

FRICTION

INTERPERSONAL Disagree Better

The Experiment: One Conversation, Looped

Duration: One week

Time required: One conversation, 30–60 minutes

Goal: This experiment asks you to choose one conversation this week where you know disagreement is present and practice looping deliberately from start to finish, to practice making the other person feel genuinely heard before you ask them to hear you.

Step One: Choose the Conversation

Pick a real disagreement or tension you have been carrying. Not the highest-stakes conflict you can think of—choose something real but navigable. A friction with a colleague. A recurring tension with a team member. Something you have been avoiding or have already handled poorly once.

Before the conversation, write down two things:

1. What is my goal for this conversation—not what I want to win, but what I want to understand?

2. What do I already believe this person thinks or feels—and how certain am I that I am right?

The second question is the more important one. Your assumptions about what the other person means are the primary obstacle to hearing them. Name them before you walk in so you can catch them when they interfere.

Step Two: Run the Loop

In the conversation, commit to the following sequence—in this order, without skipping steps:

- **Listen.** When the other person speaks, track what they are saying and how they are saying it. What words carry the most weight? Where does their tone shift? What are they most animated or most careful about? What are they not quite saying?
- **Paraphrase.** When they have finished, or reached a natural pause, reflect back what you heard in your own words. Be specific. Not “I hear you saying you’re frustrated” but “It sounds like what bothered you most was not being consulted before the decision was made, is that right?”
- **Check.** “Did I get that right?” Then stop talking and listen to their correction or confirmation. Do not add your response or explain yourself. Just receive what they offer.
- **Invite more.** “Tell me more about that.” Or: “What was that like for you?” Or simply: “What else?” Do this at least once before you offer anything from your own perspective.

Only after you have completed the full loop should you begin to share your own view.

Step Three: Debrief

After the conversation, write briefly in response to these questions:

- What did you learn about this person’s experience that you did not know before?

- Where did you feel the pull to skip the loop and defend yourself or offer your own view? What triggered it?

- Did the conversation feel different than your typical pattern in disagreement? What changed—or did not?