

## Dealing with Difficult Situations

### Description:

This tool provides a checklist to assess your personal approach to communication in difficult situations and offers guidelines to effectively manage difficult situations.

### How it can be used:

All leaders must deal with situations that are difficult to manage; after all, that is what leadership is about. Although the circumstance may range from dealing with poor team performance to processes that are not functioning (and everything in between), key concepts provide a framework to guide you in dealing with a difficult situation. Using the following checklist, assess your approach to communicating in difficult situations and make any necessary adjustments to help you become more prepared. By following the guidelines, you will be able to manage difficult situations professionally and effectively.

Behaviour	Yes	No	What can I do to improve?
I am aware of my verbal communication style			
I am aware of my non-verbal communication style			
I understand the importance of body language			
I understand the concepts of active listening			
I practice active listening			
I understand the difference between assertive, aggressive and passive body language and behaviours			
I know my behaviour pattern in difficult situations			
I understand my communication strengths and weaknesses			
I know how to say 'no' in an assertive way that does not damage others			
I understand the value of compromise			
I understand how to influence others assertively (not aggressively)			
I understand how to defuse aggressiveness in someone else			
I know how to create a win-win situation			
I know how to give constructive feedback			

### Guidelines for managing difficult situations

- Act professionally.
  - Keep calm.
  - Do not take situations personally. A leader's role is to be objective.
  - If you feel that your emotions may get out of control, reschedule the meeting or take a break to get your emotions under control.
- Establish the facts.
  - Do not make assumptions.
  - Ensure you get the facts versus hearsay, can it be verified?
  - Listen to all points of view.
  - Take the time required to get it right.
- Ask questions.
  - Get to the base of the issue (put aside the details until the base issue is clear).

- What is the most important aspect you need to know about the situation?
- Practice active listening techniques.
  - Clarification: Ask questions to clarify.
  - Paraphrasing: Rephrase content.
  - Reflection: Rephrase feelings.
  - Summarization: Listen for themes or main points.
  - Use physical cues: Use head nods, eye contact, open body posture.
- Reframe the situation so it avoids personalities.
  - Explain the situation in terms of what the real issue is, for example, 'setting the office sound policy' rather than 'someone's radio is being played too loudly'.
  - Clarify what is expected through addressing this situation.
- Confirm whether your organization has any policies or guidelines that relate to this issue.
  - Has this already been addressed in the past? If so, how?
- Identify the options, and, if relevant, use a framework to assess the options (pro/con assessment, decision-tree, weighted matrix, balanced scorecard, etc.).
  - How does each option align with your organizational vision and mission?
  - Have you identified substantial risks with any of the options?
- Seek solutions that are win-win.
  - If that is not possible, aim for compromise where all sides feel like they were heard.
  - Negotiate an outcome with which all sides can live.
  - Avoid situations where one party feels that it has lost and another party has won.
- Be creative in addressing difficult situations.
  - There is no 'one size fits all' solution to dealing with challenging situations.
  - Adapt your approach to the particulars of the situation.
  - Ask the parties to suggest solutions that answer their needs while not damaging the other parties.
- Confirm the solution.
  - Reaffirm that all parties can live with the solution.
  - Clarify the implications of the solution.
  - If necessary, explain any consequences of not adhering to the solution.
- Acknowledge the process and, if relevant, thank the parties for coming to a solution.

**Source:**

*First Nations Health Managers – Governance, Strategy, Policy and Decision-Making Toolbox*  
 First Nations Health Managers Association