

# ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP *and* MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

## *Managing Difficult Conversations & Feedback*

*based on the work of C. K. Gunsalus*

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## At End: Key Takeaways

- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_



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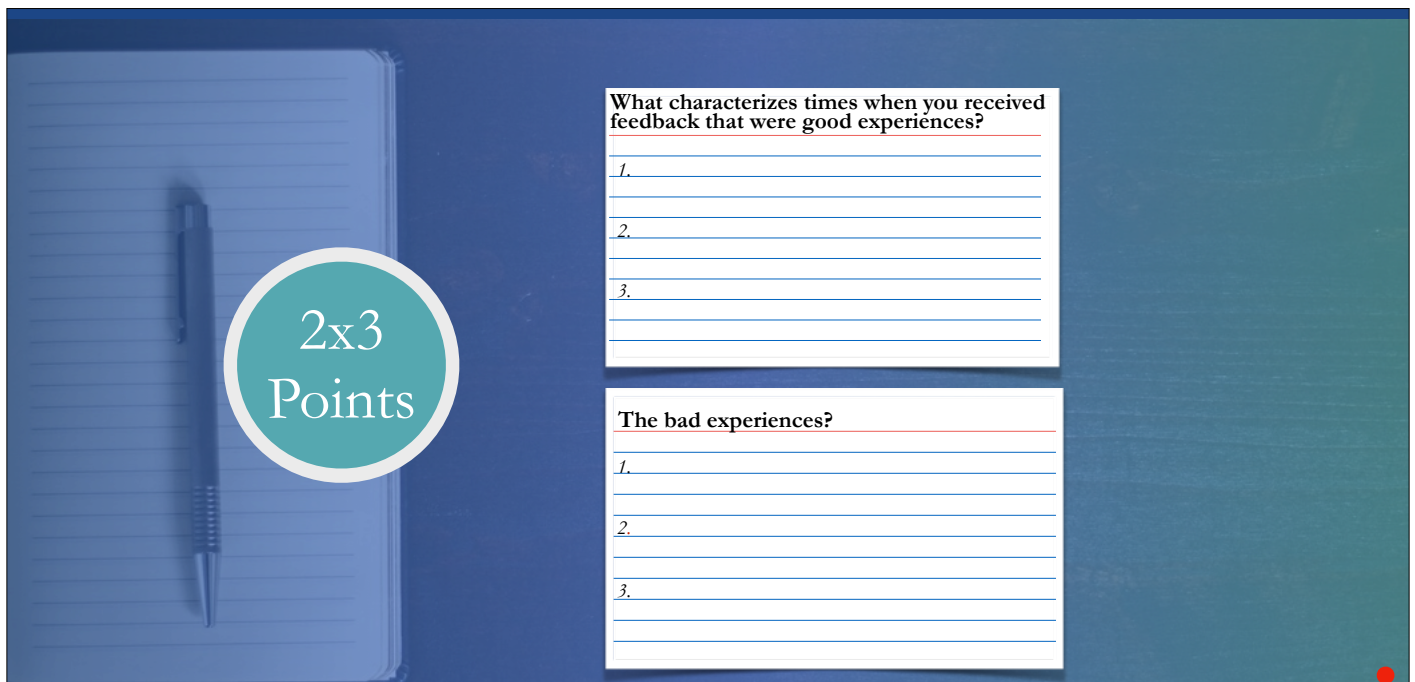
# Managing Difficult Conversations



Manage  
yourself



Develop  
your skills



2x3  
Points

**What characterizes times when you received feedback that were good experiences?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**The bad experiences?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



You have an enthusiastic graduate student who isn't getting your messages about problems. The student, Chris, often leaves messes in the group office area despite being asked to clean up before leaving and several group discussions about courtesy to each other with very tight shared space. Worse, Chris repeatedly leans on others to use a technique it is Chris's job to learn.

Chris regularly leaves equipment in a state where the next person to use it needs to reload paper or other minor maintenance that should be part of being a good group member.

You need to set expectations more clearly with Chris and make it clear that this cannot continue.

*Using the DMF, prepare for a meeting with Chris to be clear on what you want Chris to take away from the meeting*



Decision-Making  
Framework



*What are the issues?*



*What policies or rules apply?*



*What questions do you have or data do you need?*



*Who, what are your resources?*



*What are your options?  
Who is affected by each?*



*What will you do?  
What (exact) words will you use?*

# Difficult Conversations

What is it?  
Can you  
articulate it?

## GOAL:

Layer professional skills *over* your  
personality and reactions.





**GOAL:**

*Layer professional skills over your personality and reactions.*

1 Know your conflict comfort and style



**GOAL:**

*Layer professional skills over your personality and reactions.*

1 Know your conflict comfort and style

2 Gain specific skills

3 Practice, so they're accessible when needed



Develop your skills



Learn a little social psychology



Align with others



Develop good personal scripts



 Egocentrism bias

 Reciprocity norms

 Sinister attribution error



Sinister  
Attribution Bias

Never attribute to malice that which incompetence will explain.

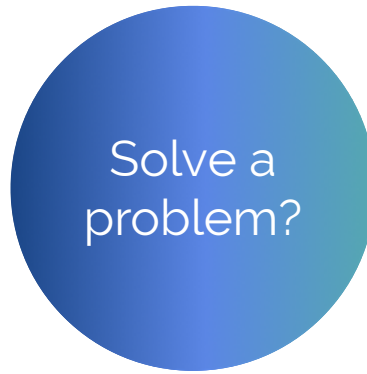
*Knoll Corollary*

Never attribute to incompetence that which temporary inattention or miscommunication will explain.

A background image showing a young child with dark hair reading a book. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text "Relationships MATTER" is centered over the image.

Relationships  
MATTER

# Outcome?



# Kinds of Feedback



*Appreciation*



*Coaching*



*Evaluation*

*Are you preparing for the right conversation?*

*Thank You for the Feedback, Chapter 2*








## Frame Your Feedback for Growth

"In a growth mindset, challenges are exciting rather than threatening. So rather than thinking, oh, I'm going to reveal my weaknesses, you say, wow, here's a chance to grow."



Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Random House, 2006.

## Feedback Best Practices

-  Appropriate time and place
-  Focused on purpose
-  Factual, calm
-  About specific conduct, behavior
-  Effects: on others, on success
-  Solicits the other person's views
-  Clear takeaway message/s

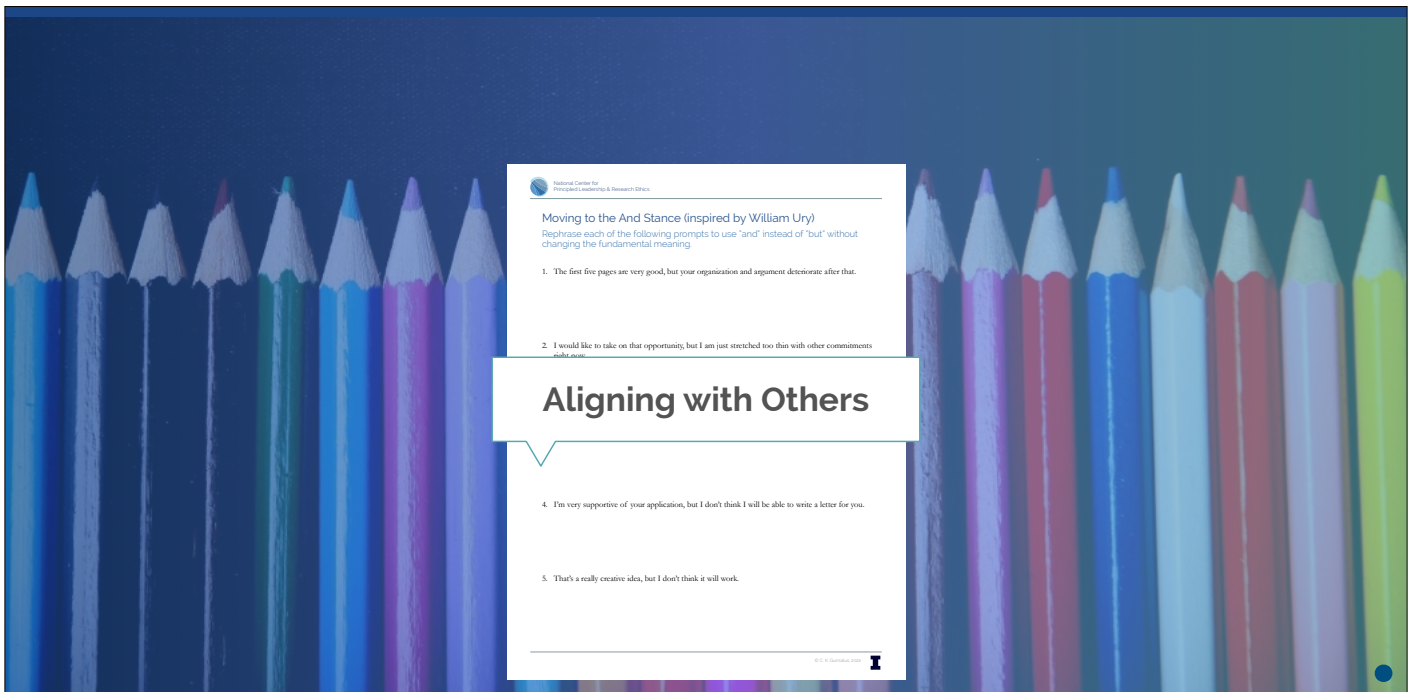





Chris has not improved since your first conversation. In fact, some things have gotten worse.

You need to make it clear to Chris that it's important to turn things around rapidly by learning the technique and running experiments alone, and leaving the common areas tidy.

*What is your message to Chris and what words will you use to make sure it lands?*



  
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Moving to the And Stance (inspired by William Ury)  
Rephrase each of the following prompts to use "and" instead of "but" without changing the fundamental meaning.

1. The first five pages are very good, but your organization and argument deteriorate after that.
2. I would like to take on that opportunity, but I am just stretched too thin with other commitments [with it](#).

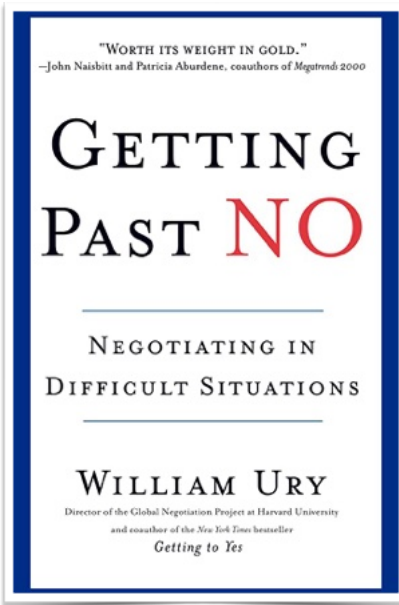
**Aligning with Others**

4. I'm very supportive of your application, but I don't think I will be able to write a letter for you.
5. That's a really creative idea, but I don't think it will work.

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## Aligning with Others

- 🎧 Improves audience attention, retention
- ⚙️ Changes *your* alignment
- ☀️ Reduces conflict, aggression spirals
- 🔄 Takes constant practice!



## Aligning with Others

- ☑️ Collect YESes
- ☑️ Agree wherever you can
- ☑️ Agree without conceding
- ☑️ Acknowledge the person
- ☑️ Acknowledge the person's competence and authority
- ☑️ Don't contradict, agree and build

William Ury, *Getting Past No*



Personal Scripts

Words you have prepared, in advance, and practiced, for predictable situations.

## Personal Scripts

### Preemptive

- 1 Speaking regularly about values & mission
- 2 Building it into a habit to ask questions about others, their interests
- 3 For anticipated events: You know it's coming (feedback, evaluation, difficult conversations)

### Reactive

- 4 Buying time to think
- 5 Calling a pause in a topic or discussion that is getting off the rails, too heated
- 6 Turning the tables to the other/s: asking for solutions
- 7 Noting positives
- 8 Agreeing to disagree

## Some Useful Scripts

*"I need some time to reflect. Perhaps I could get back to you in about 20 minutes?"*

*"I recall there is something about that in the policy manual. Let me review that and get back to you."*

*"I'm so rushed right now, I couldn't do this justice. I'll carve out some dedicated time Wednesday afternoon."*

*"This will affect others as well as just you. As soon as I have had a chance to speak with each, I will decide."*

## More Baseline Scripts

*coaching*

*"I am interested in your success. It is my duty to share a candid evaluation with you so you can assess and adjust going forward."*

*"I'm not comfortable discussing that."*

*boundary*

*pause*

*"Let's agree to disagree for now and both go have a good think about this. Let's try again tomorrow."*

*"I hear what you're saying and I respect how strongly you feel."*

*pause,  
boundary*

## Concepts, Phrases to Excise

*"You have to understand..."  
or "You need to..."*

*"You'll just have to trust  
me on this."*

*"I regret that you are  
unhappy with my  
decision."*

*"This is as hard for me  
as this is for you."*

### Short Case

Chris has not improved since your first conversation. In fact, some things have gotten worse.

You need to make it clear to Chris that it's important to turn things around rapidly by learning the technique and running experiments alone, and leaving the common areas tidy.

*What personal script/s will you use with Chris?*



## Tailoring Scripts for Giving Feedback

coaching

*"...before I provide feedback, share with me how you think this went/ what you think about [the document]..."*

*"I want you to be successful here. I have noticed two behaviors/concerns that I believe are holding you back. They are X and Y..."*

coaching/  
evaluation

evaluation

*"I know that you're still learning the technique, and it's essential that you take ownership of it and not rely on others to do it for you. Let's plan how to get there."*

*"This is an urgent situation. Your performance is not acceptable, and it's impacting the productivity and morale of the entire group. I expect you to plan and run experiments independently."*

evaluation

## Scripts for Setting Expectations

*"When you're new in our group, we expect you to ask questions, not guess! We are here to help you grow."*

*"While I encourage asking questions, we expect our senior group members to develop independent ideas and project plans."*

*"I understand that you want step by step instructions, and for this task, determining those steps are part of the assignment."*

*"As a group, we have a set of shared expectations, such as..."*

*"If you are unable to fulfill a commitment, we expect you to notify others by X time..."*

*"For developing specific steps for a new process, I expect you to consult appropriate resources and first form your own ideas ..."*



Despite your previous conversations, Chris continues to be disorganized and has not run experiments in a few weeks. More concerning on a personal level, Chris frequently looks exhausted, stressed, and generally unhappy.

Recently, Chris only successfully completed  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the qualification exam, resulting in a failing grade. In consultation with the DGS, you have concluded that Chris needs to leave the program.

*Develop personal scripts for your meeting with Chris.*

## Scripts for End of the Line

*lack of improvement*

*"As we have discussed, you've been unable to meet the milestones we set for improvement. I will not be able to renew your appointment."*

*"You are not thriving here, and your interests may not align with our needs. I think you may be more successful in another environment."*

*not working*





*declining performance*

*"You've continued to become more disengaged with our work and are consistently struggling to meet expectations. This affects all members of the group, so I am recommending you leave."*

*"I understand that this may be hard to accept, and certain performance standards must be met to continue here."*

*final decision*

## Check Yourself:

-  Are you prepared and managing your emotions?
-  Is your feedback specific?
-  Is it *actionable*? Does the student know what to do next?
-  Have you approached it with a growth mindset?

## Performance Feedback

1. Kindness matters.
2. Be prepared. Be specific.
3. Know your role.
4. This is not the moment for diplomatic euphemisms.
5. Check for understanding.



*Key takeaways?*

*Questions or concerns?*

*See you next time!*