

Dignity Conversations: Workplace

CONVERSATIONS THAT LEAD TO INSIGHT AND ACTION

Conflict expert Donna Hicks was holding a workshop with employees of a global corporation and asked them which of the [Ten Elements of Dignity](#) is most often violated at their firm. They answered “Safety.” People did not feel safe speaking up; they were afraid of being embarrassed in front of their co-workers.

- Do you feel safe speaking up at work?
- Are you able to make other people feel safe when offering you feedback, especially people who report to you? How do you do that? When you want to discourage feedback, how do you do *that*?
- The first step in ending a fight is always to offer an expression of dignity. Can you think of a dispute you had at work that you brought to an end? Can you see the role dignity played?

It can be hard to treat others with dignity when you disagree. But it can be especially difficult to treat them with dignity if they say something contemptuous.

- Have you ever seen someone defuse a hostile debate by treating the other side with dignity? If so, what did they say and what made it work?
- Some experts say the most important first step in defusing hostility is to listen without interruption, to say things like “Tell me more.” “Can you explain that?” Why do you think this might defuse a hot debate? Have you tried this?
- Have you ever been in a disagreement at work that you didn’t handle as well as you wished you had? Was it because you didn’t know how, or because you were too angry to care?
- Do you think practicing phrases to defuse hostility could have helped? What phrases would you like to be ready to use the next time a discussion turns hot?

A happy and productive workplace requires candid communication, which includes challenging contempt and standing up for your own dignity and that of others. This means giving honest feedback, and receiving feedback with dignity.

- Donna says when offering feedback, you should first say that the relationship is important to you. Then describe the situation, the dignity violation, and the impact it had. Why would it help to focus the feedback on one event and its impact? What can happen if the feedback is broader? Where is the discussion likely to go – and with what effect?
- Have you ever been embarrassed at work and just let it go? Would you like to give feedback to the person who embarrassed you? Why haven’t you done it? What would it take for you to give it a try?
- Good working relations are always marked by dignity and are always disrupted by contempt. Can you think of your most difficult relationship at work and explain it with dignity and contempt? Does this offer you any ideas for improving the relationship?