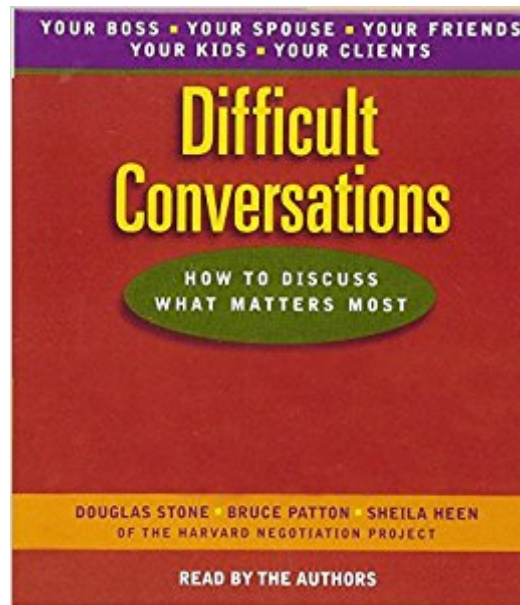


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# Difficult Conversations: How To Discuss What Matters Most



## Synopsis

Dealing with your ex-husband, who can't seem to show up reliably for weekends with the kids; navigating a workplace fraught with office politics or racial tensions; saying "I'm sorry" or "I love you". We all have difficult conversations, no matter how confident or competent we are. And too often, no matter what we try, things don't go well. Should you say what you're thinking and risk starting a fight? Swallow your views and feel like a doormat? Or should you let them have it? But--what if you're wrong? *Difficult Conversations* shows you a way out of this dilemma; it teaches you how to handle even the toughest conversations more effectively and with less anxiety. Based on fifteen years of work at Harvard Negotiation Project and consultations with thousands of people, the authors answer the question: When people confront the conversations they dread the most, what works? *Difficult Conversations* walks you through a proven, concrete, step-by-step approach for understanding and conducting tough conversations. It shows you how to get ready, how to start the conversations in ways that reduce defensiveness, and how to keep the conversation on a constructive track regardless of how the other person responds. Whether you're dealing with your baby-sitter or biggest client, your boss or your brother-in-law, *Difficult Conversations* can help.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

We've all been there: We know we must confront a coworker, store clerk, or friend about some especially sticky situation--and we know the encounter will be uncomfortable. So we repeatedly mull it over until we can no longer put it off, and then finally stumble through the confrontation. *Difficult Conversations*, by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen, offers advice for handling these

unpleasant exchanges in a manner that accomplishes their objective and diminishes the possibility that anyone will be needlessly hurt. The authors, associated with Harvard Law School and the Harvard Project on Negotiation, show how such dialogues actually comprise three separate components: the "what happened" conversation (verbalizing what we believe really was said and done), the "feelings" conversation (communicating and acknowledging each party's emotional impact), and the "identity" conversation (expressing the situation's underlying personal meaning). The explanations and suggested improvements are, admittedly, somewhat complicated. And they certainly don't guarantee positive results. But if you honestly are interested in elevating your communication skills, this book will walk you through both mistakes and remedies in a way that will boost your confidence when such unavoidable clashes arise. --Howard Rothman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Bringing together the insights of such diverse disciplines as law, organizational behavior, cognitive, family and social psychology and "dialogue" studies, Stone, Patton and Heen, who teach at Harvard Law School and the Harvard Negotiation Project, illustrate how to handle the challenges involved in effectively resolving "difficult conversations," whether in an interpersonal, business or political context. While many of their points are simplistic, don't ignore your feelings, consider the other person's intentions, take a break from the situation, they're often overlooked in stressful moments. Most useful are the strategies for disarming the impulse to lay blame and for exploring one's own contribution to a tense situation. Also of value are specific recommendations for bringing emotions directly into a difficult discussion by talking about them and paying attention to the way they can subtly inform judgments and accusations. If these recommendations aren't followed, the authors contend, emotions will seep into the discussion in other, usually damaging, ways. Stone, Patton and Heen illustrate their points with anecdotes, scripted conversations and familiar examples in a clear, easy-to-browse format. While "difficult conversations" may not have the intrinsic appeal of the Harvard Negotiation Project's previous bestseller, *Getting to Yes*, this book is a cogent resource for those who see the sense in preparing for tough talks in advance. Agent, Esther Newberg. Ad/promo; author tour. (Apr.) FYI: Patton is the co-author of *Getting to Yes*. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

For several years I've been working in psychotherapy to actually feel my anger - and use it productively so that people don't walk all over me. I used to be such a people-pleaser, i didn't even know when I was angry... and then I would unknowingly turn all my anger on myself - in the form of

depression and self-criticism. It can still take awhile for me to realize when I don't like something and am annoyed or frustrated. And when I get angry, I can still become very anxious so it's tempting to vent, thinking I'm so entitled and right. But venting always turns out bad. Now I'm committed to becoming aware when I don't like something - sooner and sooner - and setting boundary or at least expressing what I don't like. Enter this book. It is helping me do all the is MUCH more gracefully. At first I just wanted to set a boundary. Sometimes it came out harsh. Now I understand the importance of staying calm, compassionate and connected with the other person when expressing my likes and dislikes as well as when negotiating and compromising - and staying friends during the whole process! I'm still learning. And reading the book. I'm not depressed anymore. Really. It's really great.

This piece of word is so desperately needed then and now. It informed my own writing where I then add the importance of responsibility to who and how we are in the world. *Having Conversations That Matter* starts with *Difficult Conversations*. This is how to be Good Enough Now. Thank you for your step by step examples, scripts, and approaches to encourage your readers to try to try, be better listeners, and engage with others.

This is a useful book, but in my mind, is applicable very narrowly to certain business situations. Throughout our lives, how many times do we feel that if only we could have communicated better, we wouldn't be where we are. If I communicated more clearly and with purpose, would my relationship be better? Would my friendships be less strained? Would my interaction with my co-workers be less awkward? Would I have been promoted more quickly, or prevented being fired? While this book doesn't present answers to such specific scenarios, the book analyzes elements having a difficult conversation in a methodical manner, 'to discuss what matters most.' In that sense, the book is instrumental for any manager to become familiar with, in order to address those instances that organizational leaders inevitably face: how to confront difficult people or situations and dealing with them in a proper manner. Analytically speaking, the authors break down the conversational approach into three types: 1) "What Happened"?, 2) Feelings, and 3) Identity Conversations. The book itself is an offshoot of the Harvard Negotiation Project (an earlier title from that project is the famous "Getting to Yes" by Ury and Fisher). My opinion of book's main limitations are two-fold: One is that it might best pertain to hierarchical organizations. Otherwise, it's not always helpful to have structured approach when talking about matters of heart ... it doesn't work that way in life. When it comes to things of heart, honesty, confession, and parable may be

more appropriate, to present a few examples. Second limitation is that even in a business setting, what leads to difficult conversations are bad management and engagement amongst co-workers. In that case, the problems arise long before the need for a difficult conversation. Hence, in my mind, this book is applicable very narrowly to certain business situations.

If you don't know what to do when a friend PMs you out of the blue on the offense about something you posted on Facebook and you can't even remember what you could have said to warrant such an attack, this is the book you need to have read and understood! It also helps with any conversations that you need to have with a loved one, a co-worker and client, etc. Highly recommend!

I can't say enough how much I love this book--EVERYONE SHOULD READ THIS!! It's many years of counseling wrapped up in one book! Also, it's not just for "difficult conversations," but a great guide on how to talk to people in general. I have re-thought how to approach ANY conversation I have with family, friends, co-workers, and even my young kids!

This is a very good read. Something that I'm already using in personal, family and work relationships. I'm totally going to re-read it a but later to see how my practical experiences match up with the examples in the book and see if I still can improve or something different works better for me in certain situations. Huge thanks to the authors of this book!

Great book I have read many times to help with professional work and personal relationships. Highly recommend. I have gone to it multiple times with new understanding each time.

One of the greatest books I have ever read. While I was assigned to read it for a graduate course, it has helped change how I interact with people on a day-to-day basis.

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