

Reflection and Process for Raising Difficult Topics in Meetings

Regardless of whether you are a positional leader or not, you can facilitate a conversation about a challenging topic. There's probably no perfect time, but just getting started will help. Here are a few strategies that help ease the way.

Taking time to write and reflect in advance also will help you clarify your thinking and ensure you hone in on the heart of your concerns.

State the topic

Complete the following sentence stems to name the issue. Be sure you're clear and an encapsulate the issue in a phrase or short sentence.

I feel like there's an elephant in the room. I'd like to talk about...

Share your intentions

Sharing intentions at the outset allows for people to hear your concerns without telling a story about what they think your intentions are. What do you want people to do with the issue you're naming?

My intent in raising this topic is...

Acknowledge fear

It's important to name your fear, as most people who raise tough topics are often fearful of the consequences. Naming fears can be disarming in a group setting.

Write down what you might say here:

Now take a deep breath. Take another one when you name this issue in a meeting. And restate the topic.

Adapted from Aguilar, E. (2019, September 12). How to Address Tough Topics in Staff Meetings. Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-address-tough-topics-staff-meetings>



Communicate confidence that the elephant can be discussed

How might you share with the group that this conversation will be worth it?

Share the impact that the elephant is having on you and the consequences of not addressing it

People often are afraid of saying the wrong thing, so they say nothing. Remember this step may be messy, but it's worth taking the risk. Practice by writing here.

What is the impact this issue is having?

What's at stake if nothing changes?

Ask how others see the situation and about the impact that the elephant is having on them

Always create space for response and others' perspectives. Remind the group that addressing the elephant is not the same thing as solving the problem. By opening up a conversation, by naming the previously undiscussed issue, you are taking one big step toward more effective collaboration.

Listen fully and encourage others to do the same

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