Leading Difficult Conversations
LEAD6211

Course Outline (online)

Description: Having difficult conversations is part of every leadership position. Learn to approach the toughest conversations with confidence by developing skills to move past emotion and deliver your message clearly and positively.

Course Goals: To create greater comfort with initiating, and engaging in, difficult conversations, by learning how to structure the conversation, how to reduce defensiveness in others.

Course Objectives
At the end of this course, participants will be able to:
- Consider what makes a conversation difficult for you
- Choose when to speak up and when to be agreeable, skip it or temporarily defer
- Differentiate among assertive, aggressive and passive approaches
- Say what you know to be true but not more than you know to be true using ‘I’ statements
- Ask questions without causing defensiveness
- Structure conversation using findings from neuroscience
- Say ‘no’ when appropriate while remaining positive
- Approach difficult conversations with courage and humility

Course Topics:
- Why we need to have difficult conversations
- Contrasting assertive and non-assertive approaches using the Interpersonal Influencing Inventory
- When not to be assertive
- Assertive communication including ‘I’ statements
- Responding to others assertively
- Reducing defensiveness with open questions
- The focused conversation method (ORID)
- The power of a positive no

Evaluation: This is a graded course where a Complete or Incomplete will be issued. In order to receive a completion for this course, a student must:
- Students are required to attend a minimum of three of four Zoom sessions (and watch the Zoom video of the session they did not attend, if any).
- Complete assignments to demonstrate skills presented by the course
- Participate each week, posting no later than Sunday night, in forums relating to one of that week’s course topics. (The minimum level of participation is to provide your response to the question posed and to respond to at least three posts from others, unless otherwise noted in the forum instructions.)
- Do a weekly quiz based on the Zoom session and videos for that week

Code of Student Conduct

This course outline is a sample only and is subject to change.
The purpose of the Code of Student Conduct is to define the general standard of conduct expected of students registered at Western University, provide examples of behaviour that constitutes a breach of this standard of conduct, provide examples of sanctions that may be imposed, and set out the disciplinary procedures that the University will follow. For the complete Code of Student Conduct: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/board/code.pdf

How often will the instructor communicate with me?

Questions posted in the general discussion forum or by message will receive a reply within two business days. In addition, the instructor will be available to answer students’ questions immediately following the Zoom sessions each week.

When will I receive my grades?

Final grades will be available 2 weeks after the last scheduled day of the course. A grade report can be printed from myWCS.

How do I hand in assignments?

All assignments will be submitted electronically through OWL using the assignment tool. The due dates for assignments are shown as the end of the week. However, if your require flexibility, any assignment can be submitted as late as the last day of the course.

Course Schedule:

Four consecutive weeks:

- Attend 90 minute Zoom meetings. The session will be recorded
- Assignments and forum discussions are geared to weekly topics so students are expected to spend 90-120 minutes each week at times of their choosing each week.

Week 1

- What factors make some conversations difficult and what constitutes a difficult conversation for you
- Interpersonal Influencing Inventory (online self-assessment)
- Contrasting Assertive Approaches to Non-Assertive Approaches
- Dare to Lead online self-assessment

Week 2

- When not to be assertive
- ‘I’ statements contrasted to common non-assertive communication approaches
- Discussion of Daring Greatly Leadership assessment
- The Power of a Positive No
- Other assertiveness tools
- Open versus closed questions

Week 3

- How to reduce defensiveness by either avoiding asking questions or asking open questions
- The four level discussion method (ORID). Structure conversations to avoid problems

This course outline is a sample only and is subject to change.
• CHEAPVIN – questions that get to the heart of the issue
• Plan a difficult conversation that you will have next week

Week 4

• ‘Clear is Kind’. Showing courage and generosity in difficult conversations
• Responding to other assertively
• Course Recap

Evaluation Method:

As part of the course/instructor evaluation, a survey will be sent to you electronically by Continuing Studies. You will be asked the following questions. Please consider these throughout the course.

1. How would you rate your overall experience?
2. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:
   a. The course content was relevant and valuable.
   b. The instructor conducted class sessions in an organized, well-planned manner.
   c. The instructor explained concepts clearly.
   d. The instructor displayed enthusiasm and energy in conducting class sessions.
   e. The instructor made me feel comfortable in the learning environment.
   f. The instructor encouraged my participation and interaction.