

# Difficult Conversations

and how to make them easier.

Tracey Loscar, Deputy Director, EMS



Hello!



# Why are we here?

01

Discuss what constitutes a “difficult” conversation.

02

Review the Shannon-Weaver communication model and identify potential barriers or confounding factors in effective dialogue.

03

Identify how the physiologic response to stress can impact a workplace interaction.

04

Identify methods to facilitate effective communication, regardless of content.

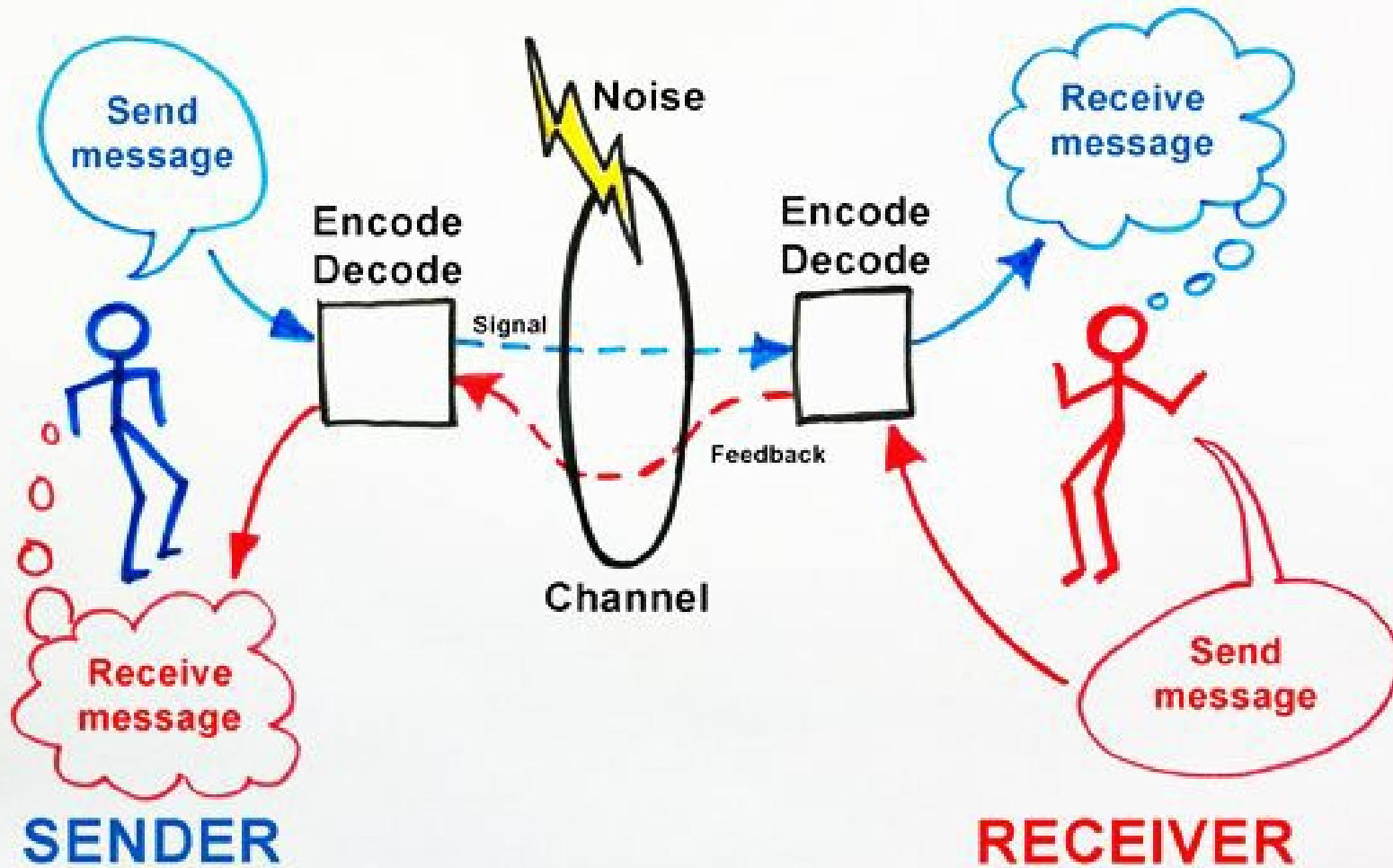
# What is a crucial conversation?

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- When there is a dialogue between two or more people where:
  - Stakes are high.
  - Opinions vary.
  - Emotions run strong.
- What do you consider a difficult conversation?

\*From "Crucial Conversations," 3rd Edition





**The Shannon-Weaver model of communication**



FRAGILE

# Understanding Noise

- Distraction
  - Physical, emotional, mental
- Fatigue
  - Physical, emotional, what time of day is it?
- Age
  - Always consider mixed generational communication.
- Gender
  - What impact does it play?
- Background
  - Area of the country, upbringing, political beliefs
- Communication styles
  - Language, accent, education

# Noise Reduction

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- Who are the players?
- Consider the environment.
  - Adapt for the type of conversation.
  - Walk and talk.
- Accommodate strong emotion.
- Allow for distraction (or not).
  - Items of interest, visual and physical.
- Make time.



# Why Conversations Go Poorly



Biology – high adrenaline causes flight or fight.



Surprise – they arise without warning.



Confusion – they often require us to improvise without time to rehearse.



Self-Defeating Behavior – we do or say something that makes things worse.





# Understanding Stress

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- “Fight, flight or freeze.”
  - When you fear people aren’t buying into your idea, you push harder (fight).
  - When you fear harm, you become silent (flight).
- Can be immediate.
- When confronted with a life-threatening situation, our rational brains may become confused and override our instinct.
- Perceptual distortion – tunnel vision, time “slows down,” and things appear in slow motion (symptoms of hyperarousal).



People feel unsafe because  
of the conditions, not the  
content, of the conversation.

*The content is the “what,” the conditions are the “why.”*

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# When it comes to these conversations -

- We can choose to:
  - Avoid them.
  - Face them and handle them poorly.
  - Face them and handle them well.
- They can respond with:
  - Silence
  - Violence
  - Dialogue



# The Sounds of Silence

- **Masking:** Understating or selectively stating true opinions.
  - *Sarcasm, sugar coating, couching*
- **Avoiding:** Not addressing the real issue.
  - *Changing the subject, shifting the focus to others.*
- **Withdrawing:** Not engaging in the conversation any longer.
  - *Exiting the conversation or exiting the room/area.*



# The Sounds of Violence



- **Controlling:** Coercing others to your way of thinking.
  - Cutting others off, overstating your facts, speaking in absolutes, dominating the conversation.
- **Labeling:** Stereotyping or categorizing people.
  - Name-calling, generalizing.
- **Attacking:** Making the other person suffer.
  - Belittling, threatening.

# Active Listening

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- Face the speaker, maintain eye contact (don't stare).
- **Be attentive**, but relaxed.
- Keep an open mind.
- **Listen** to the words, try to picture what the speaker is saying.
- **Don't interrupt** and don't impose your "solutions."
- Wait for the speaker to pause to ask clarifying questions.
- **Ask questions** only to ensure understanding.
- Try to feel what the speaker is feeling.
- Give the speaker regular **feedback**.
- Pay attention to what *isn't* said, **watch the non-verbal cues**.



# AMPP

- **Ask them to tell their story.**
  - What's going on?
  - I really want to hear your thoughts.
- **Mirror to confirm feelings.**
  - Describe how they look or feel.
  - Create safety by showing comfort with them demonstrating strong emotion.
- **Paraphrase to acknowledge their story.**
  - Remain calm. Don't parrot back. Indicates you are trying to understand, and that it is safe to continue.
- **Prime when you're getting nowhere.**
  - Offer your best guess at what the other person is thinking.







# DARK HUMOR

Not everyone gets it



February 1, 2022

# Know the Rules of Engagement

- Use your resources.
  - Current agreements.
  - Borough-wide memos.
  - Contact HR, Legal or the appropriate MSBEA Representative
- Know the processes.
  - Is the information current.
  - Are there steps missing.
  - How do we get the employee any help they need?
  - Is there a way to help that we may be unaware of? (See step 1.)
- Do not make up answers.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT

Between

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

And the

SUSITNA BOROUGH EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION  
APEA/AFT/AFL-CIO  
LOCAL #6136

FOR THE PERIOD  
January 1, 2022 – December 31, 2024

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Employee Association  
**MSBEA**  
Citizens Serving Citizens



# Basic Rules

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Pre-Plan

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Bring back up

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Explain the rules

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No distractions

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Allow for enough time

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Define next steps

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Follow through on any agreements made

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Document the encounter

MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT SUN 081 Oct/2016 2:00 AM/PM  
Meeting Objective: Security model release 2.0 26/10/2016

MEETING NOTES

- New development needs to kick by sep 2016
- Delegation plan - what needs to be done
- Integration issues
  - Firewall drivers not working
  - Found a solution
- Proof of concept
- ...
- ...

AGENDA	Priority	ATTENDEES
• Bug review	5	John (SW)
• Integration issues	2	Lucy (HW) (IT)
• ...	4	John (SW)
• ...	3	Lucy (HW)
• ...		John (SW)
• ...		Lucy (HW)

Item	Owner/Deadline
... drivers for firmware	John / 15/oct
...	Lucy / 12/oct

# DOCUMENT THE ENCOUNTER

(In case you didn't see it on the last slide.)

...ing Lot



## Develop the Skill

- Thoroughly research the topic.
- Discuss it with leadership.
- Consider ALL arguments.
- Anticipate conflict, be prepared to defuse.
- Have practice discussions with peers, present your opening discussion points, listen to feedback.
- Have an idea of next steps, regardless of outcome.

# Why practice is important.



Updated with New Approaches for Today's Communication Challenges

**OVER 5 MILLION COPIES SOLD**

# crucial conversations

THIRD EDITION



**TOOLS FOR TALKING WHEN  
STAKES ARE HIGH**

JOSEPH GRENNY • KERRY PATTERSON • RON McMILLAN  
AL SWITZLER • EMILY GREGORY

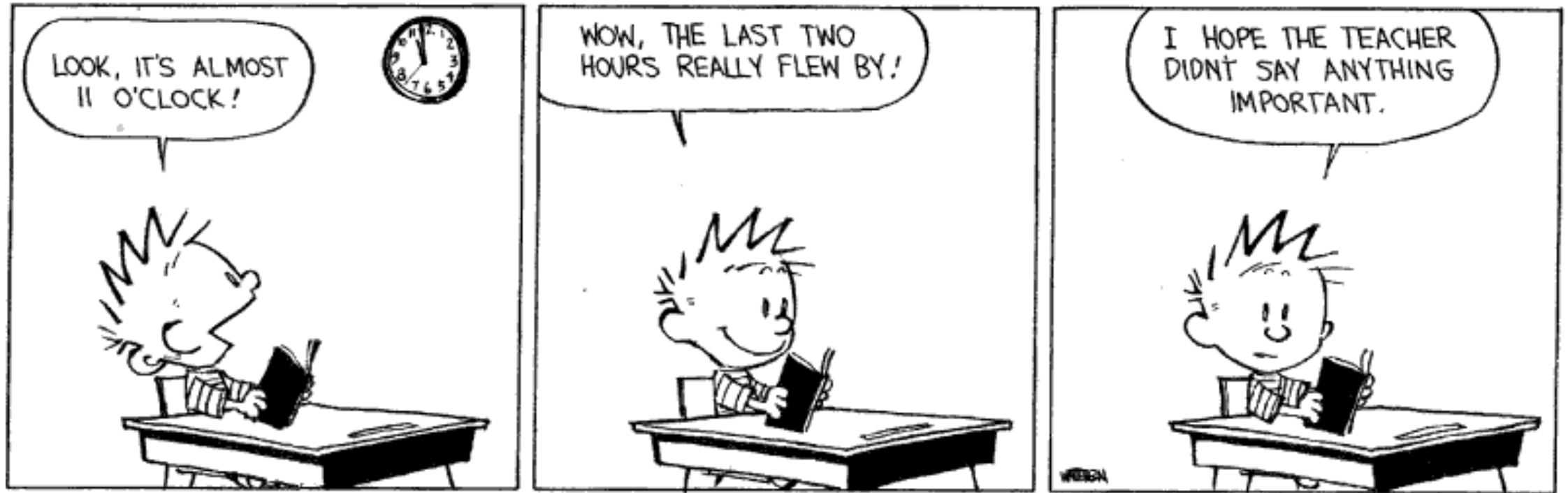
## References

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- <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/sites/default/files/migration/712/managers-guide-to-difficult-conversations-in-the-workplace.pdf>
- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/womensmedia/2012/11/09/10-steps-to-effective-listening/?sh=fb4cac338918>

Questions?







Thank you for (actively) listening!

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