

CLINICAL TRAINING

NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS: COMMUNICATION ACROSS DIFFERENCE

Strong teams aren't defined by avoiding difficult conversations. They are defined by how they navigate them.

COURAGE
CLARITY
RESPECT
GROWTH

CONVERSATIONS
STRONGER
RELATIONSHIPS
BETTER
WORKPLACES

LISTEN
UNDERSTAND
RESPECT
COLLABORATE
MOVE
FORWARD



SINGER
EQUITY & WELLNESS

WHY DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS MATTER

EVERY CONVERSATION SHAPES CULTURE

Workplace culture is built one conversation at a time. Moments of feedback, conflict, curiosity, and repair shape how safe people feel to contribute and belong.



THE CORE IDEA

EVERY INTERACTION COMMUNICATES SOMETHING

Four everyday ways we signal that someone belongs.



RESPECT

Treating people, and their identities, as they are.



CURIOSITY

Asking and listening instead of assuming.



RECOGNITION

Naming contributions and making people visible.



REPAIR

Owning mistakes and following through.

REFLECTION

THINK ABOUT A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

Take a quiet moment before we share as a group.

Reflect on a conversation that stayed with you.

What made it difficult? What helped, or made it harder?

PSYCHOLOGY OF HARD CONVERSATIONS

WHY WE REACT

Identity, emotion, experience, and our nervous systems all shape how we communicate.

IDENTITY

Who we are shapes what we hear and how we respond.

EMOTION

Feelings arrive before words and color the exchange.

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Past encounters teach us what to expect and brace for.

NERVOUS SYSTEM

Perceived threat can trigger fight, flight, or freeze.



AVOIDING ASSUMPTION

CHOOSING CURIOSITY

Assumptions close conversations. Curiosity opens them. Asking thoughtful questions creates opportunities for understanding rather than defensiveness.

THE ASSUMPTION

~~"They just don't care."~~



GET CURIOUS

"What might be getting in their way?"

THE ASSUMPTION

~~"That comment was out of line."~~



GET CURIOUS

"Can you help me understand what you meant?"

THE ASSUMPTION

~~"They're being difficult."~~



GET CURIOUS

"What does this look like from where they sit?"

ACTIVE LISTENING BUILDS TRUST

LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND

So often when someone is talking, we're thinking about how we want to respond, but communication begins with listening to understand.

SHOWS RESPECT

Real attention signals that the other person matters.

LOWERS DEFENSIVENESS

Feeling heard makes people less likely to brace or fight.

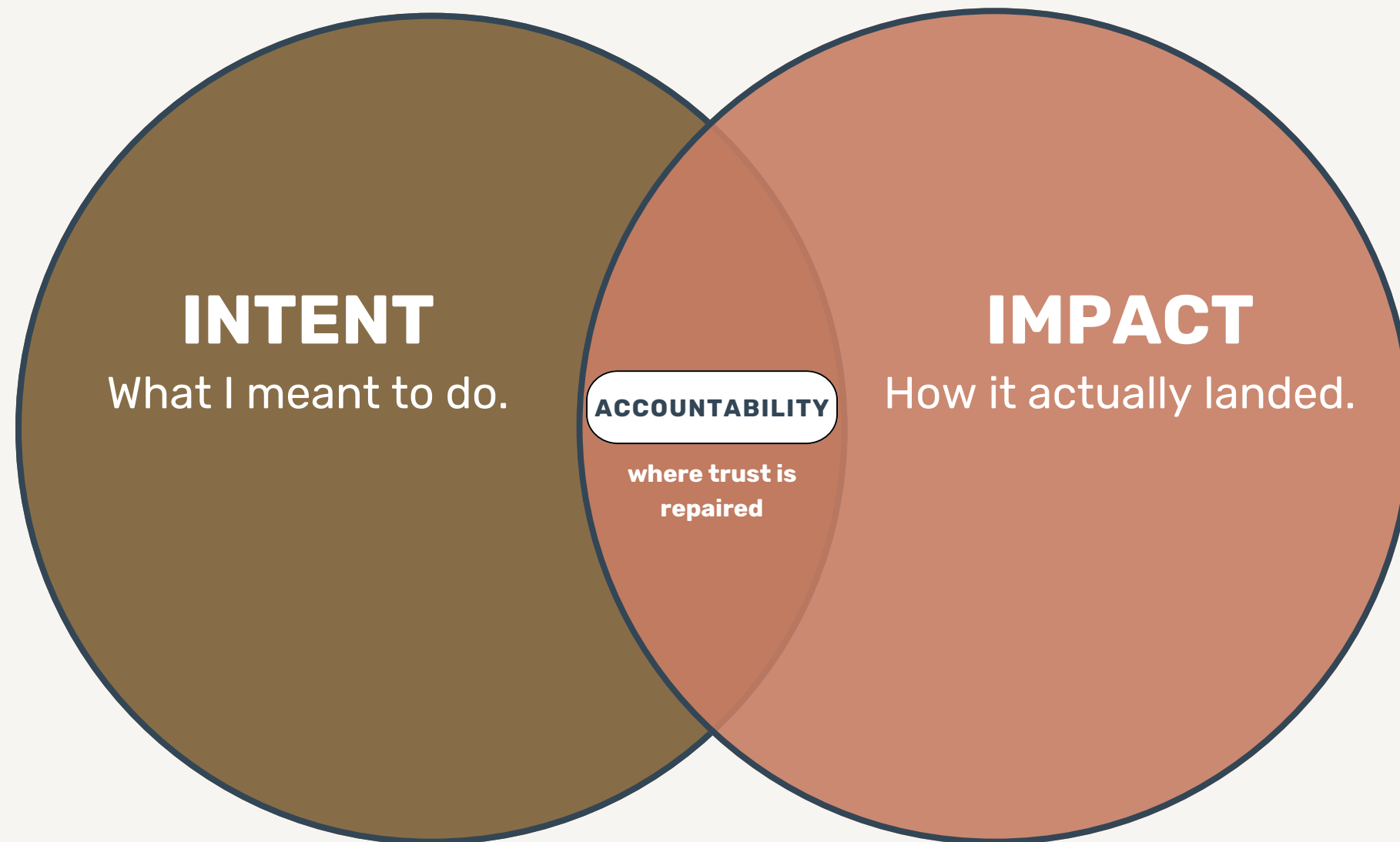
BUILDS CONNECTION

Understanding, not agreement, is what strengthens the bond.

ACTIVE LISTENING BUILDS TRUST

INTENT VS. IMPACT

Good intentions don't erase harm, and harm doesn't define who we are. Holding space for both creates opportunities for learning, repair, and trust.



SWAP 'BUT' FOR 'AND.'

~~"I didn't mean to, but..."~~



"I didn't mean to, and it still landed hard, so I'm sorry for the hurt."

Defending intent ends the conversation.
Owning impact opens the door to repair.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

RESPONDING WITH CONFIDENCE

Slow down and respond with intention, one step at a time.

LISTEN

Create space to fully understand before responding.



ACKNOWLEDGE

Recognize the person's experience without becoming defensive.

CLARIFY

Ask questions to understand what happened & what's needed.

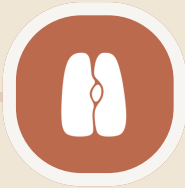


ACT

Take steps to address the situation & prevent further harm.

FOLLOW UP

Reconnect to ensure trust is rebuilt & commitments are being honored.



PRACTICE SCENARIO

A COLLEAGUE RAISES A CONCERN

Small-group discussion, then a large-group debrief.

THE SITUATION

A coworker tells you that something you said in a meeting felt dismissive of their identity. You didn't intend harm and are surprised by the feedback.

IN THE MOMENT

How do you respond without becoming defensive?

FOLLOW-UP

What would meaningful repair look like?

LANGUAGE BUILDS TRUST

WORDS SHAPE WORKPLACE CULTURE

Small shifts in language create more respectful conversations and stronger workplace relationships.

DO

SAY THIS

"I want to understand, can you say more?"

"I hear that it landed that way. I'm sorry."

"This matters. Let's give it the time it needs."

DON'T

AVOID THIS

"Calm down. That's not what I meant."

"Why do we have to make this a thing?"

"You're being too sensitive."

PSYCHOLOGY OF HARD CONVERSATIONS

GETTING IT WRONG ISN'T THE END

Everyone makes mistakes. Trust grows when people take responsibility, repair harm, and stay open to learning. Three easy steps you can take:

OWN IT

Name the impact without defensiveness.

REPAIR

Make it right in a concrete way.

LEARN

Let it change what you do next.



PRACTICE LAB

WORKING THROUGH REAL CONVERSATIONS

Build confidence by working through common workplace conversations that require empathy, accountability, and skill.



FEEDBACK

Scenario: A manager tells an employee, "You need to speak up more in meetings."

Discussion prompts:

- What behavior needs to change?
- Is the feedback specific enough?
- How could it be more actionable?



ASSUMPTIONS

Scenario: A teammate assumes you'll cover the late shift because you don't have children.

Discussion prompts:

- What assumption was made?
- What impact could it have?
- What would be a fairer approach?



BIAS

Scenario: A hiring manager says, "They're just not a culture fit."

Discussion prompts:

- What does that actually mean?
- Could bias be influencing the decision?
- What evidence is missing?



CONFLICT

Scenario: Two teammates disagree, and one says, "You never listen to my ideas."

Discussion prompts:

- What's underneath the conflict?
- What needs are being expressed?
- How could they reset the conversation?



IDENTITY

Scenario: A coworker repeatedly uses the wrong pronouns after being corrected.

Discussion prompts:

- What's the impact?
- How should they respond?
- What would meaningful repair look like?



REPAIR

Scenario: You interrupt a colleague several times during a meeting.

Discussion prompts:

- Should you address it afterward?
- What would accountability sound like?
- How could trust be rebuilt?

COMMUNICATION COMMITMENTS

What Will You Practice?

One habit to start, one to strengthen, one to let go of.

START

One new habit

A communication practice you'll begin this week.

STRENGTHEN

One existing strength

Something you already do, done more consistently.

LET GO

One habit to release

A pattern that gets in the way of being heard.

COMMUNICATION COMMITMENTS

WHAT WILL YOU PRACTICE?

Write it down, one action across three horizons.

START

ONE NEW HABIT

A communication practice you'll begin this week.

STRENGTHEN

ONE EXISTING HABIT

Something you already do, done more consistently.

LET GO

ONE HABIT TO LOSE

A pattern that gets in the way of being heard.

WRAPPING UP

EVERY CONVERSATION IS AN OPPORTUNITY

The goal isn't perfect conversations. It's the confidence, curiosity, and trust to keep showing up for one another, even when conversations become difficult.

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