

Article 4: Structuring a Conversation

“Try Discussing it One Step at a Time”

As you know from the DIMENSIONAL[®] MODEL OF BEHAVIOR[™], certain “Q” behaviors interfere with having productive conversations or collaborating.

One way to deal more effectively with behavioral obstacles — including your own — is to follow a logical path for structuring a conversation. We call it the FIVE-STEP FORMAT.

By thinking about a discussion in terms of steps, you can help ensure that both the other person and you are fully involved, stay on track, and work toward a resolution or goal by the end of your meeting.

Step 1: Establish Purpose and Benefit of the Conversation

Begin with an appropriate degree of socializing. State the purpose for meeting and offer *benefits to the other person* for collaborating with you. Doing this should create interest — very effective for having a meaningful conversation. Check the other person's readiness to proceed. If it's still low, try to raise interest or consider postponing the meeting until a better time.

Step 2: Gather the Other Person's Views of the Issue

When we start a conversation, we're tempted to give our opinions first. It's more effective, though, to get the other person's views first and gather information that could be valuable. Ask questions and really listen to understand what he/she has to say about the subject. By showing interest and encouraging participation, you should increase the other person's interest in your conversation.

Step 3: Determine Areas of Agreement and Disagreement

Since you've already acknowledged the other's views in Step 2, the other person is now likely to be more open to your views about what he/she has said. Briefly state where you agree, disagree, and why.

Step 4: Clarify and Manage Differences

With both viewpoints on the table, discuss where you disagree, try to fully understand, and attempt to resolve any arguments. Since discussions can become impassioned, emotions that interfere with discussion may need to be expressed and acknowledged.

Step 5: Facilitate Developing an Action Plan of Next Steps

Once differences are worked out, you can now discuss an action plan for mutually accomplishing your goal or solution. Talk over the benefits of carrying out this plan, bolstering the high level of commitment you should both have at this point. Work out the details and check for understanding.

Practice the Steps

With practice planning a Five-Step conversation, you'll find that the logic of each step makes the format easy to remember, helping you have more focused and collaborative conversations that get things accomplished.