

Negotiation.

It sounds like a term used in politics and business, and yet we as individuals negotiate all the time. We negotiate with partners, colleagues, children and -- more often than we notice -- with ourselves. For most people, negotiation is as constant as breathing.

There are lots of books that tell us how to breathe deeply and mindfully in order to change ourselves and enhance our relationships. The same is true for negotiation. There are specific techniques that, when followed, do improve the outcome and are more likely to create a feeling of collaboration and win-win.

Like breathing, it takes practice and attention in order to improve our negotiating powers. When the skills are not integrated into our being and the pressure rises, it's easy to fall back on our old competitive “win-lose” habits. Here are some tips for rethinking how we have difficult conversations:

1. **Missed Expectations:** Conflict is a result of missed expectations and the antidote for that is clarity. At work, be very clear what the expectations are. Summarize the action item and be sure to ask questions such as “what *exactly* does ‘better performance’ or ‘early to work’ mean?”
2. **Check Your Intentions:** When starting a conversation, check what your honest intention is. If it is to “shame or blame or teach or preach” to the other person, then stop right there. It will sound like criticism and it probably is. If your intention is to improve the relationship or the outcome, then you’ll approach it differently.
3. **Curiosity versus Certainty:** When you are in the middle of the conversation, are you willing to be curious and open? If you are certain that only you know the “right” outcome, you will miss a lot of creativity and certainly not foster goodwill.
4. **Valued, Respected and Heard:** Create your own **V-R-H** meter. When you’re done with a conversation, check your internal scale from 1-10. Did you feel valued and respected? More, importantly how did the other person feel? If your rating is low, reflect on what could have been done differently.

These are just a view of the strategies to start you thinking about how to approach difficult conversations. Effective negotiation begins with an attitude that is reflective and empathetic. There is a fundamental principle in negotiation that is not negotiable: Beyond “win-win,” you must have a core belief that you are really and truly connected to the other person and that you care about their well-being as much as your own.

For more information on divorce, family and workplace mediation, please visit BJ’s web site at www.BJMediationServices.com, call BJ at (585) 234-8740, or email BJ at bjmann1@frontiernet.net.