NEUBERG GORE
& ASSOCIATES

FUEL
for Challenging Conversations

Versions for:

1. Influence & Problem-Solving
2. Group Decision-Making
3. Conflict Resolution
4. Negotiations
5. Negative Feedback
6. Holding People Accountable
7. Repairing Trust (Cleanups)
8. Role Underperformance
9. Letting Someone Go

Online: www.NeubergGore.com/FUEL

FUEL Introduction

F   FRAME THE CONVERSATION

- Framing the conversation is setting the conversation up for success.
- Creating clarity about the goal of the conversation and the agenda will help everyone align and focus on the desired outcomes. Don't beat around the bush--even if it's a tough conversation, and make sure you both are willing to have the conversation.
- In most conversations, we want to establish a mood of openness, collaboration, and connection. Be soft on the person and hard on the problem.

U   NDERSTAND EACH OTHER'S WORLDS… THEIR WORLD FIRST

- The best solutions and highest follow-through will come when there is mutual understanding of each party's underlying interests. Don't argue over the solutions--build them together.
- Most people are poor listeners, especially if they are upset or have strong opinions. Set up their listening by first understanding them. Even if they say something you disagree with, stay curious and ensure they feel heard. Paraphrasing is an extremely powerful and much underused tool.
- Also be sure to share your interests and priorities.

E   XPLORE OPTIONS

- This is the time in a conversation to create value--to find ways that all the parties can be satisfied. Brainstorm together and expand ideas.
- If you get caught into narrowing into one solution too fast or critiquing solutions, it will shut down creativity and you'll likely leave value on the table.

L   EAD A COMMITMENT LOOP (3 C's)

- **Commit**: Make sure everyone is clear and aligned on next steps (who is doing what by when). Often, commitments that may have seemed obvious were misunderstood.
- **Collaborate**: See all commitments as mutual ones; work together to make them successful.
- **Complete**: When the task is complete, discuss what worked well and what can be improved in both the task and your next collaboration.
- A commitment loop is further clarified on the next page.

COMMIT

- At the end of all meetings, ensure there is clear agreement of who-is-doing-what-by-when.
- Get a committed response (yes, no, counter offer, commit-to-commit).
- Don't accept unclear or half-commitments.
- Be clear on the desired outcome (not just what they are doing, but why).
- Be clear on the action plan if there are multiple steps. If the commitment is over a longer period or critical, setup milestones and check-ins.
- Document the agreement together in an email or plan. Reconfirm alignment.

COLLABORATE

- Understand your role in the commitment--it's a mutual commitment, not just "theirs."
- Help them win. Give them the advice, support, resources, people, etc. to be successful.
- Offer encouragement and appreciation.
- For longer/critical projects, have regular check-ins to track progress and offer support.
- If you are concerned a commitment won't be kept, have a conversation. Resolve broken commitments as they arise by initiating a conversation.
- Be clear that not all commitments should be kept. Encourage risks and failures to be communicated promptly.
- If they need to renegotiate a commitment, be open to it. Explore options for how to move forward.

COMPLETE

- Share your satisfaction and dissatisfaction. A simple tool to use is to share plusses (what worked) and deltas (what can be better).
- Learn what you can do better to support their success and be open to their critical feedback. Own your contribution to their challenges--be both a student and a teacher.
- Offer frequent appreciation with specificity, depth and authenticity. It's a bank account of positive regard that allows you to share negative feedback more easily now and in the future.
- Share negative feedback using the FUEL model. Be sure to be committed to their success and understand their obstacles.

F RAME THE CONVERSATION

- Establish an open and collaborative mood.
- Clarify the goal of the conversation—focus on the shared, desired outcome.
- Be soft on the person and hard on the problem. Care about them personally, but also name the elephant in the room and challenge directly.
- Create the agenda and timing together.
- Ensure the right people are included from the start.

U NDERSTAND EACH OTHER'S WORLDS… THEIR WORLD FIRST

- Be curious: Dig for underlying interests, priorities, and feelings.
- Stay curious. See dissent as an opportunity to learn.
- Paraphrase to ensure you heard correctly and demonstrate understanding.
- Share your interests and priorities.
- Synthesize: List shared priorities and differences.

E XPLORE OPTIONS

- Set a mood of creativity: Clarify you are brainstorming, not decision-making.
- Co-create many possible solutions.
- Expand ideas: Do not narrow into one solution.
- Redirect critiques back to brainstorming.

L EAD A COMMITMENT LOOP

- Decide and commit to clear next steps (who is doing what by when).
- Be obstinate about your vision & interests, flexible about tactics.
- Move the ball down the field with small steps.
- Ensure everyone fully commits even if they disagree.
- Setup a check-in, milestone or next conversation.
- Write an email to summarize the decision that was made.

F

FRAME THE CONVERSATION

- Trying to get to agreement too quickly (1 step forward, 2 steps back).
- Being too nice and not naming the real intent of the conversation.
- Unilateral moves including setting up an agenda without a discussion.
- Having the conversation in the wrong circumstances.
- Underestimating the importance of mood, e.g. moving forward before cleaning up trust issues.

U

UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER'S WORLDS… THEIR WORLD FIRST

- Expecting to be heard before hearing the other person.
- Solving problems based on solidified positions rather than underlying interests.
- Believing you understand what's important to them without confirming your assumptions.
- Not empathizing with their perspective, especially when you disagree.
- Not explicitly sharing your interests and priorities.

E

EXPLORE OPTIONS

- Focusing on the first solution that seems the best rather than fully exploring possibilities.
- Judging, critiquing or ignoring ideas while brainstorming. Not gently correcting when others critique or judge.
- Throwing out ideas without caveating that you are just exploring.

L

LEAD A COMMITMENT LOOP

- Walking away with two different ideas of next steps.
- Accepting unrealistic commitments or withholding concerns.
- Thinking too big rather than just focusing on the next step.
- Not personally thanking people for what worked in the conversation.

FRAME

What will you say to create an open and collaborative conversation?

-

UNDERSTAND YOUR INTERESTS

List your interests and then rate their priority:

-

GUESS ABOUT THEIR INTERESTS

What questions can you ask them to identify their interests?

-

EXPLORE OPTIONS   Brainstorm possibilities (ideally with a colleague):

-

LEAD NEXT STEPS   What is a realistic next step coming out of the conversation?

-

FRAMED THE CONVERSATION

The What
- ❏ Created a shared vision of success.
- ❏ Set a forward-looking positive tone.
- ❏ The elephant was named (the problem, the complaint, the request).
- ❏ It is clear what is being discussed or decided (and what is off the table).

The Relationship
- ❏ Friends not foes—they know you are a support for them .
- ❏ Context of appreciation.

The How
- ❏ Agreed on topics, agenda, and timing for the conversation.
- ❏ For decisions: identified who else needs to be consulted.

UNDERSTOOD EACH OTHER'S WORLDS…THEIRS FIRST

Their world
- ❏ You understand their world and their point of view even if it's inaccurate (interests, cares, feelings, priorities challenges, or concerns).
- ❏ You demonstrated understanding through paraphrasing.
- ❏ For cleanups, you identified what you did to contribute to the problem and took responsibility for any negative impact you had.

Your world
- ❏ They understand your world, point of view, and underlying interests and priorities.
- ❏ You owned your opinions as interpretation not fact.
- ❏ You ask to be paraphrased if there was any doubt of understanding.

Shared reality
- ❏ You have a shared reality—where you agree, disagree, or are uncertain.
- ❏ Identified common priorities and differences.

EXPLORED OPTIONS
- ❏ Brainstormed options; avoided debate and assessment.
- ❏ Developed several options and did not narrow too quickly on the first solution.
- ❏ Let the ideal path be generated through the brainstorm.
- ❏ For cleanups, also discussed the relationship and how to ensure the misunderstanding doesn't happen again.

LED A COMMITMENT LOOP
- ❏ Gained clear commitment on next steps (who is doing what by when).
- ❏ Left the meeting in a way that WE had a shared commitment.
- ❏ For cleanups, agreed to specific actions to deal with similar breakdowns in the future.
- ❏ Reconfirmed your support for the other person.