

## Managing Difficult Communications— Separation Notices

Any communication has the potential for being difficult, or not! It is how we deliver the message, and how we prepare the person receiving the message that will set the tone for the meeting.

### **Difficult communications occur most often when we are:**

- Defensive or negative
- Unwilling to listen or understand all perspectives
- Indifferent
- Insensitive to others needs
- Threatening in the words we use or our behaviors

### **We manage difficult communications by...**

- **Managing how we think**
  - If we personalize what is said = difficult communication
  - If we think strategically, balancing emotions with what we are trying to accomplish = manage the communication toward mutual benefit
- **Recognizing what we are dealing with**
  - Lack of safety (financial, emotional, physical, etc.)
  - Lack of sense of belonging (lost involvement; lost membership, etc)
  - Lack of recognition (feeling overlooked, etc.)
- **Speaking the language of the person you are trying to connect with**
  - Safety... language of possibilities, available services, avenues of support
  - Belonging... language of involvement
  - Recognition... language of praise, requesting advice, seeking assistance
- **Listening actively**
  - Congruence – staying with the subject that is important to the person you are trying to connect with
  - Partnership – reflecting what you've heard to assure understanding
  - Asking questions to help clarify
- **Offering feedback to build understanding and explore all options**

### **Tips for sharing/exploring the difficult communication... effectively**

#### **A. Prepare for the meeting**

- Focus on the reality of the situation and what you have influence on
- Prepare a checklist of important points to discuss and then use that list to assure all essential points are addressed
- Anticipate questions, issues, fears, and resistances
- Prepare notes about each individual that you can use in closing the meeting with that individual that highlights their unique contributions to Lane, your division/department, and your appreciation for their efforts
- Questions that may help you gain this focus are:
  1. What can I do to help employees understand what is happening?
  2. What can I do to help employees prepare for their “next step”?
  3. What can Lane do to help employees prepare for their “next step”?

4. What can I say that will help employees know they are valued?
5. What do I need to do to help employees process emotions?

**B. Scheduling the Meeting/Just Before the Meeting**

- Create a safe, respectful environment
  - Prevent interruptions of any kind
  - Allow enough time for the meeting; information sharing and listening
- Take a deep breath and remain calm

**C. Hold the discussion**

- Focus on helping the employee feel heard
- Allow the employee time to take in what is happening, don't just deliver the news
- Focus on assisting the employee
  - Empathize with them
    - example: "Is there anything I can share to help you further understand what is happening?"
  - Help them explore options
    - example: "Lane provides several services and programs that can help you"
      - HR—process, benefits, payroll, contracts
      - Employee Assistance Program—emotional impact of layoffs
      - Workforce Development—Career development services
  - Offer a letter of recommendation and reference

**D. Close the Discussion**

- When you feel the employee is able to manage the difficult information, gently close the discussion... An example of a gentle closing follows:

Sample closing: "Let me share how much I appreciate the contributions you have [, or are making] made to Lane and to [division/department]"... (then list some of those contributions from the list you prepared prior to the meeting).

"Others won't care how much we know until they know how much we care."  
--Charles Swindoll