

YOUR BOSS ■ YOUR SPOUSE ■ YOUR FRIENDS
YOUR KIDS ■ YOUR CLIENTS

Difficult Conversations

HOW TO DISCUSS
WHAT MATTERS MOST



DOUGLAS STONE ■ BRUCE PATTON ■ SHEILA HEEN
OF THE HARVARD NEGOTIATION PROJECT

With a foreword by Roger Fisher, coauthor of *GETTING TO YES*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

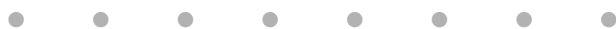
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Sheila Heen is a Lecturer on Law at Harvard Law School and a partner at Triad Consulting Group, a firm dedicated to assisting individuals and organizations with their toughest conversations. Heen coaches executives facing difficult choices, labor-management teams locked in conflict, family businesses facing succession issues, and communities divided by racial strife. Her clients range from Fidelity Investments to the Singapore Supreme Court, from the U.S. Air Force to the Carlson Family, from Greek and Turkish Cypriots to The Citadel Military College of South Carolina. At Harvard, Heen teaches negotiation to students and professionals and writes regularly on the subject of communication and conflict management. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with her husband and her son, and can be reached at heen@post.harvard.edu.

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Most**



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To our families
with love and gratitude

and to our friend and mentor, Roger Fisher,
for his vision and commitment

Foreword

The Harvard Negotiation Project is best known for a book on negotiation and problem-solving called *Getting to YES* that has sold more than three million copies. Since its publication in 1981, readers all over the world have been persuaded that negotiators are more effective when they move away from adversarial posturing and instead work jointly to satisfy the interests of both sides.

The “Harvard Method,” as it is sometimes called, emphasizes the importance of easy two-way communication. Yet in both negotiations and daily life, for good reasons or bad, we often *don’t* talk to each other, and don’t *want* to. And sometimes when we *do* talk, things only get worse. Feelings — anger, guilt, hurt — escalate. We become more and more sure that we are right, and so do those with whom we disagree.

This is the realm of *Difficult Conversations*, and why it is such a powerful and urgently needed book. It explores what it is that makes conversations difficult, why we avoid them, and why we often handle them badly. Although the inquiry grew initially from a desire to help negotiators, the subject has far deeper implications. *Difficult Conversations* addresses a critical aspect of human interaction. It applies to how we deal with children, parents, landlords, tenants, suppliers, customers, bankers, brokers, neighbors, team members, patients, employees, and colleagues of any kind.

In this book my colleagues Doug, Bruce, and Sheila take us by the hand and show us how to open the door to greater fulfillment in any relationship. They provide the stance of mind and heart and

the skills of expression needed to achieve effective communication across the gulf of real differences in experiences, beliefs, and feelings, whether in personal relations, business dealings, or international affairs.

These are the skills needed to take a serious disagreement within a business organization and transform it from a drag on competitiveness into an engine for innovation. These are the skills we all can use to make a marriage more enjoyable and durable and to make relations between parents and teenagers something far better than a war zone. These skills can heal the wounds that keep so many of us apart. They offer each of us a better future.

Returning from several years in the U.S. Army Air Force during World War II, I discovered that my roommate, two of my closest friends, and dozens of classmates had been killed in that war. Ever since, I have worked to improve the skills with which we deal with our differences; to improve the prospects for our children's future; and to enlist others in that cause. This brilliant and compelling book by my younger colleagues at the Harvard Negotiation Project leaves me feeling optimistic that progress is being made on all three counts.

— Roger Fisher
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Acknowledgments

This book draws from many wells.

The stories and conversations we share throughout the book come from our own lives and from our work with a diverse group of students, colleagues, and clients. For variety and to protect confidentiality, many of these stories are amalgams of different people's experiences that shared common and important dynamics, and as a rule all identifying facts have been changed. We are deeply grateful to those we've worked with for sharing with us so generously the conversations with which they were struggling. It is from their openness and their courage to try something new that we have learned the most.

In addition to our own research and reflection, this work incorporates and builds on ideas from many other disciplines. Our training was originally in negotiation, mediation, and law, but this book draws at least as much from the fields of organizational behavior; cognitive, client-centered, and family therapies; social psychology; communication theory; and the growing body of work around the idea of "dialogue."

This work began in a teaching collaboration with faculty from the Family Institute of Cambridge, who have contributed to it in countless ways. Dr. Richard Chasin and Dr. Richard Lee worked with Bruce Patton and Roger Fisher to develop what we call the Interpersonal Skills Exercise (itself inspired by a demonstration offered by psychodrama specialists Dr. Carl and Sharon Hollander) in which participants are coached on their toughest conversations. This exercise has been at the heart of Harvard Law School's Negotiation

Workshop, and of our learning, for more than a decade. In teaching this exercise with us, Dick, Rick, Sallyann Roth, Jody Scheier, and their associates from the Family Institute have taught us about family dynamics, influence, common reasons people get “stuck,” and how to care for people in pain.

We are also grateful to Chris Argyris and to the partners of Action Design: Diana McLain Smith, Bob Putnam, and Phil McArthur. Their insights into the dilemmas of organizational life and interpersonal structures have proven invaluable to our understanding of conversations — how they go awry and how to put them back on course. A great many concepts in this book, including joint contribution, impact versus intent, and interpersonal intersections, are derived from their work. They are also the source of the two-column tool, the ladder and footprint metaphors, and methods of mapping. The two rules for expressing feelings come from Bob Putnam. Our understanding of how to tell your story and get off to a good start reflects the work of Don Schön and Diana Smith on framing, and input from John Richardson on roles. Diana and our colleagues at Vantage Partners have offered many useful illustrations of how these ideas explain and help with the challenges of organizational life.

From the field of cognitive therapy, we have benefited from the research and writings of Aaron Beck and David Burns. We are particularly indebted to them for their research on how cognitive distortions affect our self-image and emotions. David Kantor, a founder of family therapy and of the Family Institute, has helped us in understanding the landscape of what we call the Identity Conversation and how it plays out in group dynamics.

Insights from social psychology and communication theory are too pervasive to cite. It is perhaps a testament to the power of these insights that many of them are no longer the province of specialists. However, we owe a great debt to the late Jeff Rubin for bringing many ideas to our attention, as well as for his unceasing support and encouragement. Our work on listening and the power of authenticity was influenced by Carl Rogers, Sheila Reindl, and Suzanne Repetto. John Grinder gave us the concept of three viewpoints, or “positions,” that