



The Art of Disagreement

by

Jeff Heasman MABP, PGCert CELTA, LL.B (Hons), LL.M

Certified Practitioner Member of the Academy of Modern Applied Psychology

Member of the Association for Business Psychology



[linkedin.com/in/jeffheasman](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jeffheasman)

Learning objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- identify why and how disagreements arise.
- understand the key skills that can be learnt to successfully manage disagreements.
- implement a strategy to turn disagreements into a positive outcome for all involved.



Is a disagreement bad?

- Disagreements are not bad but are often unproductive.
- Suppressing disagreements simply leads to problems.
- Open disagreements v hidden disagreements.
- We can learn how to disagree and so:
 - improve our and others' personal mental health
 - encourage creativity and innovation in the workplace
 - grow personally and professionally
 - collaborate



Why disagreements arise

- Something important to us is at risk and emotions are triggered (anxiety). This can trigger fight or flight.
- We want to try and change behaviour and minds of other people (veiled threats / incentives).
- Our freedom appears compromised. Other people are placing unacceptable demands on us.



- We focus on winning rather than a productive outcome.
- A previous disagreement was not properly resolved:
 - the open arguments
 - the hidden arguments
- Something needs our attention.



What ignites a disagreement?

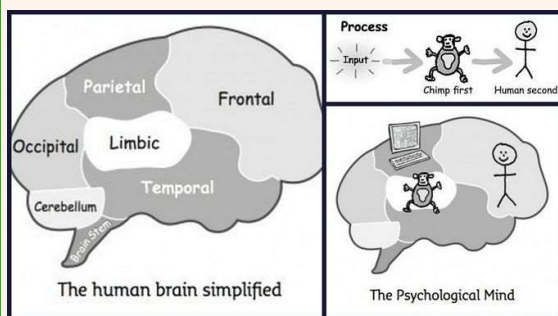
- Anxiety / backstory. A new perspective challenges our own. The problem is that this is subjective.
- A simple association will determine the **automatic** level of response.
- Anxiety is internal, until you choose to make it external.



- What is the source of the anxiety? What is the person worried about?
 - truth – is there a source of information we both trust?
 - meaningful – why is this important?
 - useful – what would happen if we didn't do anything?
- This helps to find the resolution. Your source of anxiety might not be the same. So the disagreement escalates.
- Changing minds v widening perspectives.



- Recognise the chimp inside of you and others.



Talking to yourself

- We must question our own internal voices first because the first reaction will often be fight or flight.
- Our internal voices can be categorised as follows:
 - Power
 - it is an order
 - quick but costly
 - Reason
 - that is not how it is done
 - typically a shortcut and escalates back to the voice of power



➤ **Avoidance**

- I prefer not to discuss this now
- never resolves a situation but consider if the situation is low stakes, otherwise we avoid the disagreement but don't solve the problem

➤ **Possibility**

- what else is possible? / what other evidence can we look for?
- we step back from our initial reactions
- efficiency v effectiveness
- moves towards collaboration and solutions are found



Know your own biases

- There will normally be one or more of the following at play: truth/values and personal taste/practicality
- There are 200+. A typical example is group association.
- Biases can be useful:
 - helps us to filter information/overload is a spark
 - if we can recognise them we can be open to new perspectives and we don't get upset when people point them out
 - honest bias – work to disprove our own bias when your defence mechanism is triggered / don't leap



Think "I" not "you"

- I think is a fact. What anyone else thinks and why is speculation.
- Don't speak or think for other people.
- This reveals the voice of possibility and removes the immediate anxiety.
- Curiosity means we begin to ask questions.
- Invite someone from a group and listen.



Be curious and collaborate

- I think this because + what do you think and why? = reality.
- You are using the voice of possibility.
- This will also reveal if they are relying on a considered position or what may spark an argument.
- Leading questions = the voice of power / reason.
- You don't need to agree to disagree!



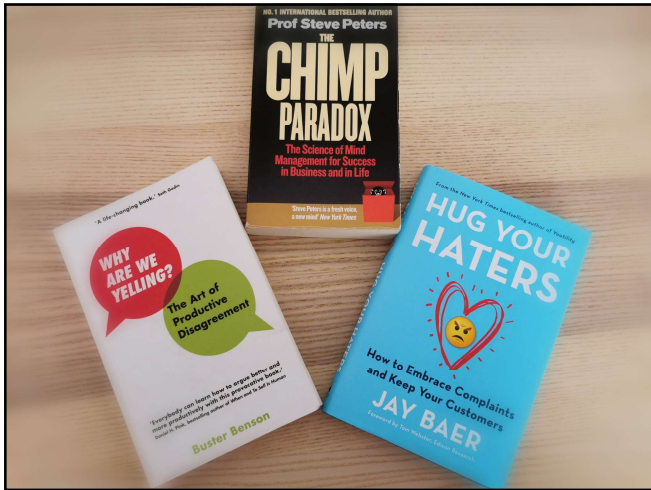
- The end game: what would we have to both do for this not to be an issue anymore? How would we know it is no longer a problem? Which can you agree on?
- "I have this idea, what do you think". The Mom Test.
- You may not reach agreement:
 - but the disagreement will be more productive
 - you will grow and the other person will
 - can you signpost and reinforce the idea of collaboration?



Some special considerations

- Social media:
 - two reply principle. May want an audience, not a reply.
 - respect communication method then try to take behind the scenes.
 - be aware of the physiology of anger.
- Authority
 - emphasise the shared goal.
 - validate original idea.
 - permission.
 - acknowledge their authority.






The Art of Disagreement in Summary

You won't always agree on everything but disagreements can always be productive!

- See disagreements as necessary and positive.
- Recognise what ignites disagreements.
- Talk to yourself and listen to the voice of possibility.
- Know your biases and filter down to the honest biases.
- Don't speculate. "I" not "you".
- Be curious.
- Collaborate.



Restatement of learning objectives

During this session we have:

- identified why and how disagreements arise.
- understood the key skills necessary to successfully manage disagreements.
- assessed how to implement a strategy to turn disagreements into a positive outcome for all involved.

