

Conflict Resolution: Getting to YES

By Kim Dannies

I just read the book *Difficult Conversations* by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton & Sheila Heen of the Harvard Negotiation Project. Why is this book an important read? Because everyday we endure conversations that we'd prefer to avoid, conversations that cause anxiety, frustration, and awkwardness. Discussing money with a spouse or a client, an employee's poor performance, curfews and accountability with a kid, or a raise with the boss are all topics that have the potential to make palms sweaty and blood boil. Wouldn't it be great to have a step-by-step approach that guarantees more success and less stress during talk time?

The Harvard Negotiation Project has done just that. Over a research period of 15 years they have created guidelines that help explore all sides of a conversation and empower people to become more effective and influential communicators. I urge you to read the book, but in the meantime here are some things to think about before your next chat from hell.

Effective conflict resolution follows a series of steps that include:

- 1. Set ground rules.** Agree to work together and set rules such as no name-calling, blaming, yelling or interrupting.
- 2. Breathe.**
- 3. Listen.** Allow each person to describe their point of view without interruption. The point is to understand what a person wants and why they want it.
- 4. Find common interests.** Establish facts and issues that everyone can agree on and determine what is important to each person.
- 5. Brainstorm possible solutions to the problem.** List all options without judging them or feeling that they must be carried out. Try to think of solutions where everyone gains something.
- 6. Discuss each person's view of the proposed solutions.** Negotiate and try to reach a compromise that is acceptable to everyone involved.

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7. Reach an agreement. Each person should state his or her interpretation of the agreement. Try writing the agreement down and checking back at a later time to see how it is working.

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