

Learning Challenge: Facilitating a Challenge

The beating heart of the *Wildland Fire Metareview, 2007-2016* (metareview) is the chapter learning challenges. Facilitating them with your crew or work group could potentially be tough, and they should be tough—that's the point. We want you to be successful, though, so in this challenge we'll explore how to get ready for these conversations.

First off, thank you for committing to doing the hard part—having the conversations that we know will make a difference in our organization. Without those the metareview is just another report that no one ever reads and doesn't really do anything to improve our work. But with your help, you can make the metareview matter. We can't do this without you.

Step 1: Pick a chapter.

Take a look at the table of contents and pick a chapter that grabs your attention. Start by reading that chapter and the learning challenge yourself.

What do you agree with? What doesn't mesh with your own lived experience? What in the section strikes a chord with you? Did anything make you mad?

Now consider how others will do the same as they read the chapter. Your role here is to facilitate the conversation. Yes, what you think is important and we hope you share that with your people. But you want to hear what they think too, right?

Step 2: Make a plan.

Each chapter of the metareview includes a learning challenge that can serve as a discussion guide for your conversation. Read the learning challenge from the chapter you've chosen and answer the questions for yourself. Your goal is to help your participants explore these questions too, but don't feel bound by that (e.g. sticking to the suggested questions). Let your participants explore ideas even if they don't fit in the structure of the learning challenge. But please work to keep the conversation constructive.

Many people have never had this kind of conversation at work. We found in our focus groups that we had to set the stage a bit, let people know what to expect, and what was expected of them. We encourage you to establish a set of ground rules, so your people



Figure 1.—Some tips for facilitating an effective conversation.

know what is expected of them. Encourage them to speak their truths, absolutely, but encourage them to do so respectfully. You can even involve them in building the ground rules.

Step 3: Schedule the conversation.

Good dialog takes time, so give your group plenty of it when you schedule the session. The tougher the subject, the longer you'll need. This is the hardest part. Pick a time. Invite your folks. Explain to them why this conversation matters to you and why you want their voice in the room. Explain why it's worth the time out of their already busy schedules.

Open your calendar. Pick a time that works for both you and your team (no Friday afternoon won't be 'perfect'). Write the invitation. Send the email.

Additional Preparation

It's often said that the hardest part is the first step. Well, you've taken that first step. You've invited people to the conversation. Now, all you have to do is have the conversation. For some of you this will come easy. For others, you might want some more preparation. Below you'll find several short videos that discuss what we've found to be important foundational learning for this kind of work. Good luck and have fun.

Having Difficult Conversations?

Most of us would rather avoid difficult conversations. They are a risk, and all too often the fear of the negative outcome prevents us from risking a positive one. That makes us feel good for the moment, but does it really help in the long run? In this TED Talk, Luvvie Ajayi Jones encourages us to get comfortable with being uncomfortable and in doing so, take the risk and go first.

https://www.ted.com/talks/luvvie_ajayi_jones_get_comfortable_with_being_uncomfortable#t-120628

Help Others Learn More

Just as we have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable, we need to help coach our folks in how to have difficult conversations. It's not something that we just know how to do—we have to learn. In this TED Talk Tamekia Mizladi Smith talks about how we can do this—first for ourselves, but then with those we lead. And don't forget to bring food, food, food.

https://www.ted.com/talks/tamekia_mizladi_smith_how_to_train_employees_to_have_difficult_conversations?language=en

Building Trust

In several metareview focus group conversations participants grappled with the lack of trust many feel within the agency. Both trust in "us" and a lack of trust in "them." We know the importance of trust. But what do we do when it's broken? In an eye-opening talk, Harvard Business School professor Frances Frei gives a crash course in trust: how to build it, maintain it and rebuild it, something she worked on during a recent stint at Uber. "If we can learn to trust one another more, we can have unprecedented human progress," Frei says.

https://www.ted.com/talks/frances_frei_how_to_build_and_rebuild_trust

Practicing Empathy

We all come to these conversations with our own lived experiences and those experiences are likely very different. In the Mental Health and Suicide chapter learning challenge, we explore really tough stuff, and we sincerely hope you've never felt the things that Eric shared in his story yourself. However, you not having that experience doesn't diminish his experience.

What is the best way to ease someone's pain and suffering? In this beautifully animated RSA Short, Dr. Brené Brown reminds us that we can only create a genuine, empathic connection if we are brave enough to really get in touch with our own fragilities.

<https://www.thersa.org/video/shorts/2013/12/brene-brown-on-empathy>

What's next?

We hope you have a good experience, maybe not a comfortable experience, but a good one. One that makes your part of the Forest Service just a little bit better. Having the conversation is important, but so too is sharing your experience. At the end of each chapter's learning challenge you'll find a "Team Learning Link" where you can share what your group talked about. Your contributions here won't go into some black hole, but is yet another venue to have your voices heard. I know right now we are asking you to trust us on that. Join the conversation and tell us how it went at by clicking the Lessons Learned Center image below.

