



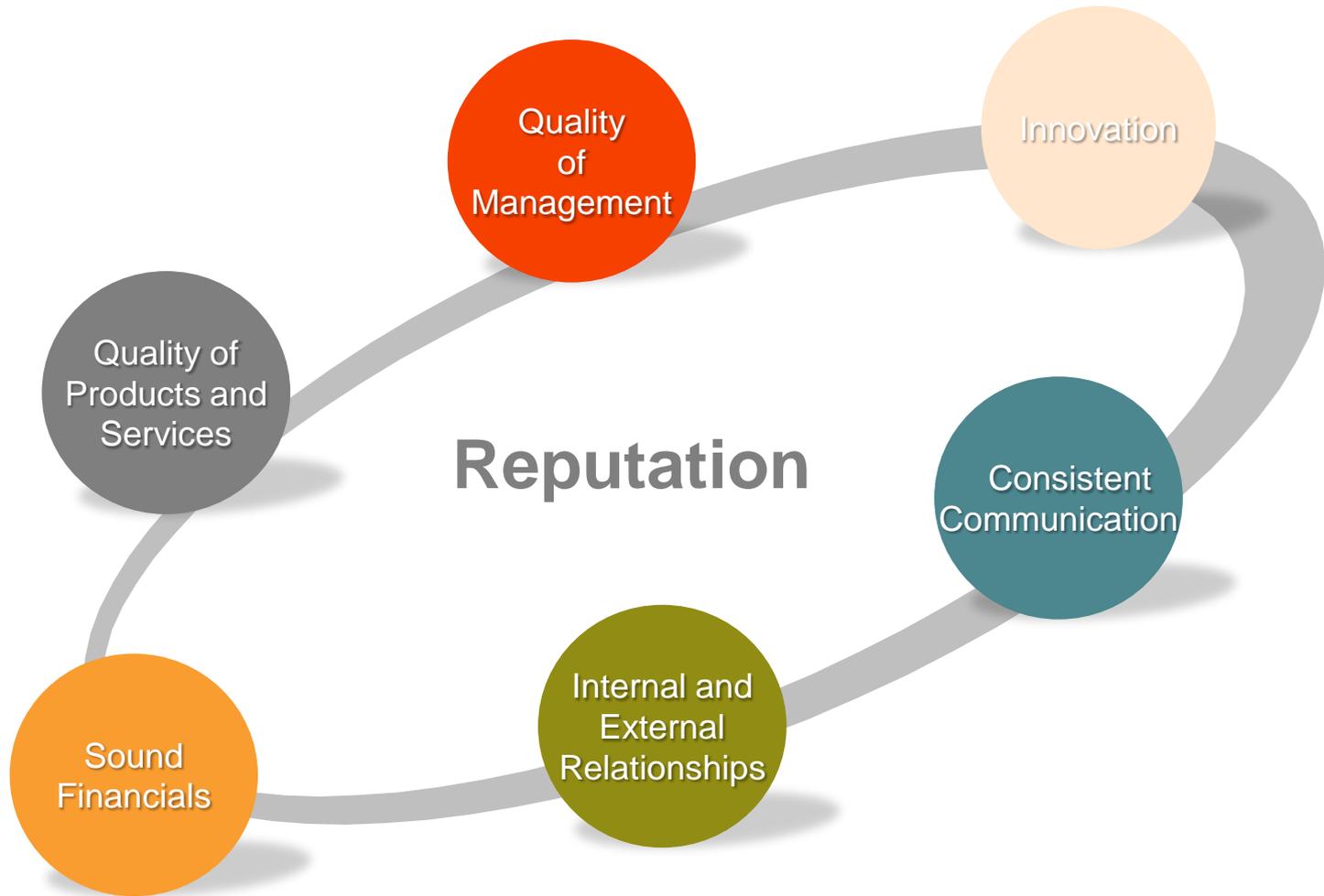
Difficult Conversations and Their Role in Building Relationships

What Do You Think?

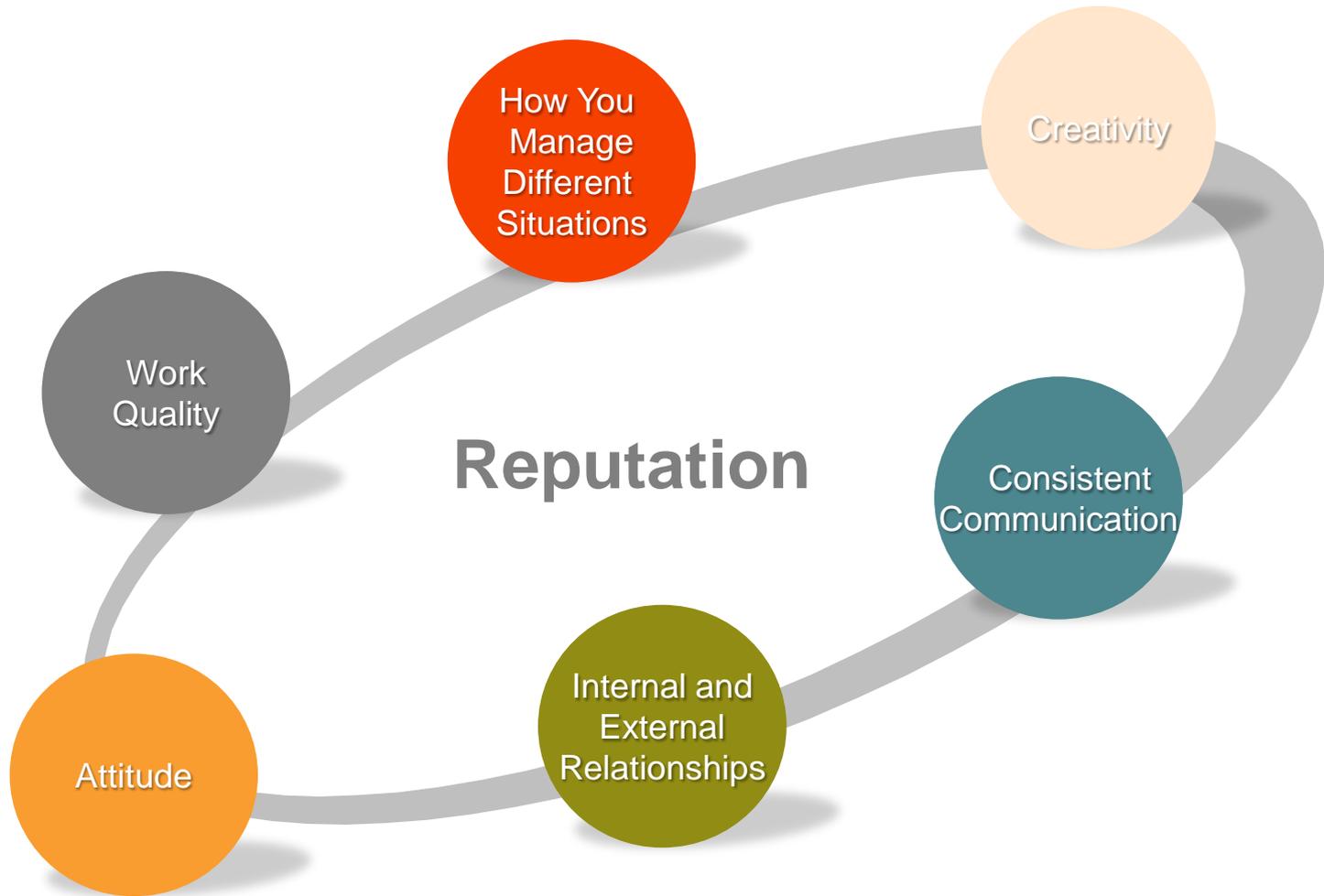
- What organizations do you respect and revile?
- What shaped your views?
- What did they do to acquire their reputations?



An Organization's Reputation



Personal Reputation



What Relationships Are Important to Your Organization?

- Customers(internal/external)?
- Homeowners?
- Farmers?
- Regulators/Government Officials?
- Partners?
- Lake Associations?

Relationship Algebra

Σ

Acts

+

Communications

= Relationship

Conversations

- Involve more than one party
- Share information, values and actions
- Key to building relationships with people important to you

Strategic Conversation Sequence

- Enter the dialogue
- Manage the dialogue
- Identify and break through barriers
- Build and celebrate success
- Check-up and follow-through

What is a “Difficult” Conversation?

- Different opinions/points of view
- An unpopular decision needs to be communicated
- Seek to elicit behavior change on the part of one or more people
- Someone feels they’ve been wronged

Where Do They Take Place?

- In the workplace
- Between districts and homeowners
- At home – spouses, children, parents, neighbors
- Other places?

Why Do We Have Them?

- Two beings cannot co-exist long-term without having conflict
- We address conflict because failure to do so prevents progress
- HOW conflict is addressed often determines whether resolution strengthens or damages the relationship
- ACTS and COMMUNICATIONS form the basis for conflict resolution

Difficult Conversations: A Model For Conflict Resolution

- Addressing conflict without preparation is dangerous
 - Assumptions about intent
 - Failure to gather the facts
 - One-sided conversations
 - The “win/loss” dynamic
 - Most often results in damage vs. construction

Difficult Conversations: A Model For Conflict Resolution

- Seven critical steps to conflict resolution
 - Are they all necessary?
 - What happens when you skip steps?
- Much of this is common sense – but we often forget to do it

Step #1: Recognize the Conflict

- More difficult than it would seem
- Open argument represents a fraction of conflict situations
- Other signs of conflict
 - Changes in the story
 - Saying one thing, doing another
 - You're mad at them – or they're mad at you
 - Silence



Step #1: Recognize the Conflict

- Conflicts involve trades in information, values, actions
- Conflicts involve different sets of expectations
- Often, an argument is “the difference between two stories”
- The best customer service often involves successfully resolving a conflict

Step #1: Recognize the Conflict

- In competition, someone has to lose. In collaboration, the majority of the participants win
- Identify WHO the conflict is with (it can be more than one entity)
- Identify WHY the conflict is important to address

Why is Step #1 Important?

- You need to PREPARE for difficult conversations
- Understand in your own mind why the conflict exists, and why it's important to you
- Look at the problem from the other side
 - How would YOU feel if you were them?
 - How would THEY feel if they were you?
- Those best at resolving conflict are those who can show empathy for the other point of view

Step #2: A Meeting of Understanding

- This is often the most difficult step – so be prepared, think it through
- Take the time to meet face-to-face or voice-to-voice with the customer, and use that time to LISTEN to his or her concern
- Ask questions to get a clear understanding of the problem
- Listen carefully for hidden issues or agendas; probe what is said – and what is unsaid

Step #2: A Meeting of Understanding

- Pay close attention to how the person “feels” vs. how they “think”
- Avoid accusations
 - “You tried to trick me” is an accusation
 - “What you did made me feel that you were trying to trick me” is less about accusation than intent
- Use open-ended questions, avoid getting to “no”
 - How...Why...Why not...What...What If...Who...Where...

Step #2: A Meeting of Understanding

- Use active listening skills:
 - “Let me understand this, what I hear you saying is (restate)”
 - “If I understand your issue correctly, it’s (restate)”
- DO NOT TRY TO SOLVE the problem at this stage – just UNDERSTAND it
- DO NOT address the issues point-by-point – let the person fully present himself/herself
- Provide the customer with information to help him/her better understand the situation and eliminate any assumptions or misinformation
- In essence, the two of you are “getting on the same page”

Step #2: Final Tips

- Try for neutral ground. If that can't be done – YOU go to THEM
- The more serious the issue, the more important to be face-to-face
- Consider the importance of time and responsiveness
- Rational, Responsive, Organized, Honest

Step #3: Agreement on Success

- This is where you start to manage the dialog
- Acknowledge a mutual understanding as progress
 - “Okay, thanks for taking the time to explain your views and to let me provide some background. Now we can work toward a solution.”

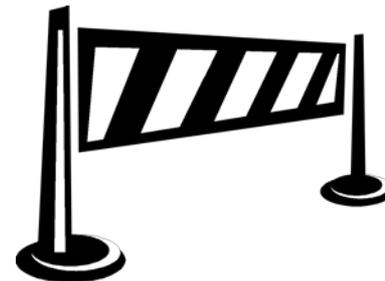


Step #3: Agreement on Success

- Mutual agreement and clear definition is critical
 - “Dealing with it” might mean a re-do to your customer
 - To you, it might mean a small repair
- Get clear, concise agreement on what will be an acceptable outcome
- Define all parameters – cost, quality, timeliness, shared responsibilities

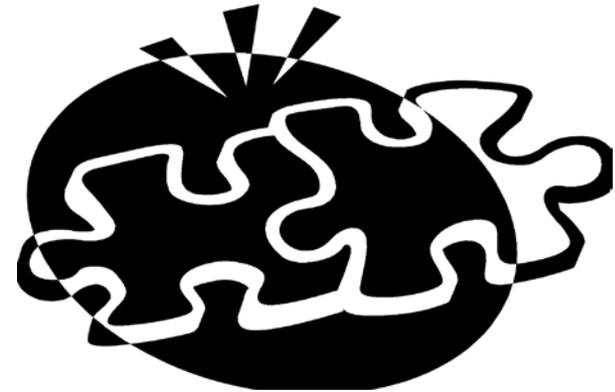
Step #3: Agreement on Success

- Your reaction – an urge to “strike back”
- Their emotion – hearts open, ears closed
- Relative position – a feeling of superiority or inferiority
- Dissatisfaction – your idea may be rejected just because it’s yours
- Power – “What’s mine is mine, what’s yours is negotiated”



Step #3: Common Solutions

- Go to the crow's nest – consider all the facts
- Step to their side – physically and emotionally
- Reframe by asking problem-solving questions
- Use the power to educate
- Build a “way out” for both of you



Step #4: Obtain Shared Commitment

- In the beginning of a conflict, it's you against the customer
- Make the problem your enemy – not the other person
 - “Together, I’m confident we can take care of the issue.”
- Ask for their involvement in helping to solve the problem. Steer the discussion away from “you vs. me” and toward “us vs. the problem”
- “Can you work with us on this situation?” “Can we solve this problem together?”

Step #5: Agree on Actions and Milestones

- Establish action steps for each of you
 - Shared commitment means shared action
- Give the customer a role
 - Logging times when events occur
 - Gathering relevant background information
 - Visiting other sites



Step #5: Agree on Actions and Milestones

- YOU need to take action
 - Clearly state what you will DO
 - Agree on WHEN your actions will occur
 - Establish “check in” times right away so there’s no question about commitment
 - Where possible, develop a written recap

Step #6: Confirm and Celebrate Resolution

- If both of you have taken the appropriate steps, resolution should happen
- When it does, don't assume that the customer will notice and that "no news is good news"
- Take the opportunity to contact the neighbor, confirm success and even celebrate it with him/her
- There's nothing wrong with a celebratory lunch or cup of coffee to share in a job well-done

Step #7: Check-in

- A few months after resolution, check back in with the person or key contact and see if things are still going well
- Ask if he or she have heard complaints from others, and verify that the problem has been corrected and that they haven't taken their complaints elsewhere
- “I'm so glad we did this together.”
- Ask for a referral!

A Crib Sheet...

- Conflict is often the difference between two stories
- We often assume negative intent and negative character
- Move from assigning blame to mapping out contributions
- Acknowledge and express feelings
- Recognize the effect of conflict on “identity”

Conclusion and Comments

- Always have a conflict resolution strategy in mind
- Difficult conversations will move your business forward
- Assuming “ill intent” will almost never lead to satisfactory resolution
- Conflict does not always require a winner and a loser
- When conflicts aren’t getting resolved, it’s usually because a step has been skipped
- Come into difficult conversations with an open and prepared mind

To Go Deeper...

“Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most”

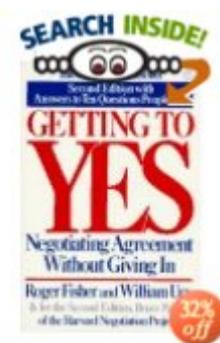
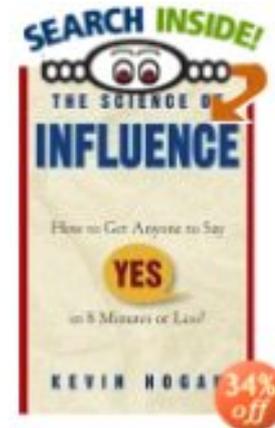
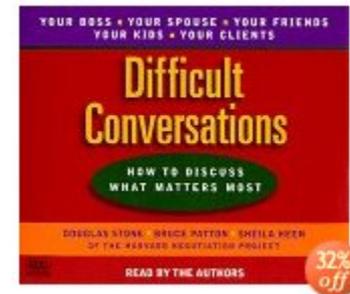
– Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen

“Getting to Yes”

– Roger Fisher and Bruce Patton

“The Science of Influence”

– Kevin Hogan





Thank you!