



What to do when a confrontation doesn't go well? Danny Silk

Last week's blog on the 4 Parts of a Successful Confrontation prompted many people to ask the questions I hear most when I bring up this subject:

- What do you do when a confrontation doesn't go well?
- Specifically, what if the other person won't listen and/or acts powerless?

Don't get me wrong—I empathize with these questions. None of us enjoys having confrontations with people who decide to show us their worst. However, I want to suggest that if we are going to increase our chances of having successful confrontations, we need to ask some different, better questions.

QUESTION #1: AM I THINKING LIKE A POWERFUL PERSON?

At face value, if we're asking the questions above, it implies two things —first, that we do not yet have a great plan to respond to someone acting powerless around us, and second, that we tend to be more focused on the other person's behavior than our own. Both suggest that there could be room to grow in building our own powerful mindset and behavior in approaching confrontation. No judgment here—that's true for all of us. But owning this is the first step we must take if we hope to actually grow.

Since it's always good to review these, let's remember three truths that shape the mindset of every powerful person who wants to have healthy relationships:

- I do not control you. On a good day, I tell me what to do and do it.
- You do not control me. I am responsible for the way I respond to you.
- My goal with you is connection, and I am responsible for pursuing that goal.

Thinking from this mindset requires us to have a plan for what to do when someone starts demonstrating powerless behavior (passive, aggressive, or passive-aggressive communication, blame-shifting, etc.), and that plan has to be about how we are going to manage us.

At the center of this plan must be a clear commitment not to come under fear. Powerless behavior is always an invitation to come into agreement with fear and enter an escalating exchange of disrespect, and this is what we must not do. Remember, we get to choose whether we will engage in a disrespectful conversation.

The minute we become disrespectful is the minute we start contributing to a bad outcome.

If you're approaching someone else with a relational issue, then your plan going in should include the following:

1. Understand the Issue: Have I taken the time to clearly identify the behavior or dynamic, my emotions, and what I need? (Practicing writing out "I messages" is very helpful here.)
2. Take Responsibility: Have I identified the ways that I have contributed to this issue or relational dynamic? Are there any adjustments I need to make or messes I need to clean up before I confront the other person?
3. Check My Heart/Goal: Is my goal in approaching the other person to restore connection? Am I ready to be vulnerable and show them a sad/broken heart about this issue? Am I approaching this humbly, aware that I may not have all the information yet, ready to listen and seek understanding?

4. Boundaries: Am I committed to doing my part to keep the conversation respectful and keep my love on?

QUESTION #2: HOW DID I MANAGE MYSELF IN THE CONFRONTATION?

With confrontation, practice makes better and better. Learning to execute our plan with emotional maturity, wise discernment, trained responses, and good motives is a process that requires repeated effort like any learned skill.

So, after a confrontation—even ones that go well, but especially ones that didn't—we should look honestly at how we managed ourselves and identify where we have room to grow. Here are some great questions to ask ourselves, whether we initiated the confrontation or not:

- How did I do when I was communicating? Did I stick to telling the other person about me? Was I vulnerable and courageous in telling the truth in a respectful way?
- How did I do when I was listening? Was I listening to understand? Was I able to help the other person clarify what they were feeling and needing?

- How did I do when the other person brought disrespect or powerlessness to the exchange? Did I respond respectfully? Was I able to invite the person to be powerful or help to calm their anxiety? Was I able to set a boundary in the conversation to keep it respectful, or even walk away if necessary?

Going through this list can be revealing. We may see something we need to apologize for, or forgive ourselves or the other person for. We may see where we can better communicate the issue in a later conversation. We may gain understanding we couldn't in the moment about what the other person was trying to say. All of these can help us move forward productively.

QUESTION #3: HOW DO I WANT TO DO BETTER IN THE NEXT CONFRONTATION?

As powerful people, we need to accept that confrontation is a healthy, essential skill that we must master to build healthy relationships. We must be willing to learn from even the most painful confrontations and keep getting back on the horse to try to manage our emotions, communicate honestly, listen well, serve generously, and stay true to the goal of connection.

Will there be confrontations where we are as gracious, honest, kind, safe, and respectful as possible and the other person chooses not to listen, respond, and repair connection? It certainly happens, and it is heartbreaking. These are the moments where we must dive deep into the heart of Jesus to receive His comfort, healing, and grace to keep loving like He does in the face of rejection and sin.

For no matter what the other person does, our responsibility is the same—to forgive offenses, keep our love on, and keep growing in our skill and ability to pursue and build connection.

Danny Silk
Loving on Purpose