

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

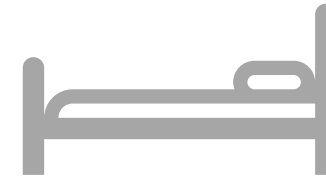
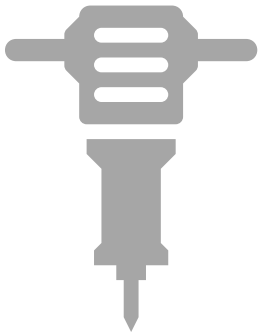
Arthur Bradford, EVP & CFO at UNT Dallas

Administrative Professionals Conference 2022
Atomic Habits: *Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results*

April 14, 2022



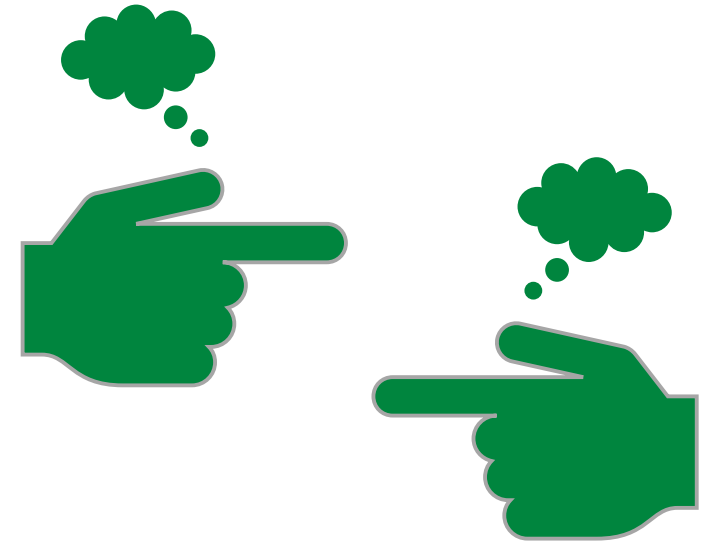
True Story





What is a difficult conversation?

A difficult conversation is an intentional discussion about an uncomfortable topic or negative experience where the goal is to share perspectives, gain understanding, develop respect, and seek resolution.





Think of a
difficult conversation
you need to have,
should have had, or
one you wish you could do over.





Why is having a difficult conversation so hard?



Emotional
Awkward
Stressful
FEAR
RISKY



What happens when we avoid difficult conversations?

Disengagement

Resentment

Isolation

CONFLICT

Attrition





Meet Micah

Title – Senior Project Manager

Tenure – 5 Years

Reports To – Rita

LY Rating – Highly Accomplished

Education – B.A. Finance UNT Dallas | M.B.A Harvard

Hobbies – Leading Bible Studies, Playing with Miniature Goldendoodle
Butterscotch

Micah



Meet Rita

Title – Vice President Operations

Tenure – 13 Years

Reports To – CEO

LY Rating – Meets Expectations

Education – B.A. English UNT Dallas | Ph.D. Operations Management UT Austin

Hobbies – Reading, Spending Time with Husband and Children Esther (14) and Jude (16)

Rita



The Situation



- Micah reports to Rita, who reports to the new CEO at *The Coffee Depot*.
- Sales continue to decline post-pandemic.
- Employee engagement is low, and turnover is at an all-time high. Employees are working overtime and on weekends.
- Micah leads a project team to diagnose the business and improve both sales and employee engagement.
- Since the start of the project six months ago, Micah has met all deadlines and deliverables.
- Micah updates Rita weekly on the progress of the project.
- The CEO has given Rita 60 days to show better sales results.



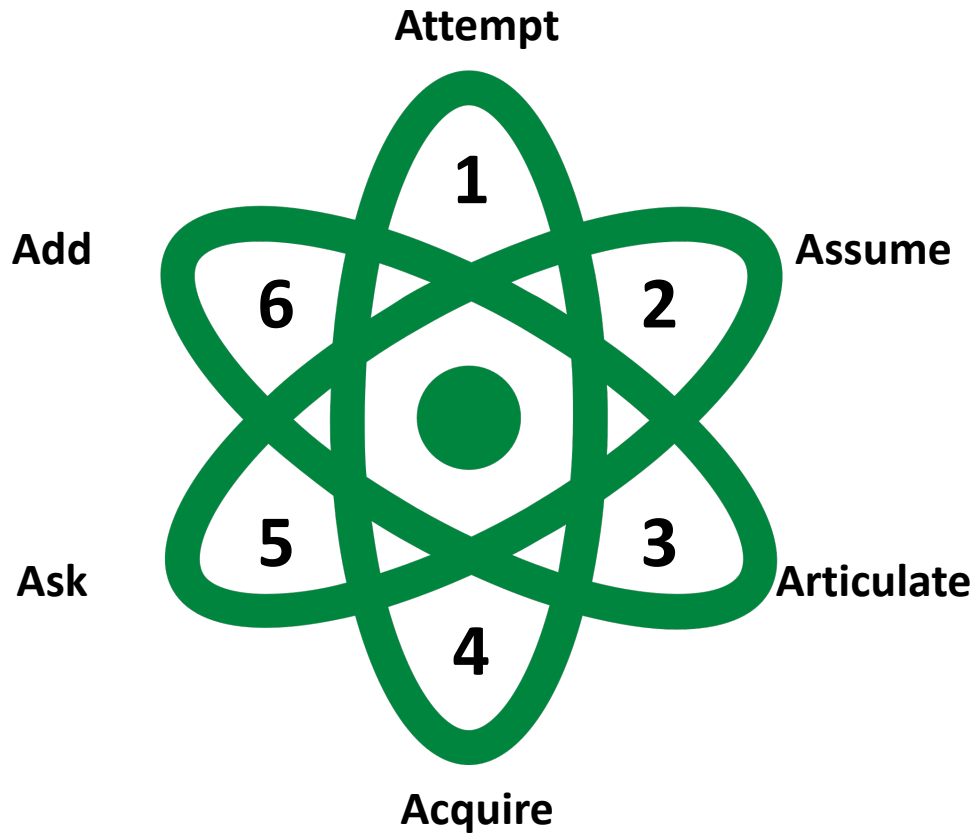
The Issue



- Micah's findings so far point to operational deficiencies as the primary cause of declining sales.
- His findings also point to management as the primary cause of low employee engagement and the high turnover.
- Despite the compelling data, Rita disagrees with Micah's findings because these findings point directly to her.
- Rita has chided Micah publicly and to the CEO.
- **Micah is contemplating having a difficult conversation with Rita.**



Six Step Technique for Difficult Conversations*



1. Attempt to get to know each other

2. Assume nothing

3. Articulate your goal

4. Acquire the facts

5. Ask for help toward resolution

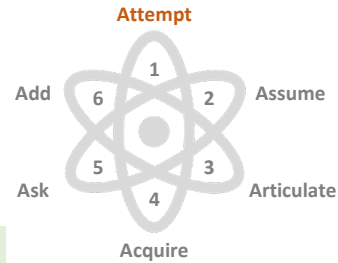
6. Add to daily atomic habits

This technique works with vertical and horizontal reporting relationships.

*Non-Scientific – Based on 30 years of Corporate America experience.



1. Attempt to get to know each other



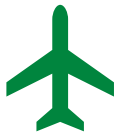
Also be willing to share. Look for connection points. Don't be creepy or come across like a private investigator. Try the F.O.R.D. method –



- Family – Learn about their family.



- Occupation – Learn about their current and past jobs, companies, and experiences.



- Recreation – Learn about their hobbies and past and upcoming vacations or how they spend their weekends.

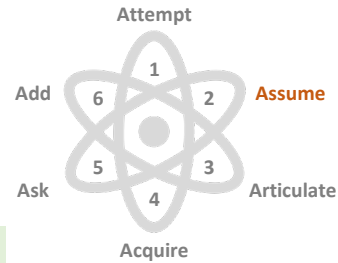


- Dreams – Learn about their dreams and future aspirations.

Should be done apart from the need to have a difficult conversation.



2. Assume nothing



Do not assume that others know what we think, feel, or want, and vice versa. In this context, assumptions are bad.



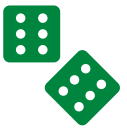
- Assumptions are stories we create in our heads to excuse, explain, or justify words, feelings, and actions of others.



- Assumptions are hard to unknow.
(Don't think about that piece of broccoli stuck between my teeth.)



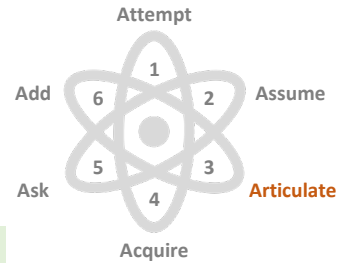
- Assumptions tend to misplace responsibility.



- Assumptions are simply unfair.



3. Articulate your goal



Formulate your goal and make sure it is reasonable and significant.
Will it make a difference?



- Change in behavior.



- Apology.



- Restoration of relationship.



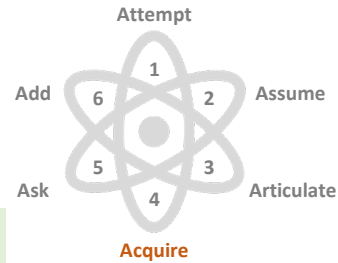
- Health and inner peace.



- All of the above.



4. Acquire the facts



Resolution is impossible without the facts.

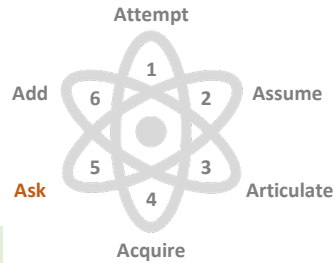
- Assert use of “I” as much as possible as you state why the need for the conversation and as you share what happened and how it impacted you. Be specific with examples of dates, time, location, and if others were present. Don’t be too scripted.
- Avoid over expression of emotions. (Watch for signs of stress.)
- Acknowledge your role in the situation.
- Affirm their point of view as they assess your claim. (Extend grace. See them as a copartner for resolution.)



Having a neutral party join you may sometimes be warranted. (e.g. HR partner or peer from another functional area)



5. Ask for help toward resolution



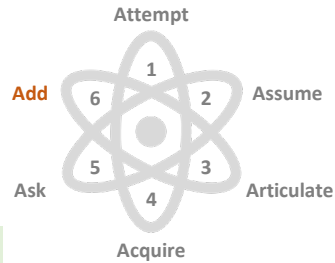
Asking for help shows vulnerability, you trust and appreciate their ideas, and that you care about the relationship.

- Share your goal from step three above. (Avoid being too scripted.)
- Ask how they can help achieve your goal. (Remain quiet and listen intently.)
- Abstain from telling them what they should or should not do.
- Agree on the resolution. (Remain open and flexible. When there is an impasse and no reasonable resolution can be reached, escalate to next level or to HR.)
- Ask for permission to hold each other accountable to the resolution.





6. Add to daily atomic habits



Add this method to your daily atomic habits.



- Cue: **Make it obvious.** | Awareness. Act immediately when a difficult conversation is needed. Don't let it stew.
- Craving: **Make it attractive.** | Focus on the reward/destination.
- Response: **Make it easy.** | Keep it simple and make it a part of who you are. Make it second nature.
- Reward: **Make it satisfying.** | Stay motivated and encouraged by your progress.

Source: *Atomic Habits*, James Clear, 2018.



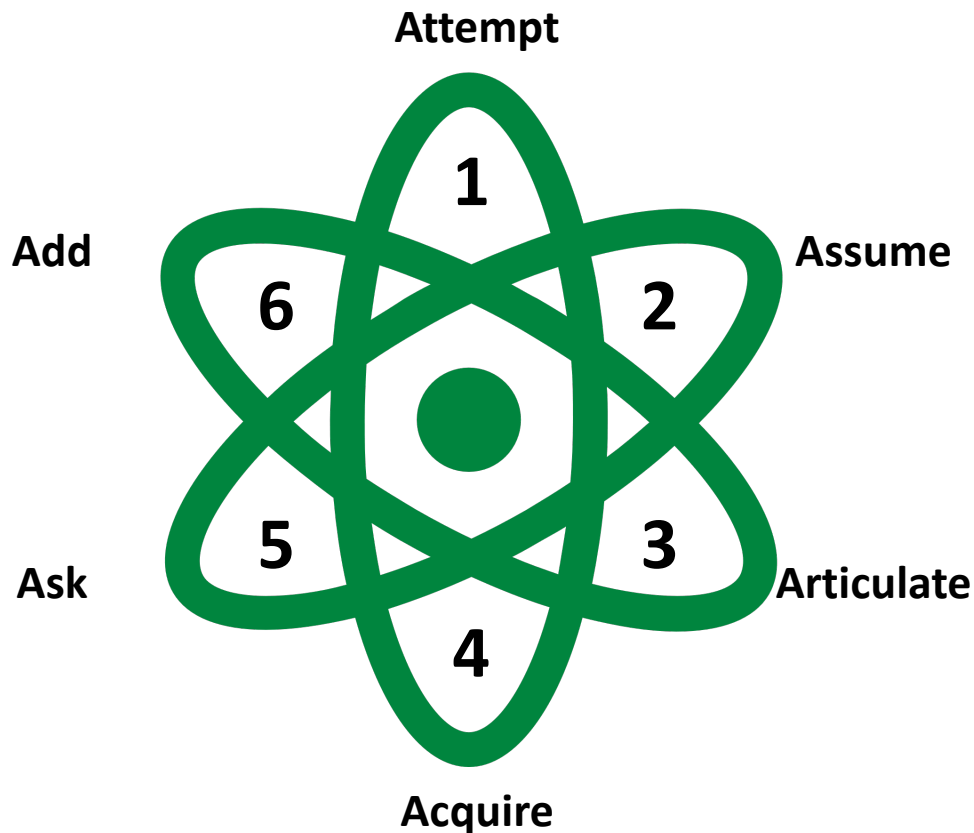
The Outcome



- Micah scheduled time with Rita to have the difficult conversation.
- Micah used this method and was successful in achieving a mutual resolution.
- Rita acknowledged her role, apologized publicly to Micah, and committed to the resolution.
- Micah acknowledged that he could have been more delicate in how he shared his findings with Rita.
- Both Rita and Micah grew as people and professionals as a result.



Six Step Technique for Difficult Conversations



1. Attempt to get to know each other

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5. Ask for help toward resolution

6. Add to daily atomic habits



Questions?

Organizational Development & Engagement

1. Attempt to get to know each other
Use the FORD Method, be willing to share, and look for connection.

Organizational Development & Engagement

2. Assume nothing
Do not assume that others know what we think, feel, or want, and

Organizational Development & Engagement

3. Articulate your goal
Formulate your goal and make it clear. Will it make a difference?

- Change in behavior.
- Apology.
- Restoration of relationships.
- Health and inner peace.
- All of the above.

Organizational Development & Engagement

4. Acquire the facts

Organizational Development & Engagement

5. Ask for help toward resolution
Asking for help shows vulnerability, you trust and appreciate their ideas, and

Organizational Development & Engagement

6. Add to daily atomic habits
Add these techniques to your daily atomic habits.

Organizational Development & Engagement

Six Step Technique for Difficult Conversations

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APC Conference 2022 | Difficult Conversations



Thank You