

Title:

Advocate Respectfully

Word Count:

380

Summary:

This is one of a series of brief articles on holding difficult conversations. In earlier issues of Ki Moments, I suggested ways to open communications that create mutual respect; we talked about the importance of knowing your purpose for the conversation; and we added Inquiry and Curiosity to our conversational toolbox. Here the topic is Advocacy.

Keywords:

assertiveness, communication skills, holding difficult conversations, respect, advocacy, managing emotions, anger management, conflict management, aikido

Article Body:

This is one of a series of brief articles on holding difficult conversations. In earlier issues of Ki Moments, I suggested ways to open communications that create mutual respect; we talked about the importance of knowing your purpose for the conversation; and we added Inquiry and Curiosity to our conversational toolbox. Here the topic is Advocacy.

Advocacy is the flip side of Inquiry - the opportunity that you open for yourself to tell your story. What can you see from your perspective that they've missed? Can you clarify your position without minimizing theirs? For example: "From what you've told me, I can see how you came to the conclusion that I'm not a team player. And I think I am. When I introduce problems with a project, I'm thinking about its long-term success. I don't mean to be a critic, though perhaps I sound like one. Maybe we can talk about how to address these issues so that my intention is clear."

Tips for sharing your side of things:

- Wait to offer your side until your partner has expressed all his energy on the topic. Check to make sure he's finished.
- Remember your purpose for the conversation. It's easy to get off on tangents, become reactive, and lose your way. Know and return to your purpose at difficult moments.

- Don't assume. When telling your story, go slow, be clear, and don't assume they know what things looks like from your point of view.
- Teach, don't preach. Notice your desire to "sell" your partner on your story. Simply state how things look from your side.
- Listen to yourself and try not to use words that will cause your partner to react defensively. You want him to listen, so use words that he can hear.
- Share facts rather than subjective interpretations. "When you walked by me and didn't say anything" is a fact. "When you ignored me" is a subjective interpretation.

Most important, speak with respect. On the aikido mat, we bow to our partner before beginning and ending each technique. Imagine bowing to your conversation partner before you begin the conversation. As you begin to lose your center, think about this, and remember that you advocate best when you respect your partner's story.

Good luck and good communication!