

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

RAME 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.

A Commitment Loop (3 C's)

Commit, Collaborate, Complete

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.

9.0 Letting Someone Go

FUEL Best Practices

F

FRAME THE CONVERSATION

- Ideally have this conversation in the morning early in the week, e.g. Tuesday at 9:00 or 10:00. It gives everyone more time to reset and adjust to the new reality.
- Share any important context or emotions, e.g. “I consider you a friend and this is a difficult conversation.”
- Name the elephant. “John, I am asking for your resignation, want to discuss why, and talk about how to part ways in a way that works for both of us.”
- Clarify that the decision has been made and own the decision if it is yours.
- Outline what is still to be decided, e.g. the transition, etc. Prepare your offer.

U

UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER’S WORLDS... THEIR WORLD FIRST

- You can appreciate them for their contributions if it’s authentic.
- Take responsibility for your role, e.g. insufficient resources.
- Ask them if there is anything that they want to share with you.
- Listen to and appreciate their view even if it’s inaccurate.
- The general rule of thumb is to be honest about why you are letting them go, but not to share their deficiencies. This is not a good time to give them advice.

E

EXPLORE OPTIONS

- Identify what is still to be decided, e.g. severance, timing, etc.
- Explore options to make the transition smooth.
- If you already hired someone to replace them, you can tell them (they are going to find out anyway).

L

LEAD A COMMITMENT LOOP

- Decide and fully align on clear next steps.
- Give them a timeline to sign a severance agreement.
- If they are transitioning slowly, schedule a follow up meeting for the next day to check-in. Otherwise ask them to be out of the office by a specific time that day.
- Apologize for company security policy, e.g. logins, door pass, etc.
- Appreciate how the person is handling this. Discuss what they will tell other people.

9.1 Letting Someone Go

Common Mistakes

F

RAME THE CONVERSATION

- Not getting clear up front with the fact the decision has already been made.
- Not being clear about whether you'd like this person to transition out slowly or depart immediately.
- Not having a communication plan in place to update the rest of the team.
- Having the conversation at the wrong time or in the wrong place.

U

NDERSTAND EACH OTHER'S WORLDS... THEIR WORLD FIRST

- Not taking responsibility for any role you may have had in their failure.
- Not empathizing with their emotional response even if you disagree with their perspective.
- Thinking that they will be logical and be able to hear your reasoning.
- Not being able to tolerate their anger or upset.
- Thinking you already said it and they heard everything you said. They'll likely remember only the bad comments.

E

XPLORE OPTIONS

- Not be willing to explore options for how to make this departure easier for them, e.g. letting them announce it, letting them resign, etc.

L

EAD A COMMITMENT LOOP

- Not letting them know you support them on the personal level even if their role is ending.
- Not being clear about next steps, logins not working, etc.

9.2 Letting Someone Go

FUEL Preparation

FRAME

What will you say to open the conversation?

-

What's the package that you are offering them?

-

UNDERSTAND YOUR INTERESTS

What are your interests and concerns for how they depart?

-

GUESS ABOUT THEIR INTERESTS

What is their story about your role in this?

-

EXPLORE OPTIONS What are the options for how to handle the transition, severance, announcement, etc.?

-

LEAD NEXT STEPS Who is doing what by when? (Communication, departure, etc.)

-

FUEL Checklist Review

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.