Heifer grazing

Resolving problems

Getting started

We have all had those conversations where the result was different to our desired outcome. We spend time afterwards replaying the conversation in our heads imagining what we wish we had thought to say, and imagining a much different outcome from the reality. These conversations have generally occurred when we have not had a clear plan of the desired outcome is or when we have been surprised by the comments being made. It is not a very comfortable position to be in either way.

Discussing touchy or difficult topics is never easy but if we put some time in before the conversation takes place then we have a much better chance of achieving the desired outcome.

Before embarking on resolving a problem the first step is to look closely and honestly at your concerns and analyse whether your expectations are realistic and whether or not you are justified in having this conversation.

Are you in the right frame of mind?

Your mind set will also have a large impact on the outcome of any negotiations so think carefully about where you sit on the quadrant below. Depending on the circumstances any of these could be valid responses but if you are hoping to keep the relationship going then starting from the attitudes on the right hand side of the quadrant will more likely have a positive outcome.

![Quadrant Diagram](image)

I want to be a winner at any cost

I want to find a way that both parties win

I plan to take whatever I can get

I want to build friendly relationships

I may have to compromise

By planning, having the facts at our fingertips and thinking about how and what questions we are going to ask we are less likely to come from an emotive, angry space and more likely to be calm and rational. If you think of times when people have behaved angrily or aggressively towards you, and how you ultimately responded to that approach, it was probably one of two ways, by being aggressive back or by shutting down. Either of these responses do not help to resolve the situation and may sometimes even escalate matters.
Preparation

Before going into the conversation be clear about the following:

- What do you hope to accomplish?
- What would be the ideal outcome?
- Have you contributed to the problem?
- Separate the practical issues from emotive ones

Use the negotiation model and attached planning template to plan the 4 step process. The planning template can also be used during the conversation to capture thoughts and guide the conversation back on track.

Negotiation model

1. Preparation
   - What is the issue e.g. weight gain, price, and are my expectations realistic? Refer to contracts and reports for defining the issue.
   - Decide on areas of possible flexibility, don’t go into the process with a closed mind, give yourself some negotiation room.
   - Plan approach – by planning you are less likely to use emotion and get side-tracked. Use the planning template and conversation starters.

2. Exchange information
   - Exchange positions and issues – negotiation is a two way process.
   - Create a positive working climate – be calm and stick to the facts.
   - Listen carefully and question thoroughly.

3. Bargaining
   - Specify what you want – be clear about the what, why, how, when. Use the remedial action plan.
   - Seek compromise – get a win-win if possible
   - Remember optimum and fallback positions – don’t back yourself into a corner.

4. Closing and commitment
   - Reiterate the value of your solution.
   - Agree on an outcome.
   - Agree on a timeframe for action to be taken. Record details using the remedial action plan.
## Planning template

### Preparation

- What exactly is the problem?

- What facts do I have to back up my position?

- What will be my conversation opener/question?

### Exchange information

- What else do I need to know to have the full picture?

- What more have I learnt about the issue?

### Bargaining

- Is there anything I would be prepared to compromise on?

### Closing and commitment

- What timeframe have we agreed on for action and who is going to undertake them?
**Conversation starters**

Beginning the conversation is often the most difficult part. Our tone of voice and the way we present a question can have a large impact on the response. Try not to be confrontational and emotive. Try to phrase the problem in an inclusive way and ask the other person for their help to solve the problem. Here are a few examples of conversation openers:

- I have something I’d like to discuss with you that I think will help us work together more effectively.
- I’d like to talk about ______ with you, but first I’d like to get your point of view.
- We seem to have different perceptions about ______. I’d like to hear your thinking on this.
- I’d like to talk about ______. I think we may have different ideas about how to ______.
- I’d like to see if we might reach a better understanding about ______. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well.

**Tips and suggestions**

A successful outcome will depend on two things: how you are and what you say.

- Have a clear vision of the purpose of the conversation and keep this in mind at difficult moments.
- Don’t take verbal attacks personally. Help the other person come back to the topic.
- Don’t assume the other person can see things from your point of view.
- Mentally practice the conversation. See various possibilities and visualize yourself handling them with ease. Envision the outcome you are hoping for.