



Managing Dialogue

COMMON PROBLEM BEHAVIORS ± WHAT TO DO IN THE MOMENT



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GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Modeling is the most powerful way to “manage.” Use folks’ names, express gratitude, share vulnerably, admit uncertainty, take accountability, listen deeply, etc. If you don’t do it, no one will!
- When you see a behavior you like, name it and praise it: “This is what X looks like! Wonderful!”
- Affirm the person, then address the behavior: “I know you didn’t mean to seem disrespectful, but....”
- Have participants do the work: Refer back to group norms. Ask participants to pause and reflect on their own engagement patterns and the group dynamic. Have them chart a course to adjust!

COMMON ISSUES

DOMINATING THE CONVERSATION

WHAT IT IS: Consistently talking first; talking the most; setting the tone; redirecting questions and comments back to one’s own agenda; centering oneself

WHAT TO DO: “If you’ve already spoken more than twice today, please take the next 10 minutes to listen.”

“I hear you. I want to return to what So-and-so said, though.”

“Thanks! What do others think about this?”

DON’T: shame them: “We’ve heard enough from *you* today! Anyone else?”

RELUCTANCE TO ENGAGE

WHAT IT IS: Shyness; hyperpoliteness; unwillingness to share opinion/ experiences; resistance to disagreement; endless deflection of questions

WHAT TO DO: “Turn to the person next to you and share. Then report out.”

Depersonalize: “How do you imagine [theorist or public figure] would respond to this question?”

“Everyone respond in writing, anonymously.”

DON’T: cajole or mock: “C’mon, I know you have something to say!! Nothing?!”

DEBATE, NOT DIALOGUE

WHAT IT IS: Competitiveness; consciously or unconsciously angling to assert one’s own experiences, identities, and ideas as superior to others’

WHAT TO DO: “This seems important to you. What are you feeling right now? What’s at stake for you here?”

“Remember, this is not about winning an argument.”

“Does this feel like debate or dialogue to you all? Why?”

DON’T: feed the fire: “Well, So-and-so is right! But let’s get back to dialogue.”

SPEAKING IN GENERALIZATIONS

WHAT IT IS: Speaking about/for an entire group; stereotypes; assuming one’s experience is universal; invoking a vague “we” or “people” in analysis

WHAT TO DO: “Please speak just for yourself.”

“You keep saying ‘we.’ Who do you mean by that?”

“Does anyone else want to respond to that? Does this seem fair to you all?”

“What evidence do you have?”

DON’T: join in: “Actually, X group of people is more like...” “I think we all...”

CONFLICT, TENSION, TRIGGERING

WHAT IT IS: Unspoken tension; people visibly upset; active or passive aggression; two people locked in a back-and-forth; offensive comments

WHAT TO DO: “Let’s take a break, then decide if we want to change topics or return to this conversation.”

“This is harmful/not helpful.”

“Pause. Journal everything you’re feeling and would like to say. Turn it in to me if you’d like to share it.”

DON’T: force anyone to stay or talk. Instead: check in 1:1 later via email. Invite (but don’t force) a follow-up chat.

WHEN YOU’RE THE PROBLEM

WHAT IT IS: The facilitator talks too much, feels too shy to intervene in conflicts, makes generalizations, argues, or gets triggered/upset/angry

WHAT TO DO: “I just made a problematic assumption/got defensive/talked over you/etc. I’m sorry.”

“I need a minute.”

[after] “You got piled on today. I regret not addressing it. What do you wish I’d done or said?”

DON’T: pretend like nothing happened or dismiss concerns; be defensive