

Strategies to Facilitate Critical Conversations

Think back to a difficult conversation that went well, and one that didn't. What worked and what didn't work?

What worked?

- Honesty and frankness
- Openness
- Good listener
- Remove emotion
- Work quickly
- Take the appropriate time
- Compassion
- Removing the ego
- Asking questions
- Not attaching
- Trust
- Validating others
- Motivated by a good outcome
- Intention
- Reinforcing positives
- Breathing
- Preparation
- Familiarity with the other person
- Respect
- Confidence
- Vulnerability
- Personal experience
- Empathy
- Multiple conversations
- It's not about you

What didn't work?

- Defensiveness
- Publicizing the incident
- Imposing your idea on others
- Too emotional
- Anxious
- Attacking
- Not listening
- Advocating weakly
- Too unfamiliar
- Assuming a result
- Not taking time
- Statements without experience
- Conversations over time
- Assuming intent
- Confrontational
- Directives
- Not agreeing on what the issue is
- Not making the other person part of the solution

How can we anticipate, address, and learn from critical conversations on trips?

Preparation

- Education, knowledge, reading
- Briefing on the:
 - Itinerary
 - Site
 - staff roles
 - explain the upcoming experience
 - explain the uniqueness and significance
 - explain the purpose and outcome of the trip
- Facilitation
 - Translation
 - Faculty
 - Guide
- Set accurate expectations
 - Guest experience
 - Environmental expectations
 - Cultural norms
- Build a network and community among visitors *before the trip*
- Share bios and headshots in advance
- Invite to a virtual group briefing call
- Start a WhatsApp group before you leave
- Ask the hosts what is appropriate, protocols, get informed from the start
- Ask people to avoid being influenced by their assumptions
- Help group understand that this is a privilege
- Permission to ask questions
- Permission to feel comfort or discomfort
 - Help the group to process
 - Prepare your hosts for this possibility
- Hold space for the learning experience – understand your role
- Offer assurance and support options

In the Moment

- Refrain from assumption
- Approach with openness
- Encourage empathy – put yourself in their shoes
- Seek to understand
- Be compassionate
- Be respectful
- Be an Ambassador
- Be firm and capable of difficult decisions
- Be nimble with expectations
- Stay curious and vulnerable
- provide different perspectives – “contextualizing”
- Use inquiry
- Be curious
- Stay flexible
- Listen
- Use discretion
- Rely on training and knowledge
- Be respectful of differences
- Give space and time to process
- Time a breathe – 90 second pause
- Allow for conversation and discussion
- Don’t embarrass group/individuals
- Facilitate activities that lead to agreement
- Ask questions for clarity

Post-Incident

- Have a private conversation
- Check-in and follow up
- Send a survey or poll
- Have time for reflection – written or discussed
- Let it lie – no follow up needed
- Elevate the situation and notify the institution
- Value individual experience
- Learn, edit, adjust
- Make peace and find closure
- Address the incident with the group
 - Ask how the group felt or for feedback
 - Address expectations vs reality
- Address individual of the incident aside from the group
 - Listen
 - Remember to not react to their reaction
 - Take time to respond
- Personal 1x1 meetings with travelers
- Invite key individuals to return as facilitators
- Get feedback from the community that offered the experience
 - Attempt to facilitate a reconciliation after an incident
- Offer resources for additional learning and moving forward