



eBook

How to Disagree Effectively



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Leadership, Team and Individual Training/Coaching

If you would like to help yourself and your team improve self-awareness and communication, [contact Barb](#) to learn more about our workshops and coaching in areas of executive, leadership, communication, business, career & sales.

Top 5 Most Requested Programs



Introduction

Sometimes we feel it's easier not to speak up when we feel disenchanted, burnt out or overwhelmed, especially at work. We might tell ourselves it won't do any good or that leadership doesn't care or they would do something about it.

The truth is, many times problems aren't addressed or responded to by leadership because leadership doesn't know about them.

CASE STUDY

Recently, I was working with a leadership coaching client, let's call her Cheryl. She started coaching and shared that she was burnt out and a flight risk. She was a potential poster child for [The Great Resignation](#).

She described how she was suffering from symptoms of having the "Disease to Please" and the impact was leading her down a ditch and draining her of energy. The key for her was she and her team were having issues keeping up with the requests coming from all sides and different departments. They felt the culture had an expectation to respond and say yes. It was exhausting. The fact here is the leadership did not realize the barrage of requests coming from multiple stakeholders and the impact of the problem. How could this change?

During our coaching sessions we worked on themes to help her to discover ways to become more empowered, increase her executive presence, and leverage her influence without authority – which is an upcoming topic I will be presenting on. (Stay tuned!)

Tying the coaching to actionable results, she developed a plan to inform her boss of her concerns and ensure her voice was heard. She imagined her issues would be met with disagreement because she had hinted about them or casually mentioned the overload previously. There were also disagreements on certain points.

This time, she outlined her concerns about burnout and attrition if the behaviors are not addressed. She also outlined her proposed plan to bring awareness to the situation at hand. Next, she orchestrated and met with her team and created a list of what she first called, "demands" and we reframed to be "requests".

Finally, she met with her boss and several senior leaders where she had a chance to practice communicating with leaders of higher authority and leverage her newfound ability to “manage up”.

Lastly, they developed their W.o.W. (what I called developing their agreed upon “**W**ays of **W**orking”).

One example of their request was an agreement to cut off work at 6:00 pm Eastern time, even though they supported a global organization and numerous time zones. This was honored along with a number of other rituals to implement.

She was heard, was able to influence/define new ways of working and became the self-appointed steward to ensure the agreements were upheld in practice.

She found her voice by finding effective ways to “disagree effectively”. What about you?

We hope this eBook inspires you to “disagree effectively”, too. To know when to stand firm and when to walk away while modifying and tweaking the communication and speaking directly and with clarity.

Sometimes the Best Move Is to Walk Away

In disagreements there are times when it may become apparent that you will not see each other's views. The conversation is going nowhere or in circles. When this happens it may be better to agree to disagree rather than carrying on a pointless discussion that will only lead to escalated emotions.

How do you know that it is time to just agree to disagree?

When the Argument Gets Personal

Maybe you started by debating which viewpoint is better i.e.: This project is more important to the business than that one. Yet at some point, the discussion shifted to include the other person's personal views. Once you begin attacking someone's opinions the discussion has become personal, and there is no way one person can win without harming the relationship and setting a negative tone for future conversations. Now is when you need to agree to disagree, or you may find a professional debate turning into a personal attack.

When Someone Gets Emotional

While we may be trained to manage emotions in professional settings we are humans who have emotions. Still, at any point during a conversation, if someone starts to get emotional or raise their voice to an unnatural level, then it is time to press the pause button on the conversation.

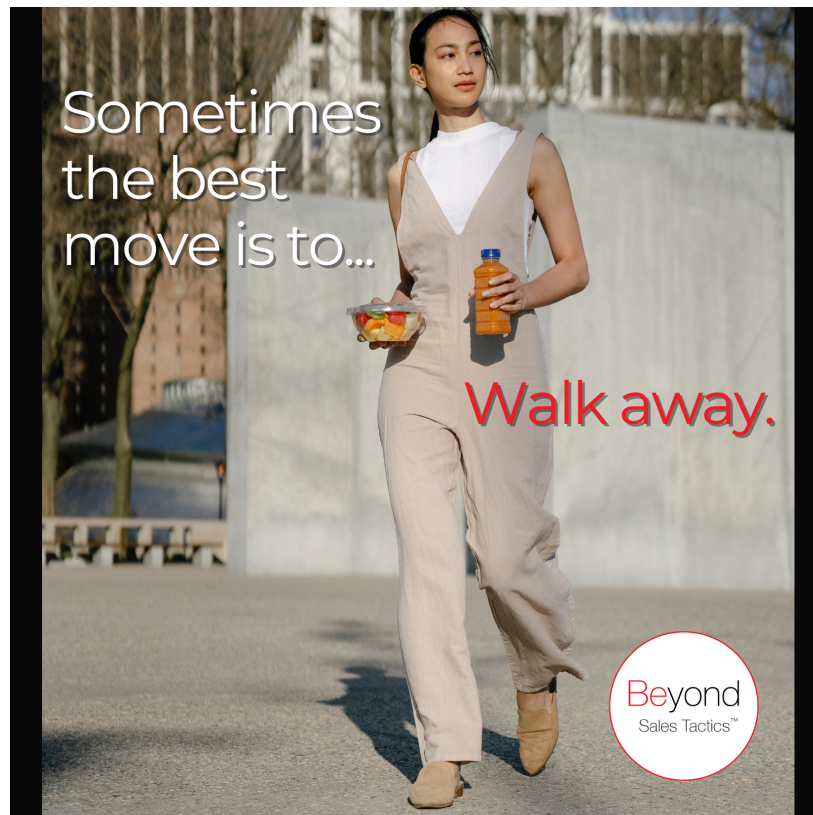
Once emotions become heightened, it is difficult to listen and we tend to close our minds to further suggestions. This is a sign that the conversation is escalating and headed toward becoming personal. Now is another instance when agreeing to disagree, pressing pause and taking time to cool down before you broach the subject again is appropriate.

When You Realize There Is No Right Answer

Sometimes we begin a conversation believing our position is the right way to proceed, yet as the conversation continues, we find that there are two or more different ways to see the issue, especially when it comes to past events.

Many times, people who were there may simply remember the situation differently. When this happens, you must realize that there is no way to go back and verify the event, and at this point, the best solution is to agree to disagree.

People may think that agreeing to disagree is a cop-out. However, agreeing to disagree is a plausible way to end a disagreement before it does collateral damage to the relationship by hurting feelings, getting emotional, or disrespecting the other(s) involved. Get curious, not furious. Ask questions when you don't understand the other person or people's reality. Using this tactic can support honest, respectful conversation before it spirals out of control.



Recognize the Merit of Other Viewpoints

We aren't going to get along with everyone. Even if we try, we might fall into people-pleasing mode and find that stance to be quite draining and, in general, impossible. It is okay to disagree with someone, and strive to, "respectfully disagree".

Disagree With Respect

When we respectfully disagree with someone, it means that we don't agree with their opinion, perspective or viewpoint, yet we respect it, and them as a person. It helps to convey this in the moment we disagree.

Acknowledge their beliefs, let them know that we don't see it their way and express directly that we don't want to argue, we want to partner and understand each other. If need be, pause or let the topic drop. This way, we aren't going back and forth extensively over something you will not likely reach agreement on, causing unnecessary discourse.

Skip Words Like "No Offense"

When we are about to communicate a diverse perspective, stay away from words like *"no offense"* or *"I don't want to be rude, but."* These phrases tend to cause friction and escalate the situation. Instead, start by acknowledging what you are hearing.

Treat the Individual with Respect

Again, even if we disagree with different perspectives or thinking, it doesn't mean we don't respect them. Refrain from raising voices and remain calm. Take the time to actively listen to them and let go of your viewpoints. Reflect what you heard before sharing your response. This way, both parties will be able to keep your emotions in check and demonstrate emotional regulation even though you disagree.

When we disagree with someone respectfully, we reach a point where neither of us will change our opinion, and thus we are respectful of each other, even as you acknowledge your disagreement.

We can hear the other person's thoughts with respect, even when we do not agree with them after dialoguing about it. Overall, respectfully disagreeing is an effective way to keep a conversation constructive while communicating honestly and effectively.



Top 4 Tips to Keep a Disagreement Respectful

It can be difficult to keep a disagreement respectful, especially if you are arguing over something you care about or have strong emotions around. However, it's important to remain respectful during a disagreement. Usually disagreements come when you and the other person (or people) are against each other, rather than you and the other person (or people) partnering to solve the problem at hand.

Below are four tips for keeping a disagreement respectful.

1. Respect the Person's Truths

No matter what you are arguing about, focus on the facts. Leave personal beliefs, judgements and conclusions out of the discussion as much as possible and check your assumptions. Doing so will keep the conversation constructive instead of becoming a personal attack.

Find a disagreement to be quickly going in a personal direction? Sort out fact from fiction. Remember our beliefs are often what drives our stories. As humans we tend to spin negative stories and our brain looks for supporting evidence to justify our beliefs. This blurs the ability to think and speak with clarity. Consider the possibility that you may actually be wrong or partially wrong.

2. Use the Word I Instead of You

During arguments, frequent use of the word "you" can come across as a direct attack on the other person, even if that is not the intention. It can have a negative impact. Our role in standing up for ourselves and disagreeing effectively is to close the gap between intention and impact. In places where we would normally say "you," try changing the sentence and select the word "I" instead. For example, instead of saying, "You never do the dishes," try saying, "I feel like I am the one to do the dishes more often. Could we take turns?" This changes the feeling and focus of the argument.

Now you try.

Point of disagreement with You _____

Point of disagreement with I _____

3. Listen Actively

One of the best ways to keep an argument respectful is by ensuring that you listen to the other person when it is their turn to speak. Not listening is an unmistakable sign of disrespect. Behaviors that impede active listening are:

- Talking over the other person
- Responding when you haven't listened to them fully
- Forming your response while they are talking
- Shifting too quickly to your point of view

Clarify what you don't understand to ensure mutual understanding.

What we are offering as suggestions sounds simple and as I always say, "What I speak about is common sense, not common practice."

4. Partner with People (or Person) to Pursue Solutions

When we are at odds with others, we need to find ways to express what we would like to see happen and how we want to work together to figure it out. Sometimes it is valuable to discuss the relationship before the problem.

We might do well to name the dynamic that is causing contention and explore ways to shift how we work together. How can we partner to find the best path forward? What can we do to experiment ways of moving ahead? How can we listen to each other more effectively?

And then we need to remember these key tips:

1. Resolve not to let the disagreement get personal
2. Use the word "I" instead of "you"
3. Listen while the other person is speaking
4. Disagree with respect
5. Partner to pursue the solution

So next time you feel triggered by words, situations or a scenario, use these 4 tips to keep your conversation productive.

Be Mindful of Your PET Peeves

P = Posture E = Eye Contact T= Tone

Sometimes, life tosses us in the ring with others we can't seem to agree with no matter how hard we try. If we are in a professional situation where we have no choice except to talk to them, we might be wondering how to do this.

Considering there is nothing apparent that can be agreed upon it might be tough. Here are a few points to keep in mind that will help us stand up for ourselves, preserve important relationships, and disagree with grace.

Choose Your Battles & Your Posture

First and foremost, when you know that you and another person disagree about a subject, it may be best to try and avoid bringing up this subject whenever possible. This way, you won't have to worry about talking to them about something you disagree with as frequently. Sit up, have an engaging posture, and be present in the conversation.

Look for Where You Agree-Keep Engaged Eye Contact

Even if we can't agree on everything, it's also difficult to disagree with everything said as well. Highlight the parts that are agreed upon. Look at the person that you are communicating with. Find common agreement. President Obama (political differences aside) would often say, "even though we disagree on X, surely we can agree upon Y".

Here's another example, "I am onboard with X opinion, yet it's the Y that I am still having difficulty aligning with. Let me share with you why..." This way, the other person knows you are listening and understands exactly where you disagree. Engaging posture and engaging eye contact will help your communication stay connected, even while working through disagreement. This creates a bridge to better understanding.

Keep Conversations a Neutral Tone

If opposing viewpoints arise, be intentional, and do your best to keep the conversation on neutral ground. Focus on what you can control in the conversation. We can keep the tone neutral first by letting go of our agenda, ask questions to understand their

viewpoint and ensure to keep our voice from elevating. Redirect the conversation away from a part that might be especially tense or inflammatory for all involved.

Share Stories

Some topics are bound to start a divisive debate. So instead of discussing charged issues like current events, try sharing stories instead. Stories are your recount of events, keeping the conversation in neutral territory.

When it comes to talking to people that you disagree with, this can be a difficult task. There may be topics that you agree to avoid to keep the conversation neutral.

Stories humanize situations and provide opportunities for connection and common ground. Sometimes hearing others' stories will evoke judgmental thoughts. When these thoughts are spoken they may sound sarcastic or snarky. Those are times to filter your thinking and keep those snarky's to yourself.

“Keep the snarky
comments in your
mind.”

Barb Girson



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Common Ground Is Closer than You Think

It's important that we feel validated and that our opinions, thoughts, and feelings are heard. "Being heard" can be difficult when we disagree with someone who has more authority than us, especially if we feel intimidated by them. However, there are several tips to communicate our thoughts, ideas and needs with someone that has more authority than us.

Pick The Right Time

When it comes to disagreeing with our superiors, be it our boss or their boss or even our clients, it's all about the timing. Voicing a contrary opinion to our boss in the middle of a meeting with people who came to evaluate them is not the right time. Instead, wait for a one-on-one conversation to discuss why your opinions are different. This way, neither are feeling attacked or embarrassed.

Identify Goals You Share

Shared goals are important yet the method used to reach said goals may be different. Keeping the shared goal top of mind, reiterate how we want to work towards it together, then begin a brainstorm on how we can move forward to achieve the shared goal. This diplomacy will help the person of authority see you as more of an equal than an enemy.

Stay Calm

One of the most important points to remember when disagreeing with someone in a higher leadership role than you is to stay calm. Remember your tools that you can control - your PET peeves (posture, eye contact, even on zoom, and tone of voice).

If we get too emotional, the other person/group may find it difficult to understand us, putting a negative spin on working together. If we start getting riled up, take a deep breath, pause, and remember to speak calmly to be heard and to listen.

It can be extremely challenging to get up the nerve to disagree with someone who has more authority than us. So before doing so, consider practicing with a trusted peer or a coach, find a time that is convenient for everyone involved, and use calming techniques such as breathing exercises before starting the discussion. Also, identify common goals to help others see you as an equal. Then remain calm, cool, and composed.



Conclusion

Being able to navigate disagreements is an important skill. Standing up for yourself, your needs, values and beliefs is essential. Not only are you honoring yourself, you are honoring others by offering different perspectives in a respectful way. We can't always be right, nor can we expect that every idea we have is going to be implemented.

That said, keep moving forward, keep communicating and voicing your opinions, and sharing the ideas that matter to you.

Beyond Sales Tactics



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- Speaking
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In person or virtually, Barb is here to help you take your high-performing team to the next level.



We help you transform
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