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DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

CLEMSON UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES

PRESENTED BY: JOY PATTON & ASHLEY STRICKLAND

TRAINING OBJECTIVES

- At the end of this training session, participants will:
 - Develop a better understanding of why certain conversations or conversation topics are difficult.
 - Recognize why these conversations are necessary and a part of work life as well as the importance of having difficult conversations with supervisors, direct reports, and colleagues.
 - Learn and practice specific steps and strategies for handling difficult conversations.
 - Review guidelines for effective communication as they relate to the University review process.



Did the conversation go as planned?
What could you have done differently?
What made the conversation difficult?

THINK ABOUT THE LAST DIFFICULT
CONVERSATION YOU HAD....

KEY QUESTIONS FOR HANDLING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- **What** do we mean by a “difficult conversation”?
- **Why** are they difficult? **Why** are they important?
- **Who** should be having these conversations?
- **When** do we have these conversations?
- **How** do we have these conversations?





WHAT?

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DIFFICULT CONVERSATION?



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION?

- A discussion between two or more people where

(1) stakes are high,

(2) opinions vary, and

(3) emotions run strong



WHY?

WHY ARE THESE CONVERSATIONS DIFFICULT?



WHY ARE THEY DIFFICULT

- A difficult conversation is made challenging by one or more of the following:
 - Conflict
 - Fear, anger, or frustration
 - Anxiety, procrastination
 - Disagreement
 - Misunderstanding
 - Topic being a personal matter



WHY DIDN'T I HAVE THE CONVERSATION?

Didn't want to create a bad atmosphere

To avoid confrontation

Didn't know how to say it

Worried about the reprisals

Thought it might make the situation worse

Didn't want to upset someone

Other reasons (lack of back up, lack of time, etc.)



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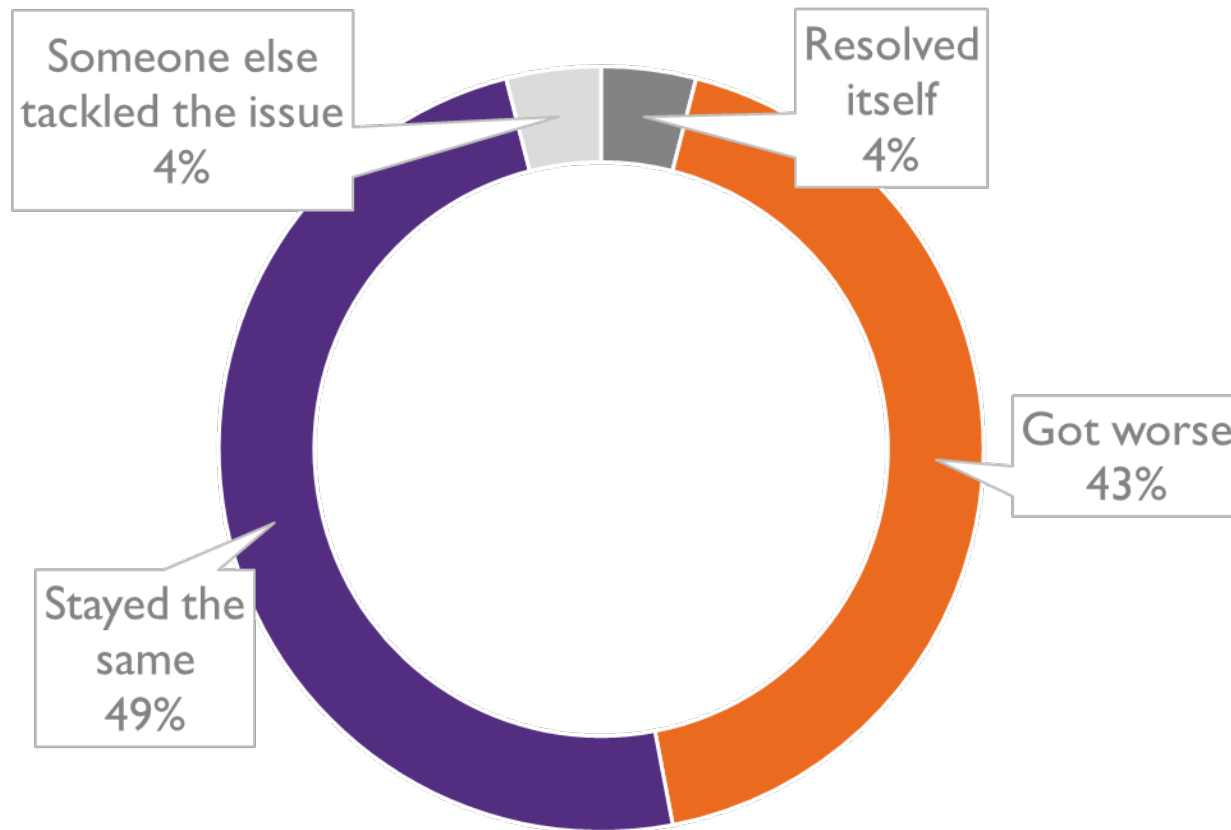
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WHEN I DIDN'T HAVE THE DIFFICULT CONVERSATION, THE ISSUE...





WHO?

WHO SHOULD BE HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS?

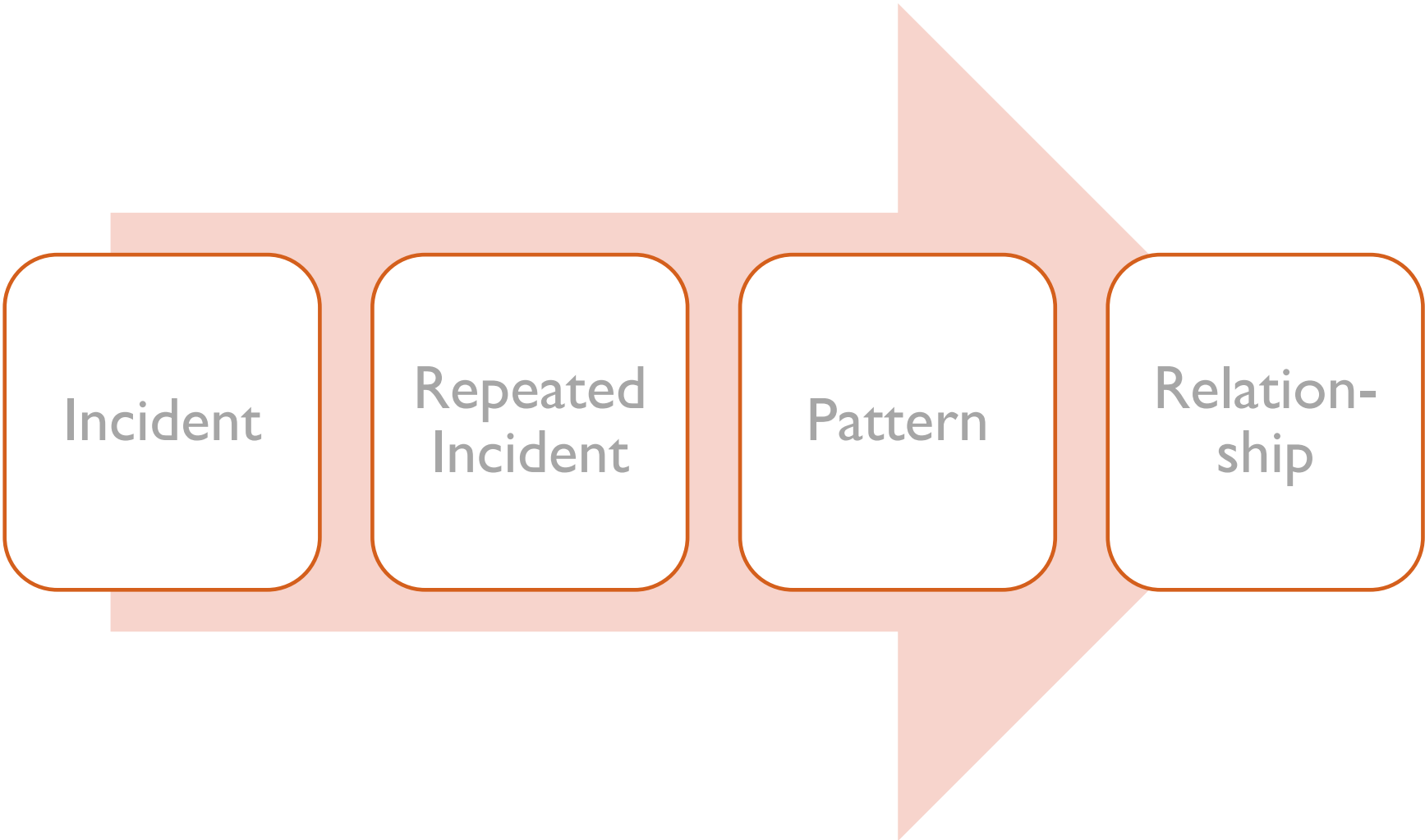




WHEN?

WHEN DO I HAVE THESE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS?





Incident

Repeated
Incident

Pattern

Relation-
ship



Incident
Notice it

Repeated Incident
Give feedback

Pattern
Initiate a conversation

Relationship

Have the conversation...

1) early 2) when you're prepared 3) in the appropriate places



HOW?

HOW DO WE HAVE THESE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS?



HOW – FRAMEWORK FOR HANDLING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Preparation



Opening the conversation



State your knowledge



Invite discussion



Agree on a way forward

PREPARATION

What is happening?

What are my reasons for having this conversation?

What has contributed to the issue?

What do I want?

What, if anything, has already been done?

What resources do you have available to you?

OPENING THE CONVERSATION

- 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.
- I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes to talk?
- I need your help with something. Can we talk about it (soon)? If the person says, "Sure, let me get back to you," follow up with him.
- I think we 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.

STATE YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE SITUATION

- Tell them what the problem is using your knowledge of the situation
- Give specific examples
 - Refer to dates, documents, work or specific interactions
- Explain the impact the problem is having on the individual, the team and the organization

INVITE DISCUSSION

- Ask for the other person's point of view:
 - Tell me how you see the situation?
 - How do you feel about what I have just said?
 - What is your perspective?
 - What do you want to happen?
 - How do you feel we could move forward?
 - What options do you think we have?

INVITE DISCUSSION

- Ask for explanation:
 - Listen to what they have to say
 - Listen to understand; do not listen to respond
 - Keep an open mind and don't jump to conclusions
 - Assume good intentions
 - Acknowledge their position
 - Explore the issues together

AGREE ON A WAY FORWARD

- Ask the employee for solutions to the situation
- Discuss the options
- Make a decision
- Arrange a follow up meeting
- Monitor and provide feedback on progress



GROUP ACTIVITY – ROLE PLAY

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

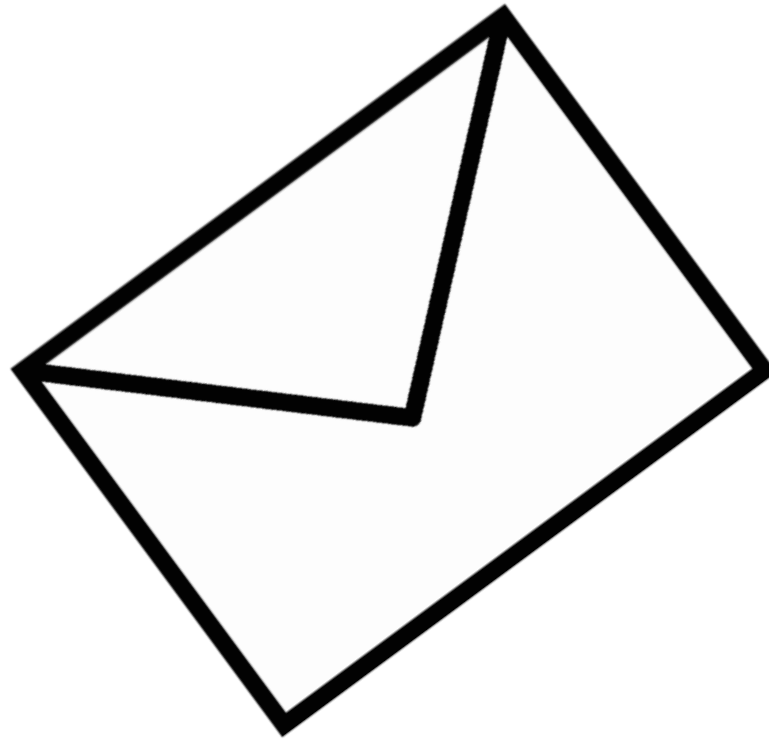


UNIVERSITY REVIEW PROCESS

- There should be no surprises during the review.
- Difficult conversations should not be put off until the official review date.
- Ensuring a successful performance review meeting can be done using the same steps as conducting a difficult conversation.
 - Successful performance review does not mean the employee received an exceptional rating.
 - **Performance reviews do not have to be difficult conversations.**

SUMMARY

- Certain conversations or conversation topics are difficult for everyone – but they are not impossible.
- These conversations or conversation topics are difficult because typically (1) stakes are high, (2) opinions vary, and (3) emotions run strong.
- It is my responsibility for ensuring my difficult conversations take place – appropriately and effectively.
- The best time to have a difficult conversation is early – before the issue is exacerbated.
- When initiating a difficult conversation, I should prepare ahead of time to open the conversation, state my knowledge, invite discussion and agree on a way forward.



ACTION ITEMS & TAKEAWAYS



FEEDBACK/EVALUATION

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS TRAINING!



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