Overview

**Difficult Interactions**

The Difficult Interactions Café is a short blended learning experience oriented around the concepts and   
skills found in the Harvard ManageMentor Difficult Interations topic. The learning experience consists of three components:

*60 to 90 minutes 60 minutes Ongoing*

Objectives

At the conclusion of the blended experience, managers will be able to:

**Determine which conflicts to resolve.\*** Specifically, the experience will help managers:

* Consider the source
* Know their default approach to conflict
* Evaluate the relationship
* Weigh the cost of avoidance
* Know when to walk away

**Address the negative emotions conflict raises**. Specifically, the experience will   
help managers:

* Identify their emotions
* Reframe negative thoughts
* Neutralize unproductive behaviors

**Clarify the facts of an interpersonal conflict.** Specifically, the experience will help managers:

* Communicate, don’t confront
* Take a neutral point of view
* Share perspectives
* Uncover intentions
* Acknowledge their contributions

**Solve the problem underlying a difficult interaction.** Specifically, the experience will   
help managers:

* Frame the problem\*
* Practice active listening
* Identify areas of agreement
* Explore solutions together
* Decide on a plan
* Look ahead
* Know what to do when they can’t resolve a conflict

**Manage conflict between direct reports.** Specifically, the experience will help managers:

* Coach employees to resolve conflicts\*
* Lead by example
* Set ground rules
* Decide when to intervene
* Facilitate a resolution\*
* Dispel ongoing tension

\*Objectives with an asterisk are included in Part 2, the Café session.

Part 1: Self-paced, Individual Preparation

Prior to the live Café session, participants are expected to complete the following assignments:

* Review the following online lessons from the Harvard Manage Mentor Difficult Interactions topic:
  + Understand Difficult Interactions
  + Decide Whether to Address Conflict
  + Address Emotions
  + Assess the Facts
  + Solve the Problem
  + Manage Conflict Between Employees
* Complete the online comprehension test from the Harvard Difficult Interactions topic
* Identify a colleague, employee, or customer with whom they have difficult interactions so they can apply the activities in the Café to their own situations

Part 2: Live, Group-based Café Session

The Café session represents the core element of the learning experience. The purpose of this session is to provide an opportunity for managers to:

* Exchange ideas and questions with others
* Discuss the context of how concepts and skills apply in the workplace
* Practice and begin application of those concepts and skills
* Build momentum and support for applying the concepts and skills in the workplace

Working through the live Café session guide should take approximately 60 minutes. If the facilitator prefers a shorter session or wishes to spend more time on a specific concept or activity, he or she may want to cover only those concepts and activities that are most relevant to the group.

| SECTION | ACTIVITY | TIME |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Introduction** | * Show icebreaker question while participants are arriving to the session (WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST CHALLENGINGABOUT RESOLVING DISAGREEMENTS WITH OTHERS?). * Introduce facilitators. * Review tips for using technology during the session. * Set context: Difficult interactions at work are inevitable. If they are ignored or handled incorrectly, the workplace can become uncomfortable. If properly managed, however, difficult interactions can ultimately strengthen a team and work environment. * Debrief icebreaker question. * Review benefits of conflict resolution. * Review session objectives. | 8 minutes |
| **Skill focus: Decide whether to address conflict** | Facilitate practice activity: Pick the right course of action. Participants:   * + Are presented with several conflicts and determine whether to address them   + Review a summary of factors to consider when deciding whether to address a conflict * Reflection activity: Learners consider the difficult situation they identified as part of their pre-work, and determine the best course of action for managing it. | 14 minutes |
| **Skill focus: Frame the problem** | Facilitate practice activity: Frame a conflict effectively. Participants:   * + Practice framing a problem in a constructive way * Reflection activity: Participants consider how to frame the disagreement they identified as part of their pre-work. | 14 minutes |
| **Skill focus: Facilitate a resolution between employees** | Facilitate practice activity: When to intervene. Participants:   * + Discuss when to intervene in a conflict between direct reports   + Identify the steps for resolving a conflict between others in the context of a scenario   + Review Harvard ManageMentor steps for facilitating a resolution * Reflection activity: Learners share methods that they can use to teach their direct reports to resolve their own conflicts. | 21 minutes |
| **Applying what you’ve learned** | * Review session objectives and skill areas discussed. * Review directions for completing the On-the-Job section of the online Harvard ManageMentor topic, including the action plan. * Close the session. | 3 minutes |

Part 3: Self-paced, Individual Application

After the live Café session, participants are expected to complete the following assignments:

* Complete the online On-the-Job section in the Harvard ManageMentor Difficult Interactions topic. The section provides learners with an opportunity to choose a skill to focus on and create an action plan for applying and developing the skill.
* Execute their action plan over a specified timeframe (e.g., 60 or 90 days).
* After the specified timeframe (e.g., 60 or 90 days), access the online On-the-Job section in the Harvard ManageMentor Difficult Interactions topic to update the action plan and reflect on the experience.