

MANAGEMENT ENGLISH

9 DISAGREEING

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Ways of Disagreeing

Acknowledge and show understanding of the other person's opinion

- “Graham, that’s a good suggestion. Right now, I feel we need to consider others as well.”
- “I believe there may be a better approach
- “I hear what you are saying and we feel differently. We think the new processes are more efficient.”
- “I really appreciate and respect your point of view. I believe in alternative ways to proceed.”
- “I see this differently Mark, there are new ways to manage this.”
- “I understand your point, thank you for sharing it, I think we can even more effective if we adopt a different approach.”
- “I was in agreement with you until you proposed changing the KPIs.”
- “Interesting, what if we also consider other strategies?”
- “Larry, there could a more efficient way of proceeding.”
- “Marta, I see what you’re saying. On this occasion I think there is an even better way of doing this.”
- “Sorry Ken, I have a different perspective on this issue.”
- “Terry, that sounds good in theory, but that is not what we are seeing in reality.”
- “Thank you for sharing your insights, we have received very different customer feedback.”
- “Thank you for your proposal, nevertheless we have to keep our business with our current supplier.”
- “Thank you, John, that’s a fascinating idea. I would like to share a different view.”
- “That is a good option and I think we can also consider other options.”
- “That plan made a lot of sense up to the point you identified the suppliers.”
- “True, that is a fair point. I must inform you that I disagree given the information I have received.”
- “We understand where you are coming from. Our outlook is different to yours.”
- “We wish that was the case, however it clearly is no longer the case.”

Apologize and disagree

- “Bill, I am sorry, I must disagree with you on this, I think there is a better way to do this.”
- “I’m sorry, I disagree, we have not given up on the goal.”
- “I’m sorry; I do not agree.”
- “My apologies; I respectfully disagree.”
- “Sorry Carl, I don’t think that’s a good idea.”
- “Sorry Jane, I am afraid I disagree with you.”

Express neutrality or uncertainty

- “George, I am not sure I see it that way anymore.”
- “I could be wrong but my understanding is that the supplier actually had achieved their targets.”
- “Let’s move on, I don’t think we’re seeing eye-to-eye on this issue.”
- “Lilly, I don’t think you and I have the same view on this issue.”
- “We have some hesitations about proceeding as per your plan.”
- “Harry, I am not sure we agree with you on the sales plan.”
- “Our CEO is not entirely convinced, I suggest you review your approach.”
- “My concerns are as follows Bill.”
- “I’m not sure whether we can buy in to your strategy.”
- “I partially agree/ partly agree, but...”

Politely disagreeing without saying the other person is wrong

- “If we also think about the competitors’ services, then I think we can see our USP is not clear.”
- “If we look at this from another point of view, we could also say that the tech could be improved.”
- “It appears that your feedback is very different from ours.”
- “What you are proposing does not agree with the data we have.”

Showing strong disagreement with colleague

- “George, I was surprised that you would suggest that.”
- “I really cannot believe you are arguing about this.”
- “I really don’t think you can believe that!”
- “We are convinced that you only proposed that to shock us.”

Disagreeing with a customer or boss

- “(Name) thank you for explaining your reservations, given the information I now have, I would like to explain why we see it differently I would appreciate the chance to share my observations. I recommend that selecting supplier A rather than supplier B will give us better returns and cost savings in the long run.”
- “I appreciate your ideas and feedback, and we are already planning how we will correct the problem and will start work tomorrow. If you can spare a minute, I feel it would be useful for me to provide some background on this which could explain why the delays happened and service standard dropped.”
- “I understand the way you want to proceed on this, I also believe that it’s an important perspective. (Name) I would like to suggest a different approach which I think would be more effective and is in addition cheaper.”
- “I understand your position on this issue; however, I have several concerns on how it will impact on both our budget and overall operations. Could we review some alternatives that could better address these concerns?”

Phrases to use after disagreement

- “Instead, I think we should/could...”
- “My suggestion would be to...”
- “An alternative solution might be...”
- I would recommend that we...
- How about we...
- What do you think about _____ instead?
- If you ask me, I think we should...
- However, in the interest of X, we could...

General Tips on Disagreeing at Work

Consider and plan

The best first step to consider the situation from each involved person's perspective to understand the problem, motivations, expectations and goals. Taking time to plan the objection is critical, including the language and tone to be used. In some situations talking it through with a trusted contact can also be helpful, this does not necessarily mean asking for help but often simply talking it through helps clarify your mind.

Listen actively first by nodding then when you do speak acknowledge and identify a key point (this shows you really were listening) and then make your point.

“Ok Bill, I think I understand your perspective, and I thank you for highlighting the price issue as I am not sure we realized the full implication of that. I would like to share my suggestion for how we could proceed.”

Look for underlying motivation / needs

“I think I see your point of the marketing plan, but please can you explain why you are so focused on the customer profile you are identifying?”

“We understand the goal of the campaign; please can you talk us through the assumptions you have made on the uplift that will be achieved through each advertising initiative?”

Highlight common ground

“I completely agree with how you would like to set the overall KPIs, but I would like to communicate them in a different way to the teams.”

Frame an objection as trying to find a solution

“Would it be a better idea to find a solution that helps both of us?”

Pick your moment

In many cultures public disagreement is very damaging, so privacy is advisable when having a disagreement.

“Jane, please can I suggest we agree to meet in an hour together to resolve this issue away from the others? I am convinced we can resolve this issue satisfactorily.”

Actively accept not getting what you want

“We really do see this very differently Bill, I am prepared to accept we implement your plan as we can not delay any further but ask, we carefully monitor the results.”

Agree to disagree

“We are going round in circles; I do not think we can get past our differing view of the pricing problem. Let’s move on to the next topic and reconvene next week on the pricing.”

Disagree on actions not personality traits

“I do not think you are suitable for handling this issue.” - personality based view.

“I do not think you should handle this issue the usual way.” - behaviour based view.

Take responsibility

“You do not understand my suggestions.” - blaming the other person.

“I do not think I am explaining my suggestions very well.” – taking ownership.

Avoid negative words

Most people respond better to positive words even if used in a negative form.

“I think this is a bad plan.” - negative and less likely to be received well

“I don't think this is such a good plan.” – better and more likely to be received well

Soften with the word ‘sorry’

This is a great word that can defuse tension and create a better atmosphere.

“Sorry (name), but on this occasion I don't agree.”

“Sorry, but can I just add an alternative perspective.”

“Sorry, but I think this is just not possible.”

Have alternatives ready to offer

Before disagreeing ask yourself whether you have a better alternative to offer, if not is now the time to disagree? Sometimes delaying can be more effective.

Avoid arguments over email or message platforms

Very few arguments with either customers or bosses are won when using email. Email and messaging are great for many forms of communication but are rarely useful when disagreement has become an argument. Understanding when a disagreement has escalated to an argument is important and must be managed carefully, appropriately judging when to pick up the phone or physically meet someone is a key skill to develop.

Cultural Differences when Disagreeing

There are clear cultural differences in the way different countries commonly disagree, some are more comfortable with confrontation and others avoid it. Erin Meyer, in her wonderful book 'The Culture Map' identified the differences in approach and then identified which approaches are dominant in each country.

Confrontational disagreeing – here challenging others and disagreeing is both encouraged and expected, this is seen as a way of brainstorming, solving problems / misunderstandings, learning and creating improvements / innovation. The confrontational side of the spectrum is encouraged to challenge ideas in a team, disagree with others as it's perceived more as a way to effectively develop ideas and grow, disagreeing is not inappropriate and will not negatively impact relationship. Open public disagreements are appropriate, created and seen as part of the working process.

Avoids disagreement – confrontation is consciously avoided, and debate is both planned and often managed to keep it under a level of control. Open disagreement is not acceptable, harmony and maintaining relationships is prioritized. Personal offence can be taken instead of ideas or opinions being seen as challenged, the person feels attacked personally.

Confrontational Disagreeing	In Between	Avoids Confrontation
Israel, France, Germany, Russia, Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, Italy and Australia	United States, United Kingdom, Brazil, Singapore, Sweden and Mexico	India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Peru, China, Ghana, Indonesia, Japan and Thailand

Numerous studies have been completed to compare confronting / avoiding disagreement cultures with the dynamic of how expressive cultures are e.g. expressive / unexpressive.

	Confrontational Disagreeing	Avoids Confrontation
Emotionally Expressive	Israel, Russia, France, Spain, Italy and USA	Brazil, India, Mexico, Saudi Arabia and Philippines
Emotionally Unexpressive	Germany, Netherlands and Denmark	United Kingdom, Sweden, Korea and Japan

Erin Meyer's HBR article on this can be seen here - [Getting to Si, Ja, Oui, Hai, and Da \(hbr.org\)](#)

When approaching a disagreement, it can be productive to assess the probable attitude to disagreement and being aware of how it will show itself such that emotions can be managed effectively.

Giving Negative Feedback

Giving feedback to people who share your language, culture and country can often be challenging with people of other cultures and countries, it can be particularly difficult and potentially problematic. People of course are not uniform, but there are common trends across the world regarding how people prefer to receive negative feedback.

Direct negative feedback is delivered in an open, direct and specific way, plus are not surrounded by positive feedback to make it easier to accept. This type of feedback is common and is often given in front of others (please be very careful if ever considering doing this as it could go spectacularly wrong).

Indirect negative feedback differs, it is delivered diplomatically, carefully and with softer tones, plus commonly comes with some positive feedback. When in countries where indirect feedback is the norm, negative feedback should be given 1 to 1 and in private.

<u>Direct Negative Feedback</u>	<u>Mid Negative Feedback</u>	<u>Indirect Negative Feedback</u>
Israel, Russia, Netherlands, Germany, France, Scandinavia, Italy, Spain and Australia	United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico	India, China, Kenya, Ghana, Middle East, China, Japan and Korea

Agree the Rules

When working cross-culturally there are many chances for misunderstanding so often the best strategy is to agree with the rules and agree what you expect from each other and agree the rules for what will happen if either side is offended. It is often helpful to use the following.

“What is important to you in communication and is there anything we should be careful about?”

“I know we are both committed to making this project work and there could be challenges plus stressful situations, how would you like us to give and receive feedback?”

“If I say something that offends you, please can I ask you to help me by explaining it to me such that I can both learn and apologise?”

Feedback is required for improvement so create an environment in which it can safely be given.

Persuading Others

Persuasion is seen as an art rather than a science, it varies across cultures and in business needs to be learnt to build and develop relationships, there is often the risk of disagreement.

Principles-first persuasion starts with statements, facts or an opinion, then ideas or concepts are added to support or explain the conclusion as is required. Messages and reports commonly start with an executive summary or bullet points, discussions are presented and conducted in a clear, specific and practical way. In everyday business discussions which are very theoretical or philosophical are rejected.

Applications-first persuasion starts with developing a theory or complex concept before presenting facts, statements or opinions. Normally messages or reports start with the building up of a theoretical argument before moving to a conclusion, principles in each situation are constantly assessed.

Principles-first	In between	Applications-first
Italy, France, Spain, Russia and Germany	Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Scandinavia and Netherlands	United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and USA

Both ways can lead to success plus they can work well together if a process is established such that they can work their preferred way and meet in agreement at a point.

Principles-first	Applications-first
Create the solution or idea then find the facts to back it up	Find the facts and figures then decide on the theory or idea
Like to understand the 'why' before taking action	More focus on the 'how' than the 'why'
Theories and complex concepts are developed before presenting specific facts or opinions	General conclusions are based on factual findings from the world