



John Sturrock Podcast

(transcript)

Better Conversations, Better Outcomes

Dealing with Difficult Situations - Session 1: AARREE (part 1)

Conflict is a fact of life. There will always be difficult situations in which people will hold strong and differing views. These situations can be a source of real tension especially when people are operating under considerable pressure. It is so easy for relationships and communication to break down.

So, how might that be avoided – or at least minimised?

Let me suggest an idea.

Often, if we are in a conflict situation we will have heard something with which we fundamentally disagree. Our instinct then is to set out our contrary view and to do so quite assertively, to get our point across. We think that is the only way to be heard.

The trouble with that is that this may simply provoke the other person to be, or seem, equally robust in response. Starting positions are simply reinforced. It is harder to back down then for fear of losing face. This is not unusual and nothing to be ashamed of. It is the way we are wired.

In mediation my most used tool to help in this sort of situation is a mnemonic with six letters in it. **AARREE**.

I invite people with whom I am working to use this to help manage their response to a situation. Often it will be when someone is angry, or upset, or appears to criticise you, or simply disagree with you.

I suggest in that situation, rather than setting out your own position, you try to find words which do these six things:

- **Acknowledge** the other person's point of view
- **Accept** that this is how they see it from their perspective
- **Recognise** the impact on them and what they are trying to do
- **Reassure** them that you respect them and want to find a way to deal with the situation
- **Engage** with them on a human level
- **Explain** your point of view and why you have reached it

AARREE is a framework, not a straitjacket. However, the order is important. You will still get your point across and may still need to take a decision which the other person doesn't like. But they will feel respected, valued and listened to because you have addressed their perspective first.

To do this, just pause before speaking and let your mind formulate the right words using AARREE as a guide. It could make all the difference.