

Lesson Manuals

Lesson 8: Mastering difficult conversations

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In the previous lesson, we learned how we can manage our emotions during difficult conversations. By reframing our automatic thoughts, we can control our emotions rather than letting our emotions control us.

Now that we've given you tools to master your internal state during difficult conversations, in this lesson, we're going to shift our attention to equipping you with skills to communicate effectively in these moments.

We're going to teach you a master strategy for effective communication, along with specific techniques that will allow you to:



Listen to others in a way that makes them feel heard.



Communicate your views in a manner that will likely be well-received by others.



De-escalate tricky conversations when they start to go off the rails.

We'll practice applying these techniques in a conversation that will simulate a situation you may encounter in your daily life.

Before we get started, let's recap the key takeaways that we've learned so far.

Okay!

The conversational tactics we'll cover in this lesson build on principles from earlier in the program. Let's review!



Lesson 1:
Explore the inner workings of the mind

When you notice that your elephant (automatic thinking) is in charge, you can Take the Reins!



Step 1 | Detect when your elephant might be in control.



Step 2 | Pause to give your rider time to catch up.



Step 3 | Correct your elephant's missteps.

Lesson 2: Uncover the roots of our differences

Your moral worldview is one of many ways of seeing the world. Two good and well-intentioned people can disagree on important moral issues.



Lesson 3: Cultivate intellectual humility

If we cultivate intellectual humility and enter into an explorer mindset, we can view mistakes and disagreements as opportunities for growth and learning.



Lesson 4: Welcome diverse perspectives

Speaking to people who see things differently than we do helps us fill in our blind spots, come up with new discoveries, make wiser decisions, improve our communication skills, and build diverse coalitions.



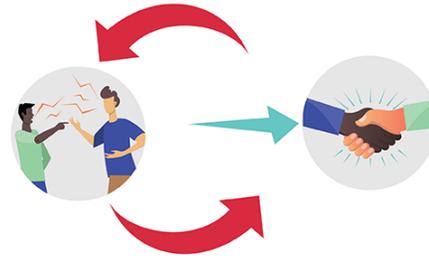
Lesson 5: Explore other worldviews

We can uncover the values and life experiences that shape other people's beliefs and find common ground despite our differences.



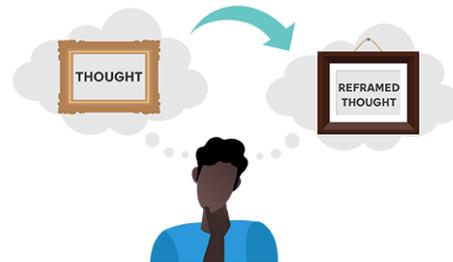
Lesson 6: Challenge the culture of contempt

We can embrace clumsy conversations and choose to forgive people's mistakes instead of reacting with shame and contempt.



Lesson 7: Manage emotions in difficult conversations

We can recognize that our interpretation of events, rather than the events themselves, determines how we feel about them. This empowers us to shape our interpretations and gain control in difficult conversations.



Let's begin by considering why it's valuable to put all of this together into a strategy for effective communication.

I'm ready!

Many of us enter into difficult conversations without a plan. But given what you now know about the rider and the elephant, you can understand why this is shortsighted.



If we don't have a plan, we're likely to act on *impulse* — which means our elephant (automatic thinking) will be in charge. That's a problem, because as we saw in the last lesson, our elephant often leads us astray in the midst of difficult conversations. It can cause us to behave in ways that feel good in the moment, but actually hinder our own goals.

Here's how this tends to play out...

We're talking to someone about an issue we care a lot about. The other person says something that we strongly disagree with. This instantly triggers a visceral response from our elephant.

We feel a powerful, automatic urge to give the other person a piece of our mind. We may lash out at them or tell them off. In the moment, this response *feels good*. We also feel morally justified in doing so because we feel certain that the other person is wrong.

What's the problem here?

Communicating strategically

As we've learned, responding with aggression will likely antagonize the other person. Rather than convincing them to hear us out or change their views, we'll have turned them against us and likely pushed them even further away from supporting what we care about.

But if we actually want our message to get through to other people, we can take an approach that is far more likely to be effective.

We can make *strategic and intentional* decisions about how we interact with our conversation partner, instead of giving in to whatever feels good to our elephant in the moment.



Going in with a strategy means that we'll be much more likely to actually achieve our goals — whether we want to change hearts and minds to advance the issues that matter to us, or if we just want to find mutual understanding with people who disagree with us.

Ready to learn a master strategy for effective communication?

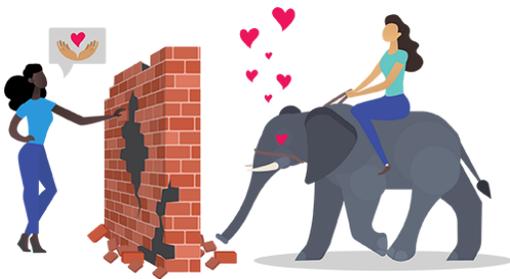
Let's do it!

Focus on the other person's elephant

There's a central principle we learned back in Lesson 1, which we'll put into practice in this lesson: **You need to appeal to someone's elephant before you can move their rider.**

Think back to a time when you had an unproductive argument with someone. You may have come armed with rock-solid facts to prove your point. But no matter how hard you tried, you just couldn't get through to the other person.

Most of us have had this type of experience — and it can be infuriating. If someone is deeply and intuitively opposed to our point of view, it's almost as if an impenetrable wall comes up. Our facts and evidence will bounce right off of them.



In order to break down that wall and get through to people, we need to shift the other person's intuitions — we need to *appeal to their elephant*. Once you reach someone on an emotional and intuitive level, the wall will come down and their rider — their reasoning side — will be much more receptive to your argument.

That's why our master strategy for effective communication is to **focus on the other person's elephant**.

How do I do this?

As human beings, we have a natural urge to reciprocate. If we enter a conversation like a warrior entering a battle, the other person is likely to copy our approach and be aggressive back to us.

But here's the interesting thing — if we take the opposite approach and treat people with unwavering kindness and respect, they'll usually return the favor by responding in a positive way.

This means we have the power to set the tone of the conversation. If you show sincerity and openness to the other person, they'll usually respond in kind. They'll lower their guard and be more open to your views.



To make sure our conversations won't descend into futile arguments, we need to keep our own elephants in check and make the other person's elephant feel good. Instead of trying to win or look smart to satisfy our own ego, **put the other person's ego first**.

**Are you saying
my views
don't matter?**

Absolutely not! Your views are very important and you should be true to your convictions. This is not about modifying or misrepresenting your views or beliefs; it's about changing the way you approach a conversation. If your sole focus is on winning the argument or trying to look smart, you probably won't get very far in persuading others. But if you focus on the other person, you will be a lot more effective.

There's another important reason to focus on the other person's elephant.

What's that?

When we follow our elephant's impulses during a difficult conversation, we tend to speak as though we're talking to a mirror. We'll express our view the way we'd want to hear it, if someone else was speaking to us.

But we don't think about how our words are actually being received by the other's person's elephant. We might completely forget that they could have a very different moral worldview from us. What sounds persuasive to our elephant could sound completely different to theirs.



If we really want the other person to care about what we're saying — and especially if we want to draw them over to our side of an issue — we need to **tailor our message to be well-received by the other person's elephant.**

By choosing our words carefully to resonate with their elephant, we can maximize our chance of making progress on the issues we care about.

<p>To summarize, what does the strategy of focusing on the other person's elephant help us to do?</p>	<p>A. To set the tone so that the other person will treat us how we'd like to be treated</p>	
	<p>B. To ensure our message will be well-received by the other person</p>	
	<p>C. To make choices that will feel good in the heat of the moment</p>	
<p>Both A & B</p>	<p>A or B (not both)</p>	<p>Any answer combo that includes C</p>
<p> You got it right!</p>	<p> You're close! Almost. Focusing on the other person's elephant is productive for both of these reasons:</p>	<p> Not quite. Focusing on the other person's elephant helps us to avoid making choices that will feel good in the heat of the moment — since giving into our own elephant's impulses isn't good for us in the long run.</p>

	It's also beneficial to us for both of these reasons:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It helps us set the tone of the conversation, so that the other person will treat us the way we'd like to be treated• It helps us figure out how to speak in a way that ensures our message will be well-received by the other person

Over the course of this lesson, we'll teach you how to carry out this strategy of focusing on the other person's elephant.

We'll break down this strategy into *three steps* which you can use to communicate effectively in any conversation:

1. **Establish your goal for the conversation**
2. **Listen to understand the other person's elephant**
3. **Speak to their elephant**

For each step, we'll teach you specific conversational strategies while working through a practice conversation on a sensitive topic. To get started, we'd like to hear where you'd stand on the topic at the center of this hypothetical scenario:

Imagine that the college you hope to attend announces that it is considering starting a new program. It plans to offer free workshops to help women enrolled in the college develop their public-speaking skills.

Do you think it would be a good idea for the college you hope to attend to offer these free women-only workshops?

Absolutely not Absolutely

Slide to answer



Thanks for sharing!

Now, imagine that you're having lunch with a group of classmates. Your friend Alex brings up the topic of this program.

Alex shares his view:

If their answer leans against women-only workshops...	If their answer leans In favor of women-only workshops...
"I'm glad that a college is only offering these workshops to women. This program should have been started years ago."	"It's ridiculous that a college would offer these workshops only to women. That's so obviously unfair."

You tense up, knowing that you disagree with Alex's point of view on this issue. You might have an urge to avoid this conversation altogether by changing topics, but you're also curious about why Alex believes what he believes.

Before you enter into a conversation with Alex on this topic, let's consider what we can do to set ourselves up for success in difficult conversations.

Which of these seems like a better way to prepare yourself for a difficult conversation?	
<p>Clear your head of thoughts so you can improvise and be in the moment during your upcoming conversation</p>	<p>Reflect on what you'd like to accomplish in this conversation</p>
<p>We can see why you might think so! But we'd actually recommend a slightly different approach.</p>	<p>Good thinking!</p>

Step 1. Establish your goals

Before you dive deep into a difficult conversation, it's valuable to first **establish your goals** for the discussion. This involves asking yourself: "What do I really want to get out of this conversation?"

For instance, it's possible you're curious to find out what someone else thinks about a topic and why. Or maybe you've discussed a topic with someone in the past and you want to try to bring them around to understanding your point of view.



Getting in touch with what you really want can help you keep your conversation on track. If things start to get messy in the midst of a disagreement, you can always think back to your goals to refocus on what really matters to you.

Which of the following goals would you like to aim for in this conversation with Alex?
 [Remember, you were curious about why Alex disagrees with you about a program which will offer free public speaking workshops for women only.]

I'd like to make sense of why he feels this way

I'd like to persuade him to adopt my viewpoint

I'd like to practice my communication skills to prepare for future conversations

Thanks for sharing! Let's say that Alex is open to having a discussion with you about this program. You've decided: "I'd like to...[the goal they selected]."



We'll show you how thinking back to this goal throughout your conversation allows you to make *strategic choices* about how to communicate effectively with Alex. You'll be able to figure out how to win over his elephant in a way that advances your goal.

Now you're ready to focus on the second step of effective communication...

What is it?

Step 2. Listen to understand the other person's elephant

It's important to keep in mind that different people will respond in different ways to the same language, because their reactions are driven by their elephants. While your message may be very compelling to one person, it could really alienate someone else.

That's why it's crucial that we pay attention to crafting a message that is most likely to be well-received by the specific audience we're addressing.

In order to present your ideas in a way that will resonate with someone's elephant, you're going to need to gather some vital information about them. We can do this by *listening* carefully to what they reveal about themselves.

Before we get started, we're curious to hear:



Which of the images above do you associate with being a good listener?

The first one

The second one

Thanks for sharing!
That's what most people think.

Thanks for sharing! That's great. Most people think the opposite, but you're onto something!

For many of us, when we think about what it means to be a good listener, we think of staying quiet and letting the other person talk. But this is a common misperception.

Take a moment to think about how you would feel if you shared something deeply personal about yourself, and the other person listened in complete silence.

Now, imagine how you would feel if the other person listened closely, and then responded with a series of thoughtful follow-up questions, asking you to expand on what you just said.

Which kind of listener would make you feel more heard?	
The one who sat in silence	The one who asked thoughtful follow-up questions
That's interesting! Most people say they feel more heard in the situation where the other person asked thoughtful follow-up questions.	Most people agree with you!

Active listening

Staying silent and letting the other person talk is one way of listening, but it's not the best option.

Active listening makes other people feel heard and appreciated. This involves thoughtfully considering what someone is saying, and then responding with follow-up questions and observations.

Why is active listening so valuable?

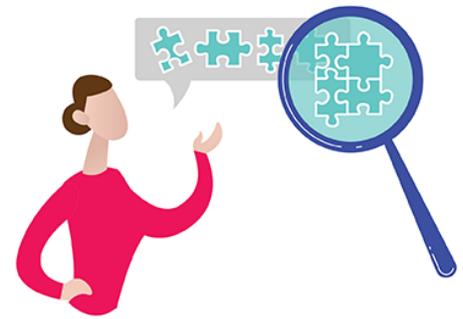
First, active listening sets the tone for a conversation to be open, honest, and mutually respectful.

By paying close attention and showing curiosity about the other person's view, we demonstrate that we're approaching disagreements as an explorer, rather than a warrior.

When we shift into explorer mindset, we signal to the other person's elephant that it's safe for them to shift in this direction as well. Instead of responding to us with attacks or by getting defensive, they'll likely let their guard down. They'll also likely return the favor and treat us with respect when we share our own views.

Second, active listening helps us learn what we need to know about our conversation partner, in order to speak to their elephant.

In order to craft a message that will be well-received by Alex's elephant in particular, you'll need to get a sense of which core beliefs and values are shaping Alex's thinking about this issue.

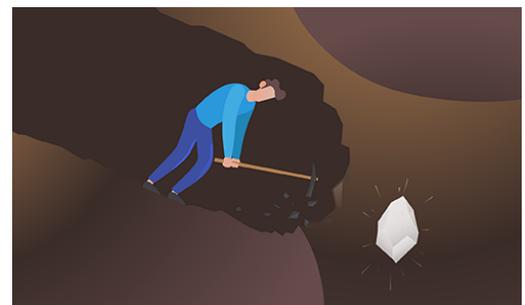


If they lean against women-only workshops...	What could you do to learn more about why Alex thinks it's a good idea to offer these women-only workshops?	
If they lean in favor of women-only workshops...	What could you do to learn more about why Alex thinks it's a bad idea to offer these women-only workshops?	
	Point out a flaw in his reasoning and see how he responds	Ask him a question that invites him to explain his view in greater detail
	Actually, a better tactic is to make use of a skill we learned earlier in the program.	Great thinking!

Asking nonjudgmental follow-up questions

Back in Lesson 5, you learned how to dig deeper to discover what lies beneath people's viewpoints when they disagree with us.

We introduced the *Five Ws* — five questions that can help you learn more about the other person's point of view:



- "Who in your life had the most impact on the way you think about this issue?"
- "What life experiences might have led you to develop this view?"
- "Where do you see this issue playing out in your life?"
- "When do you think your view applies? Are there any exceptions?"
- "Why is this issue so important to you?"

Asking these types of questions is a powerful way to gather information and put the other person at ease, because they're all nonjudgmental.

They don't express any kind of criticism of the other person, while at the same time they signal to them that you're sincerely interested in learning more about their point of view.

What does this look like in an actual conversation?

We'll contrast two different questions we could ask Alex. First, imagine that you asked:

If they lean against women-only workshops...

"Doesn't it bother you that this program insults women, by sending the message that they can't succeed in competitive industries without getting special treatment?"

If they lean In favor of women-only workshops...

"Why are you opposed to helping women develop better public speaking skills? Do you not care at all about leveling the playing field between men and women in competitive industries?"

This *judgmental* question accuses Alex based on assumptions about why he believes what he believes. He's likely to start feeling defensive, instead of feeling comfortable opening up to you further.

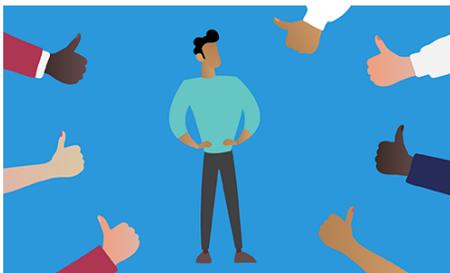


What would be a better question to ask?

You could instead ask Alex, *"Thanks for sharing your view. I'm curious to understand: Why do you feel this way about women-only workshops?"*

Beginning with "Thanks for sharing your view" indicates that you appreciate what Alex has to offer, even if you disagree.

The follow-up question, "Why do you feel this way about women-only workshops?" is *nonjudgmental*. It doesn't express any disapproval of what Alex has said. It simply offers him an opportunity to share more about his position and helps you understand his view.



By expressing appreciation and demonstrating curiosity, Alex will likely be flattered. You'll set a positive tone for the conversation, which may make him more receptive to your view once you share it.

Let's imagine that you've just asked Alex this nonjudgmental question. When he responds, there's something you can do to make sure you've understood him correctly...

Paraphrasing for clarity

In order to make people truly feel heard, you can take a moment to check that you've understood them properly by **paraphrasing their view** back to them.

For this to be effective, you should offer an *accurate* and *nonjudgmental* summary of what they've just expressed. That means sticking to conclusions you can safely draw from the words they used to express themselves.

You can do this by using phrases like, "So what you're saying is...," or "To make sure I'm understanding correctly, you believe...," and then summarizing their point of view in your own words.

After paraphrasing, you can ask, "Is that correct?" This gives the other person a chance to respond: either to confirm your summary was accurate, or to clear up any misunderstandings.



Let's try this out for ourselves. Let's imagine that Alex has just answered your nonjudgmental question by saying:

If they lean *against* women-only workshops...

"It's important that we offer everyone an equal opportunity to succeed at getting good jobs. That's why I think it's only fair to extend extra help to women, since harmful gender stereotypes have historically held women back from rising in the ranks of competitive industries."

If they lean *In favor of* women-only workshops...

"I think we need to think about possible negative effects of singling-out women and treating them differently. It might perpetuate the harmful message that women are naturally lacking in public speaking ability and can't succeed without extra training."

[Two different versions of the graded question below are displayed separately, one after the other. Each learner will only see one version of the question.]

If they lean against women-only workshops...

Which of the following would be an accurate paraphrase of what Alex said?

"So what you're saying is that offering extra help to women will compensate for the fact that in the past, gender stereotypes kept men and women from having equal opportunities to succeed in the workplace?"



Great job!

"So your view is that women should now get chosen over men in competitive industries, because men had an advantage over women in the past?"



Not quite. Let's take another look at what Alex said.

Alex doesn't think that women should have more opportunity to succeed than men do. He thinks men and women should have equal opportunity to succeed. His impression is that women-only workshops would help to level the playing field between men and women.

If they lean in favor of women-only workshops...

Which of the following would be an accurate paraphrase of what Alex said?

"So what you're saying is that you're worried that these women-only workshops might perpetuate the harmful stereotype that women have less natural ability than men do?"



Great job!

"So your view is that it might hurt women if we acknowledge the fact they naturally have weaker public speaking skills than men?"



Not quite. Let's take another look at what Alex said.

Alex doesn't believe that women have weaker public speaking skills than men. He actually thinks that's a harmful myth about women. He's concerned that holding women-only workshops might just spread that myth further instead of countering it.

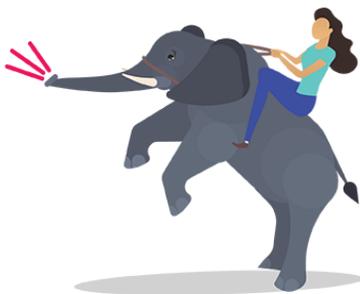
Paraphrasing is an incredibly useful tool to make sure that you and your conversation partner are on the same page as you move forward with your discussion.

Let's imagine that you've just asked Alex,

If they lean against women-only workshops...	If they lean In favor of women-only workshops...
<p>"So what you're saying is that offering extra help to women will compensate for the fact that in the past, gender stereotypes kept men and women from having equal opportunities to succeed in the workplace. Is that correct?"</p>	<p>"So what you're saying is that you're worried that these women-only workshops might perpetuate the harmful stereotype that women have less natural ability than men do. Is that correct?"</p>

Alex nods his head in agreement.

Now, what's something productive you could do with the information he just gave you?		
Immediately explain to Alex why he's wrong to believe this	Start explaining your own view so he's not dominating the conversation	Decode his language to reveal his moral foundations
<p>Hmm, not quite. That probably wouldn't be very productive.</p> <p>As we learned back in Lesson 4, most people react poorly to hearing that they're wrong. They get defensive, and might even resent the person who criticized them. As a rule of thumb, we should expect that telling people they're wrong will probably rile up their elephant.</p>	<p>That approach might work out, but we'd encourage you to keep listening a bit longer so you can gather more information.</p> <p>That way, you might have an easier time figuring out how to speak to Alex in a way that he won't misinterpret as criticism of his view.</p>	<p>That's a great tactic!</p>



In the words of author Dale Carnegie: "Criticism is futile because it puts a person on the defensive and usually makes him strive to justify himself."

Remember, effective communication requires us to set our own ego aside and focus on winning over the other person's elephant. If you try to one-up the other person, you risk hurting their pride and turning their elephant against you.

Let's turn our focus to really understanding the other person's elephant.

Okay

Decoding their moral foundations

In Lesson 5, we learned an explorer tactic that allows us to gain insight into why people feel the way they do about a particular issue when they disagree with us.

If we take the time to decipher which moral foundations seem to be underpinning Alex's stance on women-only workshops, we'll be able to think carefully about how to respond to him in a way that will resonate with his elephant.

If they lean against women-only workshops...	If they lean In favor of women-only workshops...																		
<p>Alex said, "It's important that we offer everyone an equal opportunity to succeed at getting good jobs. That's why I think it's only fair to extend extra help to women, since harmful gender stereotypes have historically held women back from rising in the ranks of competitive industries."</p>	<p>Alex said, "I think we need to think about possible negative effects of singling-out women and treating them differently. It might perpetuate the harmful message that women are naturally lacking in public speaking ability and can't succeed without extra training."</p>																		
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Care	Fairness	Liberty	Loyalty	Authority	Sanctity														
Kindness Empathy Peace Charity	Equality Justice Honesty Integrity	Freedom Autonomy Individualism Independence	Family Friendship Community Patriotism	Respect Tradition Duty Lawfulness	Spirituality Purity Faith Modesty														

What foundation(s) is Alex relying on in his argument for women-only workshops?	What foundation(s) is Alex relying on in his argument against women-only workshops?	Care
		Fairness
		Liberty
		Loyalty
		Authority
		Sanctity

Care & Fairness	Care or Fairness	Any other responses
 <p>Great job!</p>	 <p>You're close!</p>	 <p>Not quite.</p>

Alex's argument reveals his concerns about Fairness and Care.

If they lean against women-only workshops...	If they lean in favor of women-only workshops...
<p>Speaking about allowing everyone an "an equal opportunity to succeed" indicates that Alex thinks Fairness in opportunities for advancement is essential. Also, his mention of "harmful" gender stereotypes that have "held women back" from achieving success shows Care for women (specifically, in support of women's ability to excel in any career).</p>	<p>His concern about "singling-out women and treating them differently" suggests that he values treating everyone equally regardless of who they are, which is one way of using the Fairness foundation.</p> <p>Also, Alex's worry about perpetuating a "harmful message" about women suggests that Care is a priority for him.</p>

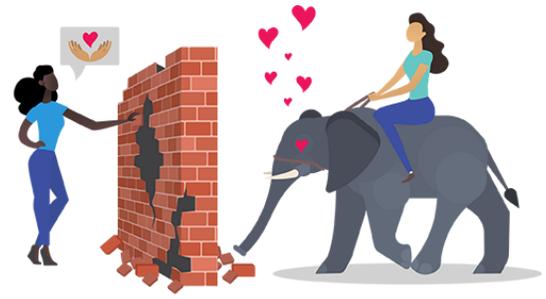
Now that we've gathered more information about Alex's view and why he believes what he believes, we're in a much better position to communicate our views to him.

Before moving on to this next step, let's briefly review what we've learned so far.

Okay

To recap, here are specific techniques we can use while **listening to understand the other person's elephant**:

- Ask nonjudgmental follow-up questions to learn more about the other person without making them feel defensive
- Paraphrase what the other person said, to show that you care about truly understanding them
- Decode their moral foundations to learn how to tailor your message to their elephant



Each of these techniques focuses on the other person's elephant. They make the other person more receptive to our message, and provide the insight we need to reach them on an emotional and intuitive level.

Now that we've done this, we're ready to move on to the next step.

Let's do it

Step 3. Speak to the other person's elephant

The techniques we'll learn to communicate our own point of view make use of the life-changing power of intellectual humility.

We've discussed how embracing the possibility of being wrong and owning up to our mistakes can transform the way we approach conversations.



When we admit that we could be wrong, all the energy we could have spent trying to protect our ego can instead be used productively, to learn new things that help us grow.

It turns out that approaching conversations with intellectual humility also helps us win over the other person's elephant.

Let's see how this works in our conversation with Alex.

Okay!

Before you share your own view, we recommend reminding yourself of your goal for this conversation. You said, "[the goal they selected]".

Now that you have your goal in mind, you can think clearly about how to best present your point of view about a college's proposal to offer women-only workshops.

Let's compare two ways that you could explain your view to Alex:



If they lean against women-only workshops...	If they lean In favor of women-only workshops...
<p>Option A: "Everyone who knows anything thinks that it's important to offer additional opportunities to women, in order to level the playing field between men and women in competitive industries. It's a complete mystery how anyone intelligent could think otherwise. The fact of the matter is that women-only workshops are the only acceptable way to combat gender inequality in the workplace."</p> <p>Option B: "Based on what I've learned so far about gender inequality in the workplace, my impression is that women-only workshops would be a positive step toward leveling the playing field between men and women in competitive industries. I understand that plenty of well-informed people see these workshops as unfair, because they offer an opportunity exclusively to women — but I'd like to explain why I think it could be fair to treat women differently from men in this regard."</p>	<p>Option A: "Everyone who knows anything thinks that it's a bad idea to single out women in this way. The fact of the matter is that this would reinforce the narrative that women need special treatment to compete successfully with men, on top of discriminating against non-binary people. It's a complete mystery how anyone intelligent could think otherwise."</p> <p>Option B: "Based on what I've learned so far about gender inequality in the workplace, my impression is that women-only workshops reinforce the narrative that women need special treatment to compete successfully with men. I also think this approach unfairly discriminates against non-binary people. I understand that plenty of well-informed people think these workshops are fair because they help to level the playing field between men and women — but I'd like to explain why giving special treatment to women does more harm than good."</p>

Do you think that Alex will be more receptive to the message of option A or option B?

A

B

Actually, Alex would probably respond a lot more positively to option B. Let's break down why that approach is more likely to be effective.

Right! Option B is a much more promising approach than option A. Let's break down why that's the case.

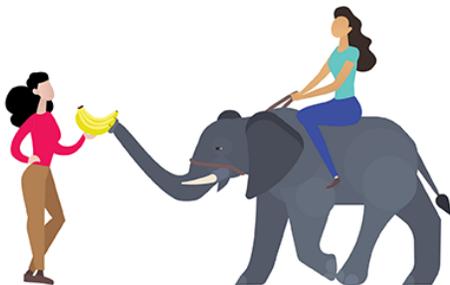
Here was option B:

If they lean against women-only workshops...

"Based on what I've learned so far about gender inequality in the workplace, my impression is that women-only workshops would be a positive step toward leveling the playing field between men and women in competitive industries. I understand that plenty of well-informed people see these workshops as unfair, because they offer an opportunity exclusively to women — but I'd like to explain why I think it could be fair to treat women differently from men in this regard."

If they lean in favor of women-only workshops...

"Based on what I've learned so far about gender inequality in the workplace, my impression is that women-only workshops reinforce the narrative that women need special treatment to compete successfully with men. I also think this approach unfairly discriminates against non-binary people. I understand that plenty of well-informed people think these workshops are fair because they help to level the playing field between men and women — but I'd like to explain why giving special treatment to women does more harm than good."



This approach follows the crucial principle that **in order to move the rider, we must move the elephant first.**

It's very tempting to try to get our point across by laying out all the facts. But we need to draw people's elephants over to us before we can get their riders' attention. We first need to appeal to their emotional and intuitive side.

Let's dive into some more specific conversational techniques that make this approach effective.

Let's do it!

Speaking with humility

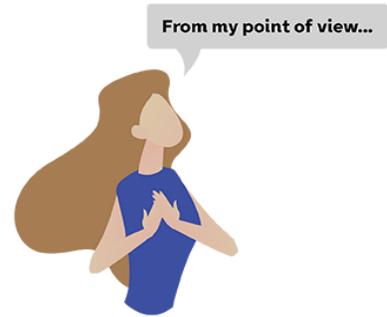
Admitting that "plenty of well-informed people" see an issue differently than you do shows respect for the people you disagree with, instead of shaming them or insulting their intelligence.

This fits into our strategy of *putting the other person's ego first.*

More generally, we'll be more likely to win over the other person's elephant if we implement a technique we learned back in Lesson 3: **speaking with humility**. That means choosing language that indicates we're expressing our own opinions and beliefs, rather than stating irrefutable facts.

We learned two important facets of speaking with humility:

- **Speak for yourself** only: By speaking in the first person — using phrases such as "I think...", "My impression is...", or "From my point of view..." — you'll make it clear that you're sharing how things look from our perspective — not how they definitely are.
- **Own your uncertainty**: If you choose words and phrases that express moderate certainty that you're correct — like "Maybe...", "It's possible that...", "It could be...", "It might be...", "It seems like...", and so on — you'll demonstrate that you're aware of the limits of your knowledge and the possibility that you could be mistaken.



Finessing your language with these tactics shows your conversation partner that you don't think your opinion is the only acceptable viewpoint. Rather, you're acknowledging that you could be wrong, and you're open to changing your mind after learning from other people.

Why is this so effective?

WARNING!
I KNOW EVERYTHING

Let's do a little thought experiment to see the value of speaking with humility. Imagine that you read an article that started with the sentence:

If they lean against women-only workshops...

"Everyone who's remotely intelligent knows for a fact that women-only workshops are the only acceptable way to combat gender inequality in the workplace."

If they lean In favor of women-only workshops...

"Everyone who's remotely intelligent knows for a fact that women-only workshops are wrong because they perpetuate harmful stereotypes about women and they discriminate against non-binary people."

Would you be willing to keep reading to learn about this author's point of view?

Not at all

Slide to answer

Yes, definitely

Good for you! After all, there's a lot we can gain from taking in a perspective that differs from our own.

That's understandable!

A lot of people would be turned off by this author's claim that "everybody who's remotely intelligent" just so happens to adopt their point of view about women-only workshops. This person doesn't seem willing to accept that smart, thoughtful people could have good reasons to disagree with their viewpoint.

Trying to speak for everyone and state your opinions as facts tends to *backfire*. Instead of seeming authoritative, you're likely to seem arrogant, and you might undermine your credibility and turn people off.

In contrast, speaking with humility makes it more likely that you'll be able to win over the other person's elephant. To be clear, you should still communicate your views, but you can adjust the way you present your message to increase the likelihood that it will resonate with others.



Is there such a thing as speaking with too much humility?

Yes! Sometimes, people are so afraid of being direct with their views that they downplay the importance of what they're saying.

For example, they might say things like, "I know this isn't a big deal but..." or "I think...but I don't really know what I'm talking about." When you completely undermine the importance of your message, it's likely that other people won't take you seriously.

Remember back in Lesson 4, when we learned that we can hold beliefs with different degrees of certainty? When we speak with humility, we're indicating that we aren't 100% certain that we are correct. But we don't have to go to the other extreme and suggest that we're 0% committed to what we're saying.

The trick is to communicate using language that strikes a balance between these two extremes. We can indicate that we truly mean what we say without being overconfident in the truth of our views.

Now, let's imagine that you've begun communicating your own point of view to Alex using the more intellectually humble opener.

What else could you do to speak to Alex's elephant in particular?

Apply my knowledge about his moral foundations



It's natural to feel an impulse to speak from the heart in the kind of language that resonates with your elephant. And that impulse is onto something — you should express your beliefs and do so authentically.

Explain my point of view in words that express my values

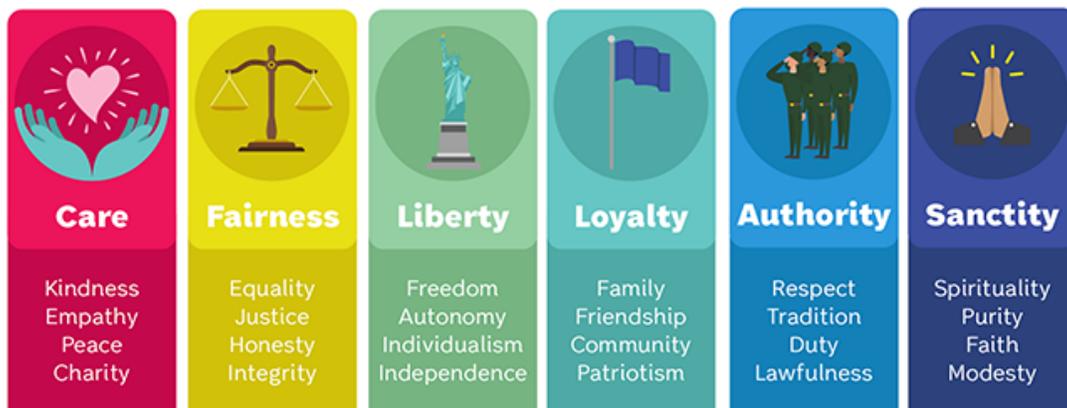


Not quite. It makes sense that you'd feel an impulse to speak from the heart in the kind of language that resonates with your elephant. You should express your beliefs and do so authentically.

But if we really want to communicate *strategically* to make sure our message lands with the other person, we ought to figure out what wording will resonate with Alex's elephant, based on what we know about his moral foundations.

Using language that resonates with their elephant

When we decoded Alex's language, we determined that his view on women-only workshops drew on the Fairness and Care foundations.



[Two different versions of the graded question below are displayed separately, one after the other. Each learner will only see one version of the question.]

If they lean against women-only workshops...

Which of these options would communicate your stance on women-only workshops in language related to Fairness and Care?

"It's our duty as Americans to treat each other as equals. What sets our nation apart from many others is that we uphold a tradition of allowing everyone an equal chance to lift themselves up to achieve the American Dream through hard work."

"It's so important that we treat each other as equals, instead of treating people differently just because of their gender. If we ensure that men, women, and nonbinary people are all offered the same opportunities for public-speaking training, we can help each individual to believe in their ability to succeed in the workplace on their own merits."



Not quite! This response actually emphasizes the Liberty, Loyalty, and Authority foundations.

Talking about "the right" to develop one's public speaking skills highlights the importance of Liberty. Speaking of a "duty" to uphold a "tradition" indicates an emphasis on Authority, and describing that duty as one we have "as Americans" conveys Loyalty to one's country.

Let's examine the alternative option:



Excellent job! Let's take another look at this message, for good measure:

"It's so important that we treat each other as equals, instead of treating people differently just because of their gender. If we ensure that men, women, and nonbinary people are all offered the same opportunities for public-speaking training, we can help each individual to believe in their ability to succeed in the workplace on their own merits."

This way of presenting the case against women-only workshops emphasizes Fairness by speaking about the value of "treat[ing] each other as equals" and offering everyone "the same opportunities." It also indicates that giving people the same opportunities is a way of showing Care for each other: it helps each individual to develop the self-esteem it takes to do their best work.

If they lean in favor of women-only workshops...

Which of these options would communicate your stance on women-only workshops in language related to Fairness and Care?

"Women have the right to develop their public speaking skills and maximize their chances of getting good jobs in competitive industries.

It's our duty as Americans to uphold our nation's tradition of supporting every individual's chance of succeeding."



Not quite! This response does involve Fairness, but it relies on Loyalty, Authority, and Liberty instead of making a connection to Care.

Talking about the importance of "treat[ing] each other as equals" and the value of giving everyone an "equal chance" certainly invokes the importance of Fairness.

But referring to "our nation" and invoking the idea of the "American Dream" makes an argument in terms of Loyalty to ideals of the United States. Speaking about having a "duty" to uphold American "tradition" plays up Authority. Lastly, the idea of "lifting [our]selves up" through hard work emphasizes the importance of individualism, which falls under the Liberty foundation.

Let's examine the alternative option:

"It's so important that we offer everyone an equal opportunity to succeed at getting good jobs. That's why it's only fair to extend extra help to women, since harmful gender stereotypes have historically held women back from rising in the ranks of competitive industries."



Excellent job! Let's take another look at this message, for good measure:

"It's so important that we offer everyone an equal opportunity to succeed at getting good jobs. That's why it's only fair to extend extra help to women, since harmful gender stereotypes have historically held women back from rising in the ranks of competitive industries."

Speaking about providing everyone with an "equal opportunity" to succeed expresses the importance of Fairness. Also, suggesting that women ought to receive "extra help" to counter the impact of "harmful" gender stereotypes shows Care for women (specifically, in support of women's ability to excel in any career).

Got it

Let's say that you used your understanding of Alex's elephant — specifically, your awareness that Fairness and Care are important to him — to express your view using this message, which you expect will resonate with his elephant. Alex replies:

If they lean against women-only workshops...	If they lean In favor of women-only workshops...
"I get what you're saying, but I'm still not convinced. The way I see it, the career-boost women would get from receiving this extra training in public speaking is really valuable. It outweighs any harm that <i>might</i> be caused by sending the message that women need extra help in order to succeed."	"I get what you're saying, but I'm still not convinced. The way I see it, the harm caused by sending the message that women <i>need</i> extra help in order to succeed is really significant. It outweighs any career-boost women <i>might</i> get from receiving this extra training in public speaking."

Has Alex drawn your attention to an aspect of this topic that you hadn't considered previously?	
Yes	No
Congratulations! You've just added to your understanding of the complexities of this issue.	That's fine! But for the sake of this exercise, we'll ask you to <i>imagine</i> that Alex has helped you realize something that hadn't occurred to you before.



Let's think strategically about what would be a productive next step in this conversation.

Remember, you decided on this goal for the conversation: "[the goal they selected]".

Given what you hope to accomplish, how do you think you should start your next reply to Alex?		
"Let me explain my point of view again, since you don't seem to get what I'm saying..."	"I guess there's no convincing you, then..."	"I hear what you're saying, Alex... "

Oops! Seems like your elephant might have gotten the best of you for a moment. As we've established, people don't respond well to the implication that they're slow or incompetent.

Even if you think Alex really should see things from your point of view by now, a more strategic approach is to **acknowledge his point of view**.

That's an understandable approach. You might very well feel as though you and Alex won't ever agree completely on this issue.

But Alex might respond poorly to the suggestion that he's closed-minded or unwilling to budge. A more strategic approach is to **acknowledge his point of view**.

Great idea!

Acknowledging their point of view

No matter what goal we set for a conversation, we're more likely to achieve it if we remember to *put the other person's ego first*.

Three simple words — "I hear you" — might be all it takes to assure the other person that you genuinely care about what they're saying. This will satisfy their need to feel heard, even if you still disagree with them.



[Tell me more](#)

There are a couple of different ways we can **acknowledge the other person's point of view**, depending on how the conversation has gone so far...

What if they've led me to change my mind?

If you changed your mind as a result of something the other person has said, or if you recognize that you've made a mistake — we strongly recommend that you tell them so!

One of the things that people most enjoy hearing are these two simple words, "You're right." It works like magic to make other people more favorable to you. It's a rare gift to hear these words, since most people find it really difficult to concede that other people are right.



But if you have the confidence to admit that you've changed your mind, the other person will be deeply appreciative, and they'll be more likely to admit when they're wrong.

What if I haven't changed my mind, but I think they've made good points?

If someone raises a thoughtful critique of the view you shared or brings your attention to something you hadn't thought of before, you don't have to pretend otherwise or shoot them down in order to make a strong case for your point of view.

That's because constructive disagreements aren't "zero-sum," where one person wins and the other loses. Instead, they're opportunities for both people to learn and grow from the experience.

As the philosopher Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains, "Knowledge, inspiration, vision — these are things that can be shared without loss. Those who share them with others add to spiritual wealth of a community without losing any of their own."

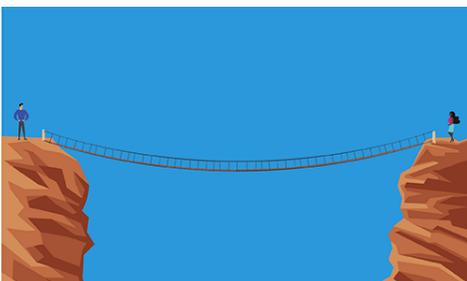
What if I haven't changed my mind, and I don't think they've made good points?

It's not worth it to pretend that they've made good points or give them false compliments. If we're insincere in praising other people, they may pick up on it and suspect that we were trying to be manipulative — which might make matters worse than if we didn't say anything.

In this scenario, you can still show appreciation for their contribution to the conversation. You can thank them for sharing their views with you, and tell them how glad you are that they were willing to enter into an open and honest discussion.

At some point in your conversation, you and your partner might have actually discovered some points of agreement on this topic. In that case, you can use yet another technique to make your partner feel heard...

What is it?



Focusing on common ground

Back in Lesson 5, we learned about short bridges and long bridges. When we're focused on all the ways that we disagree with someone, the distance between us may seem enormous. You might assume that you don't have the time or energy to cross that bridge and find mutual understanding.

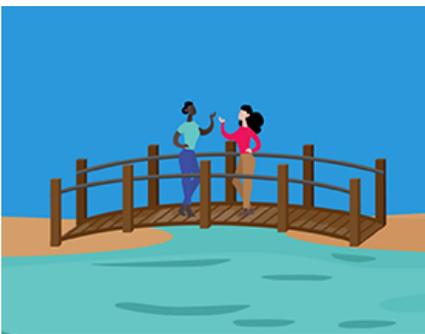
But when we acknowledge all of the things we already agree about, the bridge between us instantly gets shorter. With those small gestures of agreement, we establish goodwill with our partner and greatly improve the nature of the conversation.



Let's try finding some points of agreement in your conversation with Alex.

Can you think of something Alex said about women-only workshops that you both agree on?	
Yes	No
That's great! If you acknowledge this point of agreement in your conversation with Alex, the bridge between the two of you will feel easier to cross.	That's okay! Even if you couldn't identify any points of agreement with Alex based on what you've discussed so far, you've still gained something from this conversation. At the very least, you're more familiar with the arguments that you might come across the next time you speak to someone who shares Alex's stance on women-only opportunities.

Let's review the techniques we can use in Step 3 of effective communication, **speaking to the other person's elephant:**



- Speak with humility, to check our ego and show respect for other person's points of view
- Use language that resonates with their elephant, to make sure our message really lands with our conversation partner
- Acknowledge their point of view, to make them feel heard and appreciated
- Focus on common ground to remind yourselves of what you do agree on

Got it

Troubleshooting when things go off the rails

To recap, we've learned a three-step strategy that we can use to communicate effectively in any conversation:

1. **Establish your goal for the conversation**
2. **Listen to understand the other person's elephant**
3. **Speak to their elephant**

So far, we've been discussing how to be an effective communicator with a major assumption in play: that the other person in the conversation is remaining calm, reasonable, and cooperative throughout the discussion.

We mentioned earlier that if you approach a disagreement by treating the other with unwavering kindness and respect, they'll usually reciprocate. The key word is *usually* — there certainly are exceptions, and that's what's we'll address now.

We're going to suggest techniques you can use to troubleshoot conversations when they start to go awry.



Great



When you're at an impasse

You might find yourself in a situation where you've listened to one another and spoken to each other's elephants to the best of your ability. But neither of you are willing to budge on your positions on the topic.

If you try to keep working through this disagreement, it's likely that you'll start to get frustrated with each other.

Imagine that you and Alex have found yourselves in this situation. It's possible that you two are never going to see completely eye-to-eye on this issue.

That's a natural part of living in a diverse environment — people will inevitably have different views on important issues. But that doesn't mean we need to hate one another.

In these situations, our disagreements often reflect differences in our core values. This is likely why both parties feel so strongly about their views and are so unwilling to change their mind.

But rather than avoiding these core values, it can actually be productive to **name your differences**: to identify the values at the root of your disagreement.

If you can put into words which core values might be driving your differences in opinions, you can gain a clearer understanding of why you disagree. This, in turn, can help you accept the disagreement.

How can I practice this technique?

Let's try naming your differences with Alex.

As a reminder, the last thing he said in our conversation was:

If they lean against women-only workshops...

"I get what you're saying, but I'm still not convinced. The way I see it, the career-boost women would get from receiving this extra training in public speaking is really valuable. It outweighs any harm that *might* be caused by sending the message that women need extra help in order to succeed."

If they lean in favor of women-only workshops...

"I get what you're saying, but I'm still not convinced. The way I see it, the harm caused by sending the message that women *need* extra help in order to succeed is really significant. It outweighs any career-boost women *might* get from receiving this extra training in public speaking."



What core values seem to be at the root of Alex's opinion?

[You can refer to the values listed above.]

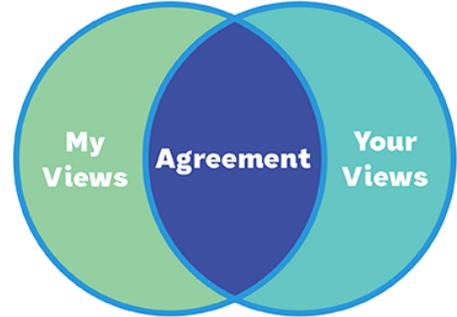
Enter text...

What core values are driving your own belief?

Enter text...

It's important to keep in mind that you and Alex may actually emphasize the same moral foundations, but you might rely on them in different ways. For example, maybe one of you favors giving equal treatment to all people, while the other favors ensuring equal outcomes for all people.

This reflects that you both strongly value the same moral foundation — Fairness — but you're applying it differently. While you may never see eye-to-eye on this issue, by identifying the values beneath the other person's position, you can recognize that the person you disagree with is advocating for their own deeply-held values, just as you're doing with your own.



How might the differences in your core values explain why you two disagree about women-only workshops?

[If you find it difficult to name differences between your and Alex's values, you could describe how you and Alex have different predictions about the practical effects of holding women-only workshops.]

Enter text...



Thanks for responding!

If you and Alex can talk openly about how your moral worldviews differ from one another, then you can solve the mystery of why this issue put the two of you so at odds with each other. It can help you find a productive place where you can agree to disagree.

How about another scenario?

When things are getting heated

Imagine that you've done everything you can to explain to Alex why you respectfully disagree with his stance on women-only workshops.

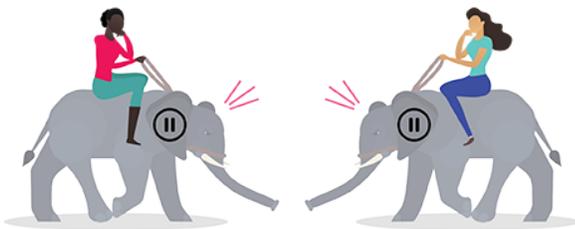
But despite your best efforts, you can see that Alex's face is becoming flushed, and his brow is furrowed into an expression of indignation.



How likely do you think it is that you'll be able to move forward in constructive dialogue with Alex?

It's totally hopeless. There's no recovering from this point	Totally likely. I don't see any problems here	It's possible to move forward, if we choose our moves carefully
This conversation might seem like a lost cause, since Alex is obviously feeling some strong emotions. But it is possible to continue a dialogue, if you act strategically!	Well, there are some warning signs here! Alex's appearance and raised voice indicate that he's feeling some strong emotions. But it is possible to continue a dialogue, if we act strategically.	That's right! Alex's appearance and raised voice indicate that he's feeling some strong emotions. But it is possible to continue a dialogue, if we're strategic about our next steps.

We've learned that whenever we need to get control of our own emotions and rein in our elephant, we can **press pause** on what we're doing and take a moment to cool off.



The same principle applies when someone else's elephant has taken charge. If we can help them take a moment to cool off, their rider may be able to regain control.

If you think the conversation has started to go off the rails, you can do two things:

First, acknowledge the other person's feelings. Telling them "It looks like you're starting to get upset..." or "I can tell this is making you feel angry..." shows that you care about how they feel.

Second, suggest taking a break. (This can work even if you're the one getting riled up, and you want to make sure your rider stays in control.) You can try phrases like these:

- "Maybe we should both take a few moments to cool off."
- "It seems like we're getting pretty heated. Let's take a breather."

What if they don't want to pause?

Pressing pause does require the other person's cooperation. There may be conversations where you try this out, but the other person's elephant keeps charging forward anyway.

For example, imagine that you ask Alex if the two of you can pause for a moment to cool off, but he replies:

"How dare you tell me I need to calm down! You don't really care about what's best for women at all — you're a misogynist!"



Whoa there! That escalated quickly. At this point, it seems like Alex is totally seething with contempt.

Which of these describes your first impulse of how to respond to Alex?

[You can be honest! It's important to get to know your own elephant, if you want to be able to rein it in properly.]

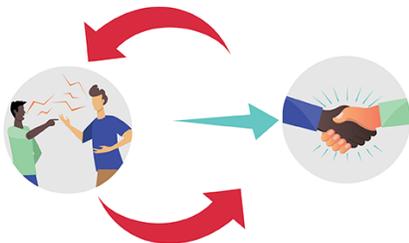
Shut down and walk away from the conversation

That's a very common impulse, and an understandable one! But we encourage you to challenge yourself to keep the conversation going.

Yell right back to defend yourself

That's a very common impulse! It's so tempting to respond with contempt when people dish it out to us. But as we've learned, that will only perpetuate the cycle.

Alex's outburst is a perfect opportunity to practice *breaking the cycle of contempt*. Remember, you have the power and the strength of mind to choose how to respond to his harsh language, instead of giving into the impulse to shut down or retaliate.



When someone steps out of line by throwing names, labels, or insults at you, you don't have to stoop to their level. Instead, you can **take the high road** by treating them with kindness, patience, and empathy.

To take the high road, reassure them that you were listening and you care about their point of view. For example, you might think back to what they shared before their outburst and paraphrase their view back to them, to make them feel heard and respected.

Are you saying I should let this person just walk all over me, instead of defending myself?

What we're recommending is that you apply the skill of *listening with strength*. We don't have to react to everything the other person says.

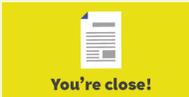
If you give into the impulse to give the other person a taste of their own medicine by insulting them back, then you've let them goad you into bad behavior.



As Victor Frankl taught us, we always have the power to choose our own way, instead of letting other people drag us into acting in ways we may regret.

Taking the high road allows you to demonstrate your willpower and moral integrity in the face of other people's errors. It might just inspire the other person to choose a better path in their future conversations.

Let's try this out with Alex. He just had this outburst: "How dare you tell me I need to calm down! You don't really care about what's best for women at all — you're a misogynist!"

Which of these represents the best way of responding to Alex's insult?				
If they lean against women-only workshops...	If they lean in favor of women-only workshops...			
"Alex, I hear what you're saying about the career-boost that women could get from these women-only workshops..."	"Alex, I hear what you're saying about the harm of sending the message that women need extra help in order to succeed..."	"This conversation isn't worth continuing if you're going to act this way."	"I'm not the misogynist here — you're the misogynist!"	"How dare you raise your voice at me! I won't tolerate your behavior!"
				
Excellent job! You listened with strength to Alex's insult, and chose to take the high road instead of reciprocating with more shouting or insults.	Almost! This is a much better option than raising your voice or insulting Alex back. But we'd encourage you to try to resume the conversation if you can, instead of shutting it down.	Whoa there! Even if Alex called you a name first, you don't have to dish out what he served. A much more strategic option is to take the high road: Ignore their insults and try to steer them...	Not quite. It might feel good to stand up for yourself and tell them that you don't appreciate their insults, but a more strategic choice is to take the high road. You can choose to ignore their insults and try to...	

	<p>You could respond, "Alex, I hear what you're saying about..."</p> <p>That way, you'd be choosing to show them a way that you can still move forward in constructive dialogue, even after someone has acted up.</p>	<p>...back to dialogue by showing them that you've heard their point of view</p>	<p>....steer them back to dialogue by showing them that you've heard their point of view.</p>
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To review what we've learned about **troubleshooting conversations that have gone awry**, we can use these three tactics:

- Name your differences in core values at the root of your disagreement
- Press pause and take a break from the conversation to calm down
- Take the high road if they've starting shouting or insulting you

Now, it's time to wrap up this lesson by summarizing our overall strategy for effective communication.

Great

Review

In difficult conversations, our elephant can get the better of us. It can lead us to behave in ways that feel good in the moment, but actually hinder our own goals. But we have the power to put our riders in charge, to make *strategic* and *intentional* choices about how we act during disagreements.

Our rider can adopt a powerful strategy: **focus on winning over the other person's elephant**. This means we'll set the tone for a productive and respectful conversation, and prepare ourselves to speak and act in ways that will land well with the other person's intuitive, emotional side.



Three steps for effective communication are:

1. **Establish your goal for the conversation**
2. **Listen to understand the other person's elephant**
3. **Speak to their elephant**

To put this all together, let's finish up with some final life hacks!

Great!

Life Hacks



To build up your skills in preparation for real conversations, you can try these life hacks:

1. Set goals for your conversations

The next time you find yourself about to express your point of view in a conversation or on social media, take a moment to decide: 'What do I really want to accomplish in this conversation?' Then make sure you craft your message in a way that will advance your goal.

2. Perfect your paraphrasing

Try listening to someone speaking (on Youtube, a podcast, TV news, etc.) in 15-second increments. Pause to restate in your own words what the speaker just said. Once you're comfortable with this, you can work up to summarizing longer time increments of speech.

3. Speak the other person's language

In the next week, when you come across an article, social media post, or comment that you disagree with, try to identify the moral foundations that might be guiding that person's view. Then, challenge yourself to write out how you'd express your view on that topic using their moral foundations.

4. Take the high road

The next time you come across a social media post or comment that you find insulting, resist the urge to reply by insulting them back. Challenge yourself to compose a response that acknowledges the reasonable aspects of that person's view. If you can't find anything kind to say to them, don't respond.

Which life hack would you like to practice?

Set goals for your conversations

Perfect your paraphrasing

Speak the other person's language

Take the high road

Self-Reflection

Great! We'll send you a reminder of the life hack you chose in your summary email.



Before we wrap up, let's do some brief self-reflection.

What's the key takeaway you learned from this lesson?

Enter text...

In the upcoming week, how will you implement this key takeaway in your life?

Enter text...



Congratulations — you've completed all 8 of the Perspectives online lessons!

That means that you've acquired a new set of skills to navigate challenging conversations more successfully. You're well on your way to having more open, honest, and constructive discussions!