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**THE ARTFUL  
CONVERSATION**

# **COMPANION LEARNING GUIDE**



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# Q: What Is a Companion Learning Guide?

Each of the workshops will have a companion learning guide that will serve many purposes.

## BEFORE THE SESSION

- You will find the **Pre-workshop Burst Video**, designed to stimulate your thinking before the session.
- There are questions for **reflection, journaling, and/or discussing** the burst video with trusted colleagues.
- If you are so inclined, you can **review the PowerPoint** that we will be using in the workshop to familiarize yourself with the content.

## DURING THE SESSION

- Additional **instructions for breakouts** are included.

## POST-SESSION

- The companion learning guide will have **further information and additional resources** to continue your learning.
- Additional **reflection, journaling, or chat** topics are also included.

## ABOUT NCRC

Your facilitators today are from the **National Conflict Resolution Center**, a San Diego-based nonprofit that works with campuses, governments, businesses, and community groups around the world to find solutions to our most challenging conflicts.

This workshop is part of a series for leaders to support your work in managing the challenges of today's workplaces, building on the strengths that you already have.



## **BURST VIDEO:**

**Welcome!**

**Balancing a Problem-Solving Orientation  
with Being Human Centered**

Written by NCRC Trainer Dari DeSousa

### **REFLECT:**

*What stood out for you in the video?*

**JOURNAL:** *In what ways has my problem-solving mindset been helpful in my work as a leader? In what ways has it been detrimental?*

### **DIALOGUE WITH A TRUSTED COLLEAGUE:**

*How can we support one another to increase our ability to be human centered in our work?*



# Overview of the Series



We will do all we can to create a [psychologically safe space](#) for you so that you can comfortably share your experiences and perspective.

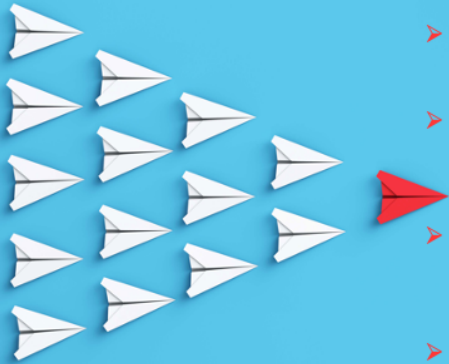
We also ask that you consider the work of Dr. Carol Dweck of Stanford University in taking the approach of a [growth mindset](#) as you participate in the sessions. While each of you is an expert, there is always more to learn!

There will be a series of four sessions. NCRC takes a scaffolding approach that builds skills and expands mindsets. While a four-workshop series may seem daunting, this time is going to be packed with skills, tools, and techniques that will assist you in tackling challenging situations. Each session is highly interactive, and you will be able to share your experience and knowledge with others.

- 1. The ARTful Conversation:** You'll learn how to effectively handle challenging one-on-one conversations. This foundational course lays the groundwork for all subsequent sessions.
- 2. The Art of Inclusive Communication:** You'll explore strategies and techniques to embrace and promote inclusivity.
- 3. The Bystander Challenge:** You'll learn what to do when you observe microaggressions and how to empower others at your workplace to become thoughtful upstanders.
- 4. The Exchange:** You'll learn a conflict resolution process that helps you lead a problem-solving conversation, focused on collaboration and future success.

# Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast

## Culture, Communication, and Conflict: Overall Learning Outcomes



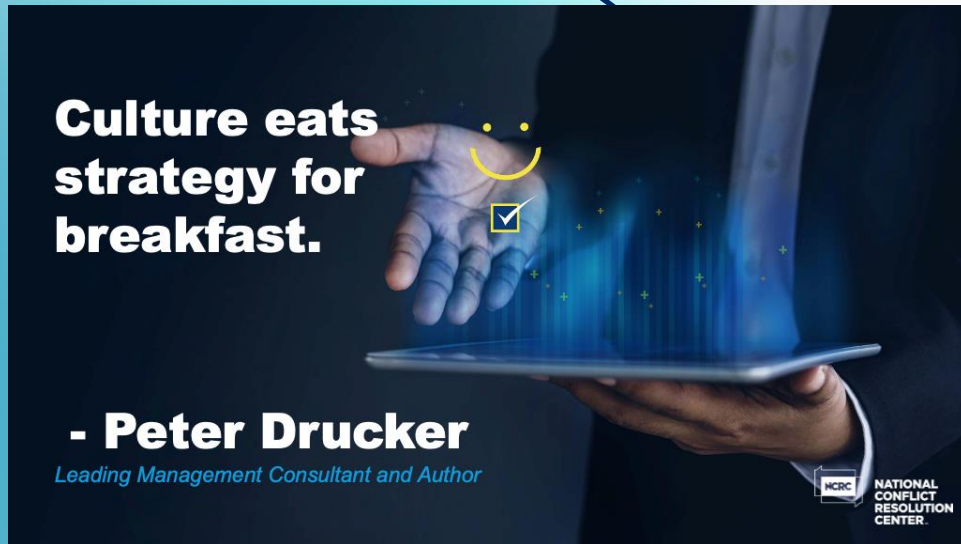
- Effectively handle challenging one-on-one conversations (The ARTful Conversation)
- Implement strategies and techniques to embrace and promote inclusivity (The ART of Inclusive Communication)
- Respond to microaggressions and empower others to become thoughtful upstanders (The Bystander Challenge)
- Lead collaborative conflict resolution processes (The Exchange)

The job of workplace leaders is to create a **healthy workplace culture**. Building a culture of respectful communication, inclusion, and productive teams depends upon the skills, values and actions of leaders.

This series is intended to reinforce the skills and effective behavior of leaders.



# Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast



This provocative quote by Peter Drucker reinforces the vital role of creating culture in the workplace. Culture trumps strategy. [This article](#) examines the concept further.

## FURTHER LEARNING

[The Culture Code by Daniel Coyle](#) examines highly successful groups through the lens of creating culture.

Another book that examines successful organizations is [The Healing Organization: Awakening the Consciousness of Business to Help Save the World.](#)

# First Breakout




This will be your first opportunity to connect with others in the cohort.

You will have an opportunity to **share** a bit **about yourself** and your **role** in your organization.

What kinds of **challenges** around collaboration, communication, culture, and connection do you face?

Lastly, discuss the **first burst video**. What resonated with you?



**NCRC** THE ARTFUL CONVERSATION

**Learning Outcomes**

This workshop will provide a useful framework for **active listening** that will set the philosophy and skills to create a **psychologically safe environment**.

- Listen **actively** and **empathetically**
- Treat all stakeholders with **respect** and **dignity**
- Demonstrate **approachability** and **openness**

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**A**CTIVE AWARENESS  
**R**ESPOND RESPECTFULLY  
**T**ROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER

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The **ARTful Conversation** workshop officially begins! This first workshop is the basis and approach for all subsequent sessions. This is the scaffolding that is necessary to build understanding.

### **Active Awareness**

Being mindful of all factors that may be playing a role in our communication.

### **Respond Respectfully**

Making others feel fully heard and acknowledged.

### **Troubleshoot Together**

Expressing ourselves in a productive way to find shared solutions.





The top of the tree is what people say when they are in conflict: **THEIR COMPLAINTS**

**Below the surface is what's really important to them:**

**THEIR UNDERLYING NEEDS**



## REFLECT

What are an employee's needs when they come to a leader with a concern? What are your needs? Which needs take precedence in that moment?

## Common Underlying Needs for the Employee

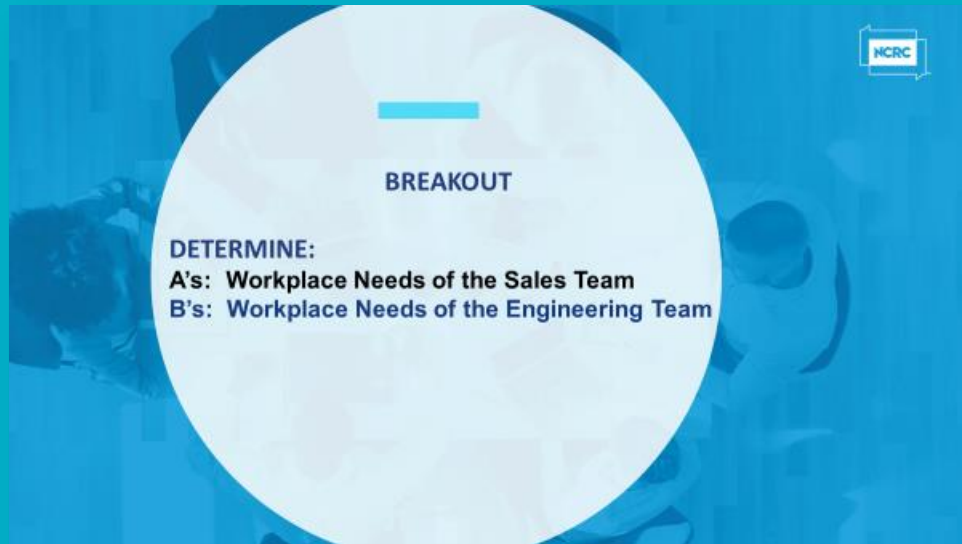
- **Being heard:** The sense that their concerns are being taken seriously
- **Respect:** Being treated in a respectful manner
- **Acceptance** by co-workers and supervisors
- **Fairness:** Being treated in an equitable manner
- **Psychological safety:** Sense that they can trust you
- **Being valued** by their manager and leadership

## Common Underlying Needs for Leaders

In addition to the needs of all employees, leaders typically need:

- **Productivity**
- **Fairness and objectivity**
- **Efficiency**
- **Levelheadedness**
- **Solutions to problems**

# Underlying Needs Discussion



We will be using a conflict scenario to understand better how to determine underlying needs. We will discover how they find solutions to the issues later!

The main characters in this workplace include:

**Samara:** CEO of Smart Alarms

**Francisco:** Director, Engineering

**Ginger:** Director, Sales

**Damian:** Employee Relations

[WATCH VIDEO OF THE CONFLICT](#)

Or

[READ COMPLAINTS OF SALES/ENGINEERING](#)

## Further Learning on Active Awareness

Most of the time, adults are expected to self-regulate their emotions in their autonomic nervous system. Stanford University's Dr. Shirzad Chamine's research and work on enhancing *positive intelligence* through self-care and short grounding exercises helps us to understand how to regulate ourselves better. You may want to look at "[Cultivating Co-Regulation in Yourself](#)" for ideas about how to co-regulate yourself in this nonscientific article.

Survivor Brain	PQ Brain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Activates fight-or-flight response</li><li>• Emotions are strong and uncontrolled</li><li>• Fear and aggression dominate</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Self-awareness</li><li>• Centered</li><li>• Management of negative emotions</li><li>• Empathy</li></ul>

Here is a [free quiz](#) to check your positive intelligence. A person can't have Active Awareness if they are operating from the survivor brain.



## REFLECT

**What do you do to ground yourself? How do you ensure that you balance self-care needs with the work that you do?**

**Active Awareness** is about maintaining mindfulness when you are actively checking in with your own thoughts and reactions. When we are exhausted or overworked, it can be difficult to reflect thoughtfully. Grounding ourselves helps us to approach situations with more Active Awareness and reduces the chances of misunderstanding and negative assumptions.

**"People will forget what you said,  
people will forget what you did,  
but people will never forget how you  
made them feel."**

*- Maya Angelou*

A blurred photograph of several people walking in a hallway, moving from left to right. The image is out of focus, emphasizing movement and a busy environment.  
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As we move into the R of the ARTful Conversation, we will be looking at how we **RESPOND RESPECTFULLY** to help create a culture of respect and inclusion in our workplaces. A successful workplace leader will model this behavior.

This quote by Maya Angelou is crucial to responding respectfully.



How we **ask questions** to understand better is important as well. As much as possible, try to **maintain a curious stance** about the other person’s perspective. In this way, your questions will reflect a genuine desire to **gain an understanding** of their perspective rather than you asking a series of questions that antagonize the other person. Watching your tone of voice to remain respectful also makes a difference.

**Taking responsibility** for your part of the breakdown in communication means being able to say that you made a mistake or assumed something incorrectly or that you are sorry for something that you did. Rather than making you look weaker or more vulnerable, it does more to set a tone of honesty and understanding. This will help the other person feel safe enough to look at their responsibility and, often, to apologize for any missteps they may have made as well. In the end, your ability to acknowledge your responsibility tends to **strengthen the relationship**.

**We will practice the skills of demonstrating understanding, acknowledging, and identifying needs, as those are key to clear, respectful communication when things matter to people.**



How do you respond  
**RESPECTFULLY** with  
your **TONE** and  
your **BODY LANGUAGE**?

## REFLECT

What are some ways that you can create safety through your body language, eye contact, and safety signals when working with others?

## FURTHER LEARNING

Body language and tone influence communication much more than many understand. Some people are naturally inclined to reading that body language and tone, while others, especially those who have experienced trauma (in their childhoods or in their current situations) or repeated **microaggressions**, are sometimes triggered by body language and tone. **Neuroreception** is how neural circuits in our brain distinguish whether situations or people are safe, among other things.

When we looked at Active Awareness, we reflected on how adults are responsible for **self-regulation**. However, there are times that **any adult can become dysregulated** (such as when they have experienced a challenging life situation). That person will benefit from interactions in which the other person is able to **co-regulate** with them. Our warm and responsive interaction connects on an unconscious level and models regulation.

In addition to eye contact and other safety signals, **mirror neurons** play an important role. A calm, compassionate face can positively impact a person who is out of regulation. **Being mindful of how our body language and tone may be playing a role in our communication helps create psychological safety for others.**

## Neuro-Reception: How it Impacts Communication

### Micro-Expressions

The facial expressions occur within a fraction of a second. This involuntary emotional leakage exposes a person's true emotions.

### Micro-Gestures

The movements in the face or body. The gestures that send negative messages, such as distracted eye movements that demonstrate impatience and break trust.

### Examples

- ▶ Happiness
- ▶ Sadness
- ▶ **Anger**
- ▶ **Disgust**
- ▶ **Contempt**
- ▶ Fear
- ▶ Surprise
- ▶ Impatience
- ▶ Distraction

## FURTHER LEARNING

For further investigation into the impact of body language, we examine here the concepts of **microexpressions** and **microgestures**.

You may want to consider what might lead you to demonstrate any microexpressions and microgestures that you commonly show. Perhaps it's too many tasks on your to-do list. This is understandable, but when others share personal experiences with you, do what you can to take a human-centered approach, being present with the other person. It can make a tremendous difference in how you are perceived.

It could be that the microexpressions and microgestures you demonstrate are connected to your self-development. Stanford's Dr. Shirzad Chamine examines *inner saboteurs* (Chamine's term) in his work, including in this [TEDx Stanford](#) presentation for workplace leaders.



# Respond Respectfully

**RESPOND RESPECTFULLY:**  
A Key Step *Before* Problem Solving

**DEMONSTRATE UNDERSTANDING**  
Recap speaker's main concerns in your own words

**ACKNOWLEDGE IMPACT**  
Reflect the feelings the person had

**IDENTIFY NEEDS**  
Say what you think their underlying needs were



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**Respond Respectfully** is a framework for active listening that invites effective dialogue. These techniques can significantly improve communication, provide clarity on both ends, encourage collaboration, and help employees feel deeply heard and understood.

## RESPOND RESPECTFULLY EXAMPLE

An employee complains to you that as a Mexican-American, she is the only **BIPOC** individual in her work group. Anytime there is any diversity training, everyone spotlights her to ask not only how she feels but also how Black people feel. She is extremely uncomfortable when this happens and is unsure what to do.

You may be tempted to react by giving the employee information about how to solve the problem, but effective leaders **Respond Respectfully** before problem-solving so the person feels heard. It will also help to clarify the employee's underlying needs.

**Demonstrate understanding:** It sounds like your team members expect you to represent the views of all BIPOC individuals when there are discussions about diversity. Is that correct?

**Acknowledge impact:** I am hearing that you are extremely uncomfortable with this, and that you can't speak for how other groups or individuals feel. Does the assumption that you could also speak for others upset you?

**Identify needs:** Being treated with respect by team members and being acknowledged for your individuality seem to be the most important workplace needs that you have. Is that correct? Are you also looking for ways to approach the situation?


# Respond Respectfully Practice

**BREAKOUT**  
A's will share Ginger's perspective  
B's will Respond Respectfully

**DEMONSTRATE UNDERSTANDING**  
Recap speaker's main concerns  
in your own words

**ACKNOWLEDGE IMPACT**  
Reflect the feelings the person had

**IDENTIFY NEEDS**  
Say what you think their  
underlying needs were

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You will now have an opportunity to practice the Respond Respectfully skills. Some may be familiar to you, yet we find that most people need additional practice with Identifying Needs. Spend more time with this if the other skills are central to how you listen and speak.

Do one round of this practice. In this practice, A's will play Ginger, while B's will listen and Respond Respectfully to Ginger.

Ginger's main concerns include:

- Getting an approval from the Engineering Department for a customization of its product
- Finding out in the meeting that the customization was not possible
- Believing that Francisco was not responsive to her inquiries
- Being angry
- Being worried about losing her job since she lost her patience



**TROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER**

**Tell your perspective in a nonconfrontational way**

**Make sure everyone's needs are addressed**

**End on a positive note**

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**REFLECT**

How does this approach to discussing sensitive topics invite a more respectful dialogue?

**TROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER**


**TELL YOUR PERSPECTIVE IN A NONCONFRONTATIONAL WAY**

State how the situation is affecting you or the others without attacking the other person.

State your interests: "One thing that is important to me/our company is ..."

Use "WE" statements: "I'd like it if we could figure out a way to ..."

State organizational values: "We value ... and for this reason, I need to ..."



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**Troubleshoot Together** is the third and final component of the ART. It's your opportunity to explain your perspective in a nonconfrontational way, to provide clarity on considerations the other person may not be aware of, and to focus on a common goal. You will have an opportunity to discuss your approach in a breakout discussion.

Though not all demands can be met, making sure **everyone's needs are addressed** is much more possible when we take this approach rather than an adversarial approach.

Lastly, **ending on a positive note** allows you to maintain a healthy relationship with the other person.

# Troubleshoot Together



## FURTHER LEARNING

We offer further learning by suggesting that you consider the goals of the conversation. Assuring that you are on the same page with others will help you Troubleshoot Together more effectively.

Additionally, many leaders have indicated that they would like to learn a methodical approach to sort through challenging conversations to more successfully Troubleshoot Together.

The steps here provide an approach that we borrow from our Exchange methodology. Leaders can use this framework to sort through tough issues.

The topics of concern are disaggregated to their smallest parts (rather than large, overwhelming topics), and then the five-step method is used, one issue at a time: DEFINE, DEVELOP, DETERMINE, DECIDE, AND DOCUMENT.



### **ACTIVE AWARENESS**

- Recognize style differences
- Check your bias and your ego
- Process your perceptions

### **RESPOND RESPECTFULLY**

- Demonstrate understanding
- Acknowledge and identify needs
- Ask open-ended questions
- Acknowledge your responsibility

### **TROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER**

- Tell your perspective in a nonconfrontational way
- Make sure everyone's needs are met
- End on a positive note



The ART, in its entirety, is very effective in showing respect and inviting inclusive dialogue. It is not necessary to memorize it. Instead, think of it as a tool for creating a culture of equity, respect, and clear communication in your work.

Practicing the ART every chance you get can give you a solid foundation on which to build your skills. In a sense, these skills are like a new language and a philosophy of communication and negotiation.

The philosophical basis for this human-centered approach we promote was originally based on the work from the Harvard Negotiation Project (particularly the book *Getting Past No*), though we have continued to expand our thinking and theoretical understanding.

**ENJOY THIS VIDEO OF THE ARTFUL CONVERSATION IN THE COMMUNITY.**



# Closure



**A**CTIVE AWARENESS  
**R**ESPOND RESPECTFULLY  
**T**ROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER

What is one takeaway for you from today's session?

**WHAT'S NEXT**

- Read about Humble Inquiry
- Next week: The ART of Inclusive Communication

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Thank you for your participation in the ARTful Conversation. We look forward to seeing you in the ART of Inclusive Communication.



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Empowering People. Transforming Cultures.