

Beginning the Conversation

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

It is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern, since our most basic task is to evaluate the reasons and evidence that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

Reading

Stone, D., Patton, B., & Heen, S. (2010). Getting started. In *Difficult conversations: How to discuss what matters most* (2nd ed., pp. 147–162). Penguin Books.

Optional: Manzoni, J.-F. (2002, September). A better way to deliver bad news. *Harvard Business Review*, 80(9), 114–9, 126.

Questions

1. Why do Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen believe we tend to start out difficult conversations in the wrong way?
2. What two steps do Stone et al. give for starting off the conversation in the right direction?

One specific type of difficult conversation Stone et al. talk about is delivering bad news. Such conversations are especially difficult because they may trigger an identity quake within you—after all, we often do not feel like a good person when firing someone or giving them negative feedback. Similarly, bad news is likely to trigger a quake within the recipient as well. The optional reading by Jean-François Manzoni provides concrete advice for such situations (and it is pretty similar to material we have already seen in this course).

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.