

1 CENTER YOURSELF AND CLARIFY REALITY

PAUSE → **BREATHE** → **REFLECT**

If strong emotions are present, check in with yourself to understand what's shaping your reaction. Let these questions help you clarify what's happening inside you.

- What part of my emotional response is grounded in facts, and what part might be interpretation?
- Am I making assumptions or filling in blanks with information that may not be accurate?
- Am I taking anything personally, or making something personal that isn't? If so, why?
- Are past experiences coloring my ability to think clearly, stay objective, and focus on the facts of the present situation?
- Am I overstating any fears and allowing them to distort my perception of reality?
(fear of harm, loss, rejection, exclusion, or desperation)
- Am I engaging in any irrational or self-protective narratives that are distorting my view of the situation, minimizing my own role, influence, or responsibility, and undermining my ability to think clearly, stay composed, and engage effectively?

FOOL'S CHOICE

"I can't be honest and maintain the relationship."

Framing the situation as an either/or when a both/and solution is possible. You assume you must choose between two undesirable extremes instead of exploring a balanced, skillful middle path.

VICTIM STORY

"It's not my fault."

Minimizing or ignoring your own contribution to the problem. You cast yourself as the innocent party to avoid discomfort, accountability, or self-examination.

VILLAIN STORY

"It's all their fault."

Exaggerating the other person's flaws, motives, or incompetence. You assume the worst about them while overlooking their possible good intentions, pressures, or limitations.

INADEQUATE / IMPOSTER STORY

"It's all my fault."

Over-owning responsibility due to self-doubt or imposter feelings. You inflate your shortcomings and assume you're the sole cause of the problem, even when the situation is shared or complex.

HELPLESS STORY

"There's nothing I can do."

Believing you have no influence or options. You convince yourself you're powerless, which prevents you from seeing the choices, boundaries, or actions available to you.

With mental maturity and genuine empathy, step outside your own perspective and explore the situation through the experiences of others. Consider:

What impact is this situation having, or is likely to have, on others involved?

Make sure you're gathering all the FACTS with a full awareness and understanding of the following categories:

- ✓ **Known Knowns** Facts you are fully aware of and confident are true.
- ✓ **Other Data Points** Assumptions, interpretations, opinions, speculation, fears, and concerns. These are not facts, but they influence your thinking and should be acknowledged, not treated as truth.
- ✓ **Known Unknowns** Information you know you don't yet have. You may need to seek out the missing data, make a well-informed estimate, or avoid filling in the gaps with assumptions.
- ✓ **Unknown Unknowns** Factors you don't yet know that you don't know (your "Black Swans"). Stay open to the possibility that additional variables or perspectives may emerge.

2 CHECK YOUR MOTIVES AND ALIGN YOUR INTENTIONS

As you consider how to approach this conversation, stay focused on what matters most and let that clarity guide your decisions and behavior.

In difficult conversations, your **behavior will always reflect your motives**. Use the questions below to **ensure your motives haven't slipped into unproductive agendas**, such as winning, punishing, keeping the peace, or teaching a lesson that can derail a constructive dialogue.

Q1

WHAT OUTCOME AM I SEEKING?

What do I ultimately want to accomplish?

Q2

WHAT DO I WANT FOR:

- *myself?*
- *the other person?*
- *the relationship?*
- *the organization?*

Q3

WHY IS THIS CONVERSATION NECESSARY?

What value will it create for me, my team, or the organization if it goes well?

Q4

IF I TRULY WANTED THESE RESULTS, HOW WOULD I THINK AND BEHAVE DURING THIS CONVERSATION?

*Who do I want to be in this moment?
How would the version of me that I'm becoming handle this?*