



How to hold a challenging conversation

What's coming up?

**Avoid procrastination & making mistakes
– (by understanding the 3 elements of
difficult conversations)**

**What to say: delivering bad news &
saying no**

**Handling heated situations – keeping
your balance and controlling the process**

1. The What Happened? Conversation

This focuses on:

what happened & should have happened

who said/did what

who said/meant what

who is right

who is to blame.

The WH Conversation – a battle of messages



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Underneath the battle of messages...

**Assumption: I know all I need to know to
understand what happened.**

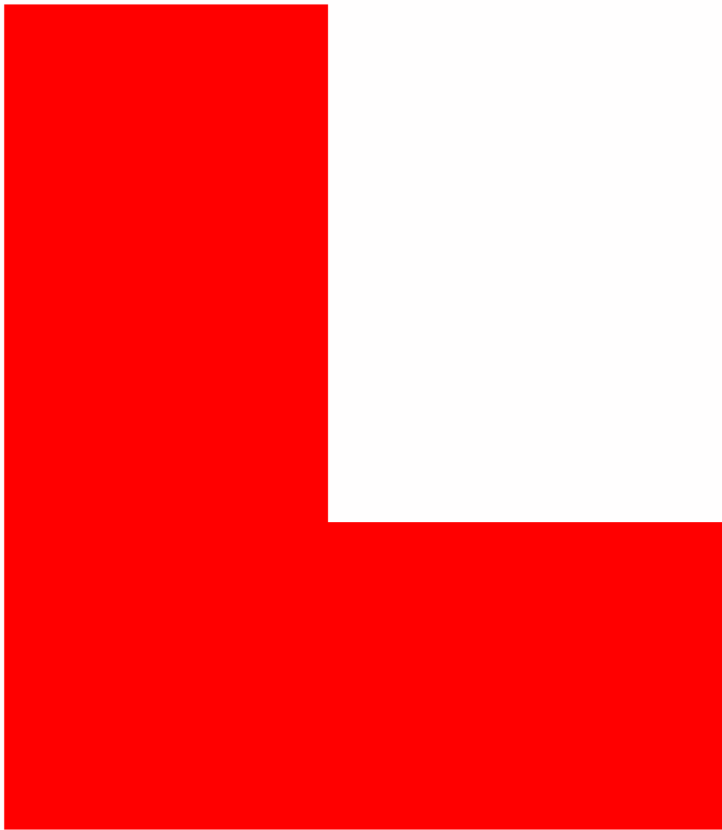
I know what they intended

It's all their fault (or all my fault)

Goal: Persuade them I'm right

Let them know what they did was wrong

**Get them to admit blame & take
responsibility for making amends**



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Underneath the learning conversation...

Assumption: We bring different information and perceptions. There are likely to be important things that neither of us know.

Goal: Explore each other's understanding, reasoning and suggested next steps.

Principle: seek first to understand before being understood.

How a learning conversation can sound...

“Let me check I understand what you’re saying...

You think/feel xxx because of xxx and you would like us to do xxx about it? Is that right?

Ok I understand/ I see what you’re saying”

To help them understand your view...

Prepare & convey 3 things:

1. What do you think/ what's your perspective?

2. Why you think/feel that: Use “I” statements

3. What you suggest you/both do about it.



2. The Feeling Conversation

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Riding emotional waves

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NEOMAMMALIAN

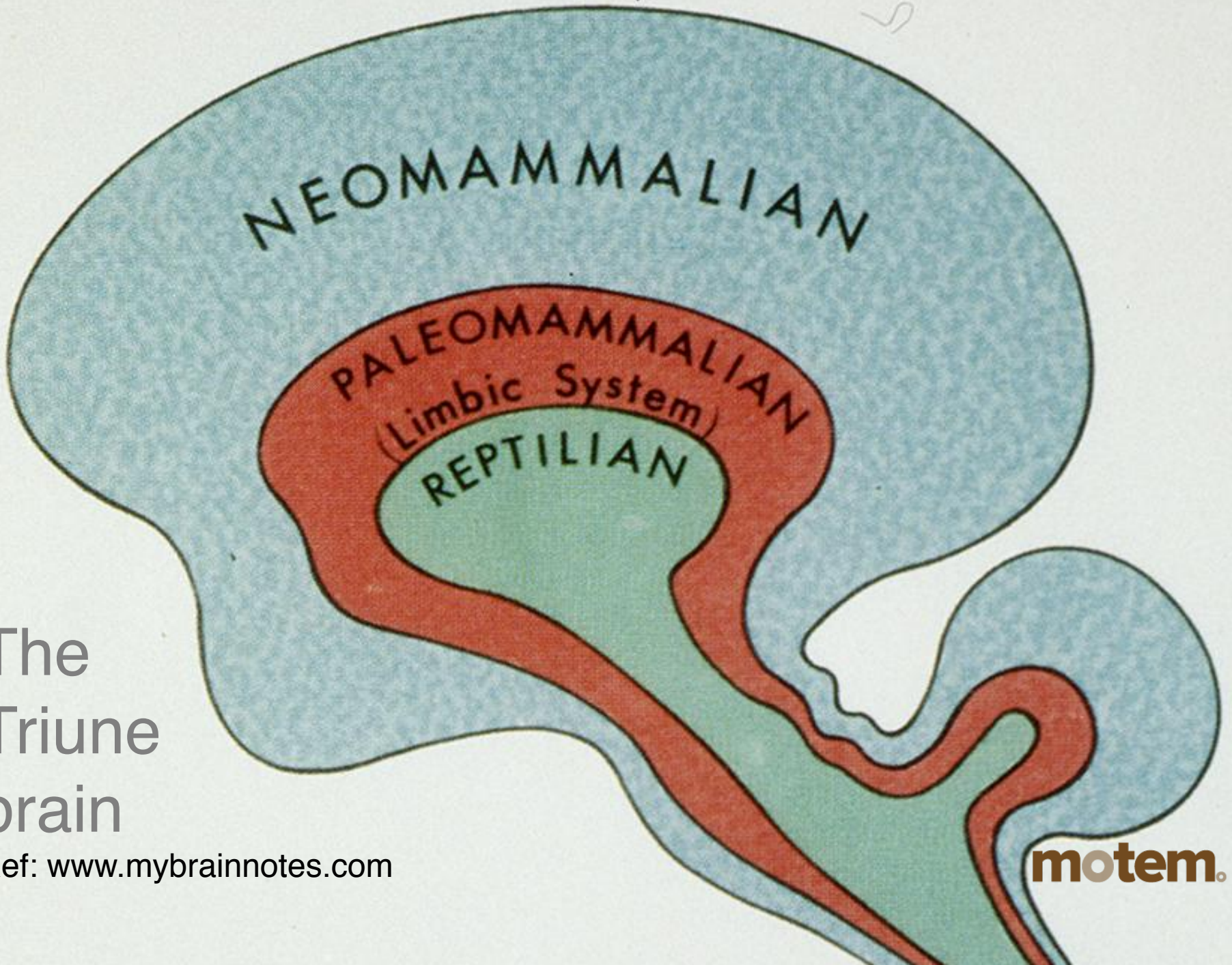
PALEOMAMMALIAN
(Limbic System)

REPTILIAN

The Triune brain

Ref: www.mybrainnotes.com

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**Feelings crave
acknowledgement.**

Acknowledging & handling your strong feelings

Be **aware** of feeling in body: clenching, tightening

Name it to claim it (this is fear/anger)

Allow it move through (accept feelings are natural & normal. Strong feelings only last **15 – 30** seconds)

Breathe deeply (in for 3 out for 6)

Drop the story

Tell yourself: in **this moment I can handle it.**
Feelings can be real but not true

Resist acting upon it in the heat of the moment

Riding emotional waves


Allow them
Breathe – in
for 3 out for 6
Can handle it

Expressing emotion

If you want to express emotion avoid venting and describe carefully eg

“When you say/do..., I feel...”

Not: “You make me feel angry when you swear at me”



When situations
heat up...

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Feelings crave
acknowledgement.
**Acknowledgement is
not the same as
agreement**

How to acknowledge other's feelings

you can say something like:

- I can appreciate this is disappointing for you**
- Yes, I completely understand why you feel angry**
- I can see/hear this is upsetting**
- That sounds like it's come as a shock**
- I realise this isn't what you were hoping for**

A close-up photograph of a man with dark, curly hair and a beard. He is covering his eyes with both hands, with his fingers spread across his forehead. His expression is one of intense distress or embarrassment, with wide, staring eyes and a slightly open mouth. He is wearing a white dress shirt with visible buttons on the cuffs. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**Things to
avoid saying**

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Things to avoid saying

- I know exactly how you feel
- I think you're being unreasonable
- Calm down!
- I understand what you're saying *but*

~~Butts~~

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Better
than
but

And
Yet
Equally
However
At the same time...



3. The Identity Conversation

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Difficult conversations have the potential to disrupt **who we think we are in the world.**

Or to highlight what we **hope we are but **fear** we might not be.**

**3 common identity issues:
Am I competent/incompetent?
A good/bad person?
Worthy /unworthy of love?**



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FRAGILE

How do we stay grounded?



Stay grounded by

- **Becoming aware of your triggers.**
- **Complexify your identity by taking the “And” stance eg:**
- **I am competent **and** I can make mistakes**
- **I am a good person **and** I have to make some unpopular decisions**

recap

- Aim to have a **learning conversation** not a battle of messages – (seek first to understand before being understood);
- **Feelings crave acknowledgement.** Allow them to move through – breath in for 3 out for 6
- **Acknowledge the feelings** in the other person so that they will be **more receptive** to a conversation. Acknowledgement isn't the same as agreeing
- Does this conversation trigger any issues around your competence, goodness, worthiness?
Complexify! Accept you can still make mistakes **and** be competent

reflection

Think back to your last challenging conversation that went badly. Look at it through the lens of the 3 elements – (what happened, feelings, identity), jot down where it went wrong, eg:

Did you get into a battle of messages? If so how?

Did you acknowledge your feelings and theirs? If so how?

Did you feel like at some level your sense of identity was at stake?

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**Delivering
bad news**

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The FEEQ model

Fact

Express your reasons

Empathy

Question

(It's a tool not a rule)

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Delivering bad news: rise in cost

YOU: “We’re looking at £45k this year – which is a result of a combination of factors – including increased legal costs across the sector and some major incidents such as the terrorist attacks. We marketed the risk and this was the best option.” (FACT & EXPRESS)

CLIENT: Sharp intake of breath. “Jeez. I thought your job is to keep my costs down – this is going in the wrong direction, I’m really not happy about this.”

YOU: Yes I can understand it seems unfair as you haven’t had any claims. (EMPATHY)

It’s partly to do with increased legal costs which has had a knock on effect on the whole sector. We could look at doing a few things to bring it down next year, for example... what do you think? (QUESTION/FOCUS ON FUTURE)

A close-up photograph of a person's face, focusing on the forehead and eye area. A hand is placed on the forehead, with fingers slightly spread. The skin is light-toned and shows some texture. The background is solid black. The text "Saying no" is overlaid on the left side, and the "motem." logo is in the bottom right corner.

Saying no

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Saying no

I totally understand why you want me to reduce this premium (**learning conversation**) and I'm afraid that it's not going to be possible (**fact**) for 3 reasons....(**express**)

I realise it's going to be disappointing (**empathy**) and yet it *is* my final decision. What I can suggest is... What do you think? (**question**)

How can you use the FEEQ model to help structure your message?

Fact

Express your reasons

Empathy

Question

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Dealing with angry & aggressive people



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AAA

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AAA – when dealing with an angry client

- **A**cknowledge their perspective: “I see what you’re saying”
- **A**ccept one thing? “I accept your point about...”
- **A**gree where you can: “I agree, we need to work out something fair for everyone here”

What to do when someone says...

“This is all your fault”

Can you help me understand why you think that and what you'd like me to do?

I can see why that makes sense from your perspective. And I agree we need to find a way forward. The way I see it is....

Because.... Therefore what you're suggesting is not possible for a number of reasons . However what we can do is...”

What to do when someone...

Refuses to listen to you/talks over you

Mr xx, I understand why you are so upset, I probably would be too if I was in your position. I'd like to work with you to find a way forward and yet it's very hard to do that when you talk over me. Can I suggest that we talk one at a time so that we can progress this?

What to do when someone says...

**It's gonna be how much?! You've got to
be out of your tiny mind**

**That sounds like it's come as a bit of a
shock to you. Can you help me
understand what you were expecting to
pay?**

What to do when someone...

Starts using lots of jargon that you don't understand and you're not sure how it relates to matter at hand. You think they're doing it to control the negotiation.

I think that we're seeing things differently as I'm not sure how x relates to point y.

Would you explain it in simple terms please? Or else please could you send over your reasons in writing?

What to do when...

You're put on the spot on and you notice
you get flustered.

**“That’s a good question, let me come
back to you”**

**“So you want to know if (repeat their
question)?”**

recap

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- **Acknowledge the feelings** in the other person so that they will be **more receptive** to a conversation. Acknowledge isn't the same as agreeing
- Does this conversation **trigger** any issues around your competence, goodness, worthiness? **Complexify!** You can be competent **and** still make mistakes

Recap: The FEEQ model

Fact

Express your reasons

Empathy

Question

recap

- **When people are angry or aggressive wanting to blame and find fault, don't bite the hook!**
- **Aim to ask questions so that they feel understood. They will then be more likely to listen to you.**
- **Acknowledge, accept, agree**
- **This way you're managing the process not getting sucked into the content**

TO DO LIST

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Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.

Grant me the patience with the changes that take time, an appreciation of all that I have, tolerance of those with different struggles and the strength to get up and try again, one day at a time.

Reinhold Niebuhr

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