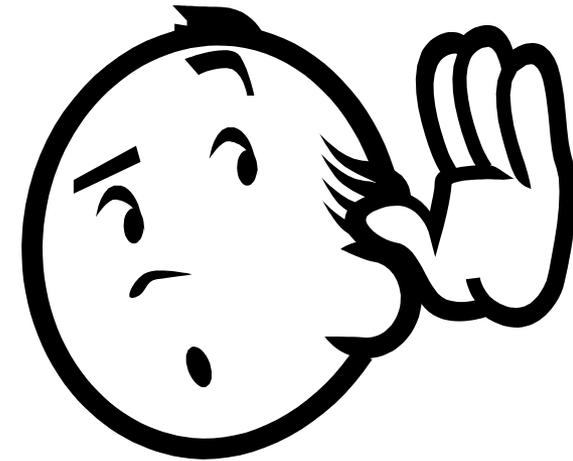
Tool #1-Listening generously

Generous, authentic listening

- In difficult conversations, we tend to stop listening
- We are formulating a rebuttal and do not *hear* what the other person is saying
- Learn to “turn off” the inner dialog and truly listen generously and authentically



Strategies for improving your communication skills



- Increase your self-knowledge
- Increase your knowledge of others
- Be willing to “really” listen – improve your listening skills
- Change your behavior

Know thyself. . .

- Socrates



Know others . . .

- Grigsby



3 Levels of Listening

Level 1:

Listening for *me*

Level 2:

Listening for *content/information*

Level 3:

Listening with your *head and heart* for the *speaker*

Good listeners

Listen with more than their ears

- Make eye contact
- Pay attention to posture and proximity
- Head nodding helps
- Concentrate on the message
- Avoid immediate assignment of emotion
 - Don't judge too quickly
 - Don't let anyone hijack your amygdala
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0VOgGPUtRI>

Tool #2-EASY conversations

Use EASY to engage others:

Elicit information – “Tell me more”, “Go on.”

Ask questions – “What led you to that conclusion?”, “How do you feel about that now?”

State the obvious – “Let me see if I have this right. You are saying . . .”

You may be wrong in your interpretation – What seems obvious to you may *not* be the intended message.

Open Ended Questions

- Cannot be answered with a “yes,” “no.”
- Encourage the person to expand on what he/she is saying.



Avoid asking “Why?”

- May leave a person feeling blamed or even shamed.
- Elicit a response: “Help me understand why you chose that course of action.”



Tool #3- Remain solution focused

Avoid the knowing–doing gap

Use a solution-focused approach:

1. Keeps conversations away from whining
2. Keeps the focus on problem solving and away from making the error of thinking that talking about something is the same as doing something – it's not the same!



Remain *solution-focused*



Start by gathering others and explain the model to them.



Ask them to agree to adopt the “solution focused” model for work related conversations.

The *solution-focused* model

Criticism alone can be irresponsible, as it does not lead to solving problems.

Agree that when criticizing, one must present a possible solution.

If you do not have a proposed solution, be brave and admit you have no solution, but are willing to keep working with the group to find a solution.

Be willing to compromise.

Be prepared to accept individual responsibility.

Remain *solution-focused*

When engaged in a conversation and the other party offers criticism, but no proposed solution, prompt them by stating “I understand your comments and feel some of them are valid criticisms. But please tell me, “**What is *your* solution?**”

Agree that if no solution is offered, the group will stick to a solution that has been proposed OR will continue to work to find a better solution

Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000.

Tool #4-Critical comments that result in changed behavior

What is a “Behavioral Protocol?”

- A statement describing a consistent set of actions to be taken in similar situations
- Protocols guide our behavior and get us beyond “*knowing*” about something to “*doing*” something
- Ultimately, they lead us to *being and acting* as positive examples e.g. enacting professionalism

It is “All About You”

- It is NOT about the other person, it’s about YOU and your response/reaction to another person’s behavior
- Keep the focus on you and on how the behavior affects you
- It’s not about being “right” – it’s about creating behavioral change
- Requires flexibility



The Proper Place, Person, and Time

- **Ask three questions of yourself:**



Is this the right setting?



Am I the right person to offer the comments?



Do we have enough time to process the conversation??



No Need to Apologize

- Don't start with "I'm sorry, but . . ."
- Manage your feelings
- Timing is important



If you want to know more about apology:

Grigsby, R.K. The fine art of apology: When, why, and how to say "I'm sorry". *Academic Physician and Scientist*, June 2007:4-6.

Embrace the inherent conflict:



Don't ignore it

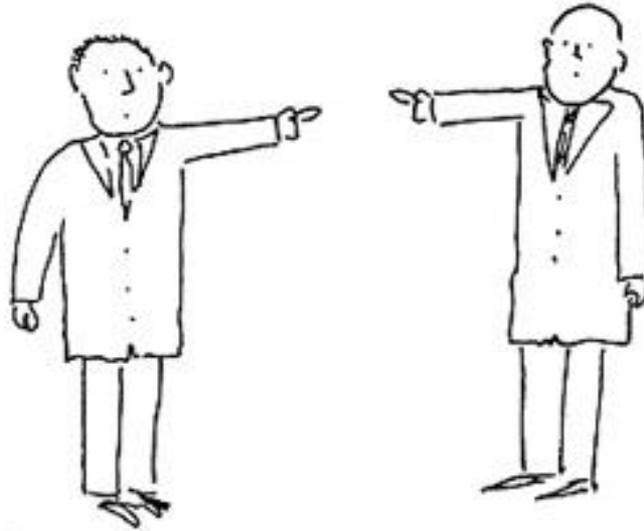
At best, you are postponing it

When conflict is postponed, it usually
gets worse



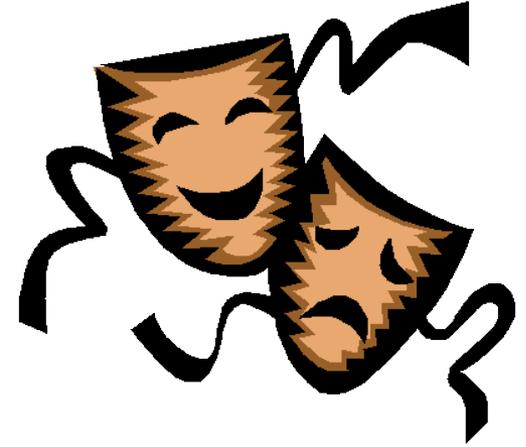
Start your conversation with “I” not “you”

- The term “you” creates defensiveness - you have identified the person as the problem
- The behavior is the problem, not the person!



Don't follow it with “always” or “never”

- Hyperbole doesn't serve a useful purpose – it increases the drama in the exchange
- It's probably not true



Follow “I” with “am,” “was,” “feel,” “felt,” “found myself”



- Remember, it’s about you and your response to the behavior of others
- It’s about the behavior affecting you: physically, emotionally, cognitively
- Own your feelings or they will own you

Follow with “when,” not “because”

- Use of the term *because* creates defensiveness in others
- Persons feel they have been identified as “the cause”
 - Determining the cause is much more complicated and isn’t fruitful in most situations

Describe the **B**ehavior Explicitly



- Use terms related to the senses
- What did the person do that you saw, heard, smelled, tasted, or felt?
- When did it occur?
- Was it once or has it occurred more than once?
- If more than once, how often?

Offer an Alternative by Describing the Behavior You Desire

- What is the ideal from your perspective?
- Describe other behaviors the person can enact
- Ask if the person has considered alternatives
- Be sure to listen and be willing to consider all alternatives
- Making a list of options can be helpful

Critical Comments to Change Behavior



Put it all together:

“I was annoyed when you criticized the proposed changes in the curriculum – and did not offer any alternative or solution. I think we all agree offering critical comments is important. Unless we offer proposed solutions, the process won’t move forward. Please propose a solution when you offer criticism.”

Best learning experiences are social

- We are wired to learn through relationship
- We learn from watching others/self
- We learn from feedback



Case Example #1

Organizational communication

- Director level position - strategy/planning
- Poor stakeholder communication
 - Wants to inform, engage, and get input regarding institutional changes
- Needs communication strategies to increase stakeholder awareness

Craft communications strategy

- Think big; Act small
 - Organization wide strategy
 - Harness the power of *opinion leaders*
- Craft the message and communicate using many channels to deliver the message many times at many levels
- Create “ambassadors” using word of mouth to deliver messages

Holding others accountable is
harder than it looks

Expect the Distracting D's”



Denial

Many people are not conscious of their own disruptive or annoying behaviors



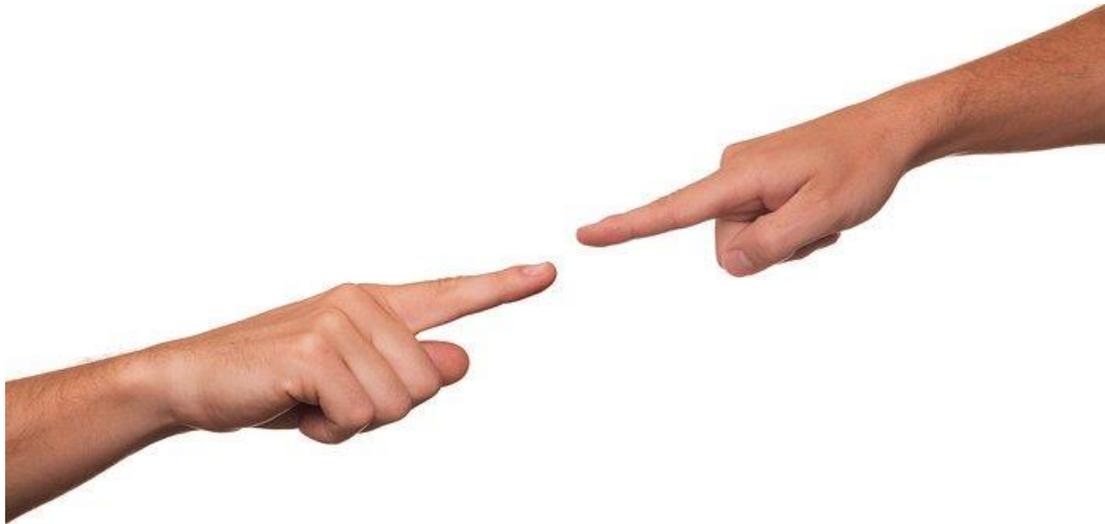
Dismissal

When confronted, people dismiss their own behaviors as being of little consequence

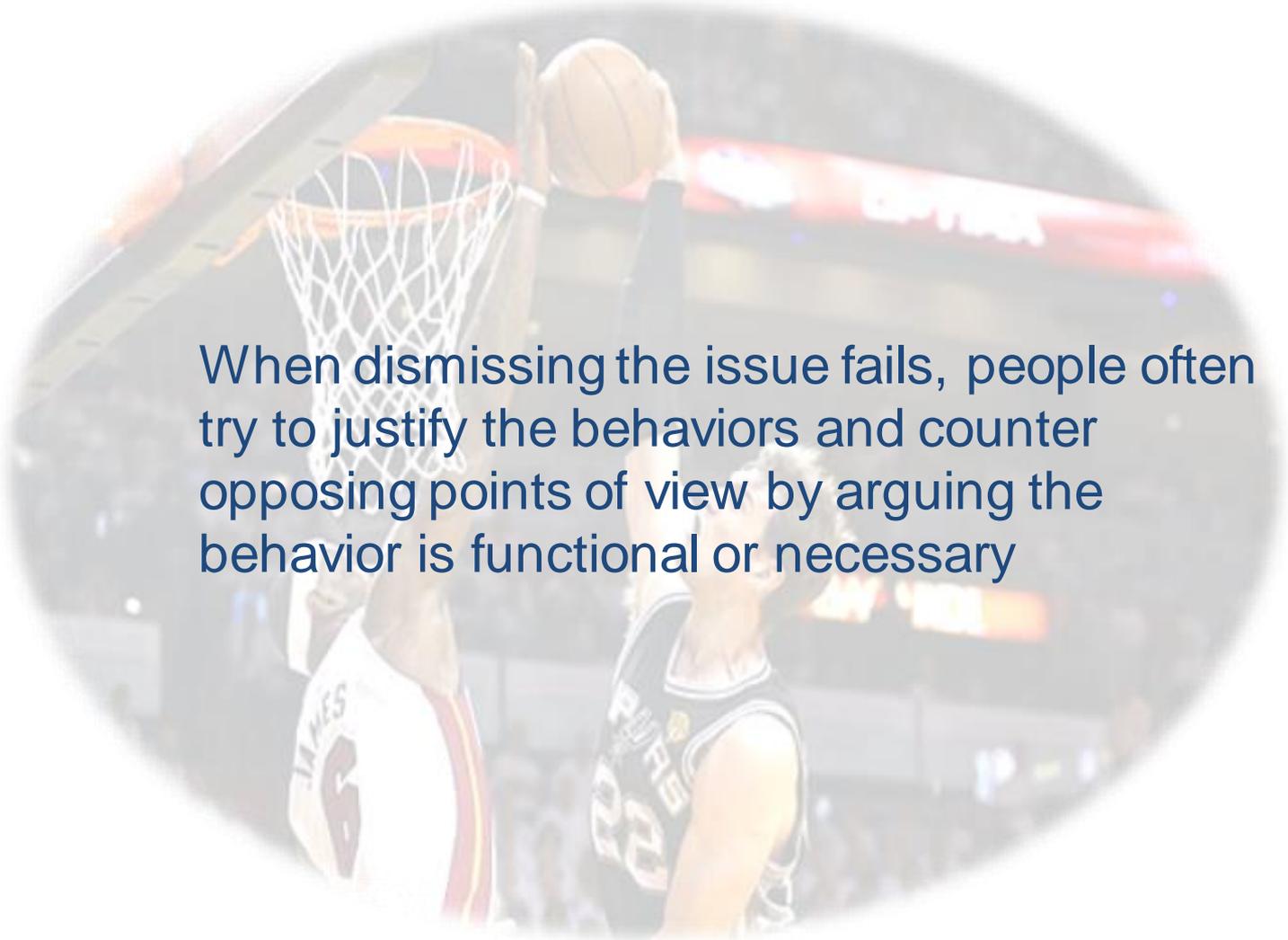


Distraction

When confronted, people change the subject and place blame on others



Defensiveness



When dismissing the issue fails, people often try to justify the behaviors and counter opposing points of view by arguing the behavior is functional or necessary

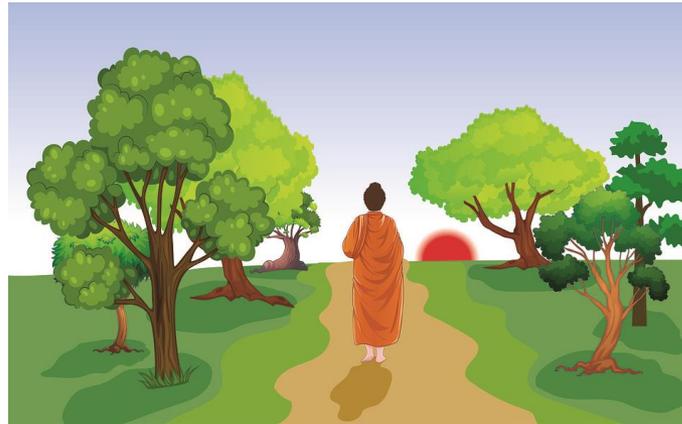
Displacement

- People turn against YOU when confronted urge changes in behavior, and those who hold them accountable
- At a minimum, they attack credibility
- The nature of the attack may escalate over time



Disengagement

- Physically present - psychologically absent
- Apathetic; may engage in learned helplessness; demoralization



Case Example #2

Diminishing leader

- Director level position – strategy/planning
- Many responsibilities beyond those in the position description
 - Building faculty and student dashboards
- Problem with an associate dean (superior)
 - Condescending in demeanor
 - Won't accept factual information
 - Snide “behind back comments”
 - Tense verbal exchanges

Adaptive strategy

- Reframe using (ACT)
 - Accept, Choose, Take Action (ACT)
- Adopt a solution-focused approach
 - When criticism is raised, ask “What is your solution?”
- Look for patterns in demonstration of these negative behaviors

Read *The No Asshole Rule* (Sutton 2010)

- Develop indifference and detachment toward the person in question
- Don't take it personally
- Look for small wins
- Limit your exposure to the person
- Engage others to build pockets of safety, support, sanity

Resources

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SAVE THE DATE: UPCOMING GIP EVENTS

Webinar: “Operationalizing Your Strategic Plan”

Sponsored by the Group on Institutional Planning (GIP) Strategic Planning and Management Subcommittee

February 11, 2019, 3:00 pm ET

2020 GBA/GIP Joint Spring Meeting

April 21-24, 2020

Hilton Union Square, San Francisco, CA

Registration opening in early January

For more information about these events or the Group on Institutional Planning (GIP), please contact Shawn Rosen-Holtzman at srosenholtzman@aamc.org.



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