



Leading Difficult Conversations

a Learning Program for STMicroelectronics

Guidelines for Independent Work

220301

andrew.betts@icondasolutions.com

Foreword

I hope that you enjoyed the Opening Workshop and that you have plenty of energy left for what now follows!

The purpose of this document is to equip you with the information and tools that you will need to prepare for the Closing Workshop.

You will be working independently in Buddy Groups, with the possibility of help from your breakout group facilitator, should you need it.

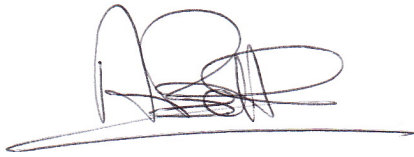
Using whatever time you can spare personally and the meeting possibilities of your Buddy Group, I suggest that you use the resources given in the next section to do as many exercises and as much reading and viewing as possible.

And there is something that your Buddy group needs to produce in time for the Closing Workshop ... *a film scene in the style of those that we improvised during the Opening Workshop, illustrating certain features of a Difficult Conversation and how they may be dealt with!*

The purpose and method for the latter work are described in the section Preparation for the Closing Workshop.

In case of questions or problems, please contact your breakout group facilitator or, in extremis, give me a call (andrew.betts@icondasolutions.com, +33 6 12 19 49 03).

Happy scene writing!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andy Betts', with a long horizontal line underneath.

Andy Betts

February 2021

Table of contents

Foreword.....	2
Resources.....	4
Exercises.....	4
Articles.....	4
Books	4
Videos	5
Preparation for the Closing Workshop	6
Your Mission : write a new scene	6
The Method	6
Review the scene template and the full film script.....	6
Define the Backdrop and the Cast of Characters for your scene	6
List the targeted learning points.....	6
Write and test the scene	6
Write the learning points and questions.....	6
Submit your scene for feedback one week before the Closing Workshop	6
Annexes	7
Annex 1: NVC exercises	7
Aspect 1 (observation).....	7
Aspects 1, 2 and 3 (observation, feelings and needs).....	7
Aspect 4 (request)	7
All aspects - email.....	8
All aspects – opinion pieces	8
Annex 2: NVC objections and clarifications.....	9
Objections	9
Clarifications	10

Resources

Exercises

There are some excellent communication practice resources at:

<https://positivepsychology.com/non-violent-communication/>

These include, but are not limited to, NVC exercises, and selected material from this source is included in the annex.

The [NonViolent Communication Companion Workbook](#), listed in the Books section below, is a solid publication from the Center for NonViolent Communication (CNVC). You can't go wrong with this one!

To go further still, you might consider joining an NVC practice group, local to you. To find one, ask around and consult Google!

Articles

Food for thought : Distance is Destroying Dialogue: New Study Shows Employees are More Than Twice as Likely to Avoid Discussing Concerns with Remote Colleagues, <https://cruciallearning.com/press/distance-is-destroying-dialogue-new-study-shows-employees-are-more-than-twice-as-likely-to-avoid-discussing-concerns-with-remote-colleagues/>

NVC in industry: When CEO Satya Nadella joined Microsoft, he started diffusing its toxic culture by handing each of his execs a 15-year-old book by a psychologist, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/when-ceo-satya-nadella-joined-microsoft-he-started-diffusing-toal/>

Books

Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High, by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler, https://www.amazon.com/Crucial-Conversations-Talking-Stakes-Second/dp/0071771328/ref=sr_1_1

Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life: Life-Changing Tools for Healthy Relationships, by Marshall B. Rosenberg PhD, https://www.amazon.com/Nonviolent-Communication-Language-Life-Changing-Relationships/dp/189200528X/ref=sr_1_1

Nonviolent Communication Companion Workbook , by Lucy Leu, https://www.amazon.com/Nonviolent-Communication-Companion-Workbook-2015-09-01/dp/B01NAO8XZQ/ref=sr_1_1

Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most, by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, Sheila Heen, https://www.amazon.com/Difficult-Conversations-Discuss-What-Matters/dp/0143118447/ref=sr_1_1

Being Genuine: Stop Being Nice, Start Being Real, by Thomas D'Ansembourg, https://www.amazon.com/Being-Genuine-Stop-Nice-Start/dp/1892005212/ref=sr_1_1

Daring Greatly, Brune Brown,

https://www.amazon.com/Daring-Greatly-Courage-Vulnerable-Transforms/dp/1592408419/ref=sr_1_1

Videos

Joseph Grenny: When the CFO shut up for 10 years (16 mins),

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuJgqTs-G44>

Joseph Grenny's keynote to VitalSmarts (30 mins),

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uc3ARpccRwQ>

Steve Jobs, a while back, replying to a very difficult question. The first minute is key.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oegPrUmVz-o>

Preparation for the Closing Workshop

Your Mission : write a new scene

With your Buddy or Buddies, you are to write a film scene in the style of those that we improvised during the Opening Workshop, illustrating certain features of a Difficult Conversation and how they may be dealt with.

At the Closing Workshop, your scene will be used as the basis of an improvisation, played out by you and other participants.

The Method

Review the scene template and the full film script

You will find a template for the scene you are to write on the Learning Management System (<https://my.icon9.net>).

You will also find the full scripts of the film scenes that we improvised in the Opening Workshop, with learning points and questions at the end of each scene. The full script is essentially a set of examples of how a Difficult Conversation can be transformed into a Normal Conversation. Your script should demonstrate the same process, but for an example scenario of your own choosing.

Look over the template, read the full script and discuss the Learning Points and Questions in your Buddy group.

Define the Backdrop and the Cast of Characters for your scene

With your Buddy or Buddies and using the template, define the Backdrop and the Cast of Characters for your scene. If you wish, you may use those from the Opening Workshop (if not, please delete them from the template and write your own).

List the targeted learning points

Decide and write down the learning points that you aim to illustrate with your scene.

Write and test the scene

Using the template, write your scene then test it with your Buddy or Buddies by reading it out loud.

Write the learning points and questions

Revisit and adjust the learning points, perhaps adding one or two questions.

Submit your scene for feedback one week before the Closing Workshop

Send your complete, draft script to your breakout group facilitator and to your trainer for checking **at least 1 week before the Closing Workshop**.

Thank you.

Annexes

Annex 1: NVC exercises

The following exercises are based on similar material from the Positive Psychology's "17 Positive Communication Exercises"/Brief Non-Violent Communication Exercises (<https://pro.positivepsychology.com/product/17-positive-communication-exercises/>).

Aspect 1 (observation)

Write down one judgment about another person and judgment about yourself that have arisen in your mind today. For example, "John acted aggressively during that meeting" and "I made a fool of myself when I struggled to express my thoughts." Then, try to translate those judgments into observations. For example, "John raised his voice during that meeting" and "I needed some time to find the right words."

You may use the Observations Compass, in the Cheat Sheets section, above.

Consider discussing what you have written with a Buddy.

Aspects 1, 2 and 3 (observation, feelings and needs)

Think of a conversation with another person where you experienced unpleasant emotions. Carefully analyze the conversation and write down:

1. What happened. What did the other person do or say? Try to describe the situation as objectively as possible (👉 Observations Compass, in the Cheat Sheets section, above).
2. Your feelings at that moment: Describe what you were feeling as accurately as possible (👉 Feelings Inventory, in the Cheat Sheets section, above).
3. Your needs. Describe what needs of yours were connected to the feelings you experienced (👉 Needs Inventory, in the Cheat Sheets section, above).

Consider discussing what you have written with a Buddy.

Aspect 4 (request)

Recall an unsatisfactory interaction where you believe there was some misunderstanding about what you were asking for. Perhaps you weren't 100% clear about it yourself? Write down:

1. The request(s) that you made.
2. How the other person responded to your request.

How could you reframe the request in a way that would be more specific, clear, and positive action-oriented?

Remember the Requests Checklist : **Clear**, **Positive**, **Negotiable** and **In The Present** !

Consider discussing what you have written with your Buddy.

All aspects - email

Choose one or two recent email messages you sent and received. Read through them and scan for observations, feelings, needs, and requests.

If you think they can be improved, rewrite some of them. Make your language as natural and colloquial as possible while respecting NVC guidelines for the four aspects.

Use the Cheat Sheets as much as you want (you have the time when writing email!).

Consider discussing what you have written with a Buddy.

All aspects – opinion pieces

Choose an article from a newspaper or social media and analyse it, looking for language that is discouraged when using NVC.

Either (1) rewrite all or part of the article, conforming to NVC standards, or, (2) write a counter to the article, opposing some of the author's views, respecting NVC standards of course.

Annex 2: NVC objections and clarifications

Objections

The following sub-sections have the form of a claim followed by a couple of objections. Perhaps you have some of your own to add ...?

The 4-step NVC protocol is a great way to structure difficult conversations

- The 4 steps are too mechanical – you end up sounding like a robot
- Conversations are too complex to be captured in 4 steps

In difficult conversations, it's crucial to be 100% truthful, and NVC helps with this

- Being completely truthful makes you too exposed. In a professional situation, for example, there may be confidentiality to protect
- But the truth can be hurtful, especially in difficult conversations

A big advantage of the NVC approach is that you can use it with anyone

- What if you're talking to someone who doesn't care what's true and what isn't?
- How so? If I tell a bouncer at a club that he's hurt my feelings, he's likely to break my arm!
- What about my Aunt Lucy? She hasn't been able to separate fact from fiction from fairies for the past 20 years!

If you can explain your needs well, people will generally try to help you meet them

- Nonsense. If my needs conflict with theirs, then they're not going to help me meet mine!
- But needs, especially in a professional context, are essentially interests. And the interests of a buyer and their supplier can never be compatible, for example.

A well-formulated request usually provokes a positive response

- No it doesn't. My daughter won't get out of the shower, no matter how I ask!
- But the clarity of a request does not guarantee that there will be a positive response

NVC encourages empathy, which is key to successful confrontations

- No! Communicating with a 4-step recipe encourages the exact opposite of empathy.
- NVC is too complicated. It's like trying to be empathetic in Chinese!

Clarifications

I believe that most, maybe all, of the above objections arise from an incomplete understanding of NVC. At the same time, they are extremely useful, since addressing leads us to explore the more subtle aspects of the practice.

The 4-step NVC protocol is a great way to structure difficult conversations

- The 4 steps are too mechanical – you end up sounding like a robot
 - *The intent of the simple, 4-step presentation is to provide an easy-to-understand framework. Once I've got past the stage of initial practice, I can use the framework without having to go step-by-step. Having said that, I may still want to fall back on the 1-4 process in cases of high stress!*
- Conversations are too complex to be captured in 4 steps
 - *Indeed, a complete conversation cannot be captured in 4 steps. We cannot simply go "1-2-3-4-bingo!" to resolve an issue. Rather, the 4 steps serve to initiate a conversation by establishing a channel of communication and get things on track. They also support the ensuing discussion, by separating concerns (situation/observations, feelings/problems, wants/needs).*

In difficult conversations, it's crucial to be 100% truthful, and NVC helps with this

- Being completely truthful makes you too exposed. In a professional situation, for example, there may be confidentiality to protect
 - *« 100% truthful » does not mean « reveal everything »! Rather, NVC teaches us to endeavor to describe situations, problems/feelings and wants/needs as accurately as possible. This is a big challenge and it's one of the reasons that NVC takes practice.*
- But the truth can be hurtful, especially in difficult conversations
 - *Judgements, projections, rules, assumptions ... all these things can be very hurtful, for sure, and that is why eliminating them is a key part of NVC practice. But if the truth is inconvenient and I avoid it, there's a good chance that I'll put off a problem for later. There's also a risk that people will find out the truth in some other way, in my absence.*

A big advantage of the NVC approach is that you can use it with anyone

- What if you're talking to someone who doesn't care what's true and what isn't?
 - *In this case, you need to withdraw, or at least defend yourself. The NVC method is based on the assumption that the communicators care about truth. The truth is not a constraint for certain people (thankfully, very few), and this gives them tremendous freedom and power. NVC is unlikely to be fruitful in such cases.*
 - *This presents a problem: how do I distinguish between these unusual situations and the more common ones where the use of NVC has not resulted in the resolution that I had hoped for? In the former case, it could be dangerous to persist with the NVC approach, since it requires openness and a willingness to show vulnerability, and this*

could be turned against me. However, in the latter case it's right to persist.

- *If in doubt, I stick to step 1 of the NVC protocol until I am sure of what I am dealing with. That is, I use observation to describe the situation factually, but I don't expose my feelings or needs for the moment. The other person's reaction to my sincere attempts to get to the truth and to their response to my requests should be good indicators of what to do next.*
- How so? If I tell a bouncer at a club that he's hurt my feelings, he's likely to break my arm!
 - *Well, for starters, he's not hurt your feelings – you are the one responsible for your feelings ☺. Secondly, I adapt what I say to the situation and to the person I'm talking to, but "adapt" does not mean "abandon the approach". I can imagine saying to a bouncer, for example: "Ok, I get it that there's a dress code and that my jeans don't fit it (SITUATION). But the love of my life just went in there (PROBLEM/FEELINGS) and I've gotta tell her where I'm at (NEED). Can you just help me get a message to her or something? (REQUEST)"*
- What about my Aunt Lucy? She hasn't been able to separate fact from fiction from fairies for the past 20 years!
 - *Ok, you've got me there. In this case, maybe you should drop the first 3 steps and concentrate on the request, to understand her view of things (however crazy) before asking for anything.*

If you can explain your needs well, people will generally try to help you meet them

- Nonsense. If my needs conflict with theirs, then they're not going to help me meet mine!
 - *The idea is to get down to fundamental needs that everyone shares. For example, "I want to do my job as well as possible" is expressing a need that very many people will share. By talking in these terms, I encourage others to look for ways to simultaneously satisfy their needs and mine (i.e. to look for solutions, rather than to simply defend their position)*
- But needs, especially in a professional context, are essentially interests. And the interests of a buyer and their supplier can never be compatible, for example.
 - *This objection only makes sense if the context is very narrow: if nothing other than price is taken into account, for example. But if the supplier's main concern is to consistently provide the best/most reliable product/service (a common need, arising from sound business considerations) then (a) this can easily be understood by a buyer and (b) this could also be in the buyer's interest. But even if (b) does not apply, at least I am somewhere on the road to mutual understanding.*

A well-formulated request usually provokes a positive response

- No it doesn't. My daughter won't get out of the shower, no matter how I ask!

- A “well formulated” request is not usually as ambitious as this. In using NVC, I first try to establish mutual understanding, rather than attempt to get my own way immediately.
- But the clarity of a request does not guarantee that there will be a positive response
 - “Well formulated” does not just mean “clear”. Rather, it depends on the quality of the first three steps of the protocol (in order to be well understood) and on the choice of a receivable request. For example, I can ask someone to explain their motives, ask them to playback what they think I meant or to give their reaction to it, ask for an idea or a suggestion, ask permission to explain something or to ask questions ... the possibilities are endless. However, so are the possibilities for ill-formed requests: asking someone to immediately change their mind, to see my point of view, admit they were wrong, give up something, and so on. All these types of request are unlikely to get me far, especially at the start of an encounter.

NVC encourages empathy, which is key to successful confrontations

- No! Communicating with a 4-step recipe encourages the exact opposite of empathy.
 - The “steps” are really 4 aspects of communication to be recognized separately, and they can occur and reoccur in any order. When someone is trying to express themselves to me and I am listening with empathy, it helps if I can quickly recognize when they are revealing a particular feeling or need, for example. The more practiced I am at recognizing these things, the easier I will find it to be truly empathetic. Feelings aren’t always announced with a “I feel that ...”, any more than needs come systematically in the form, “I need ...” ☺
- NVC is too complicated. It’s like trying to be empathetic in Chinese!
 - NVC is often described as a language and, indeed, learning it has some of the difficulties associated with learning a new language (people speak of NVC as being “giraffe language” and our normal language, with its tendency to support violent forms of expression, as being “jackal language”).
 - When we learn languages, having learnt a minimal vocabulary, we start to practice speaking. Then, when we go the foreign country in question, we quickly find that speaking is extremely tough! However, we can understand things. It’s the same with NVC: though we practice expression in class, it’s hard to use at first, in real, difficult conversation. However, thanks to NVC, we understand better what is going on in our conversations: we recognize interpretations and how they affect the flow; we can see that feelings and needs are not necessarily being expressed; we notice when requests are unclear or otherwise ill-formed. It is an enormous help, even before we become fluent!