

**Navigating Challenging Work Environments:  
Thoughts on working with members, supervisors, staff, and the general public  
AUUA Meeting, June 24, 2020  
Reverend Sharon K. Dittmar, Congregational Life MidAmerica Region of the UUA**



The Association of UU Administrators is a professional association of over 200 UU administrators from 39 states and 3 Canadian provinces. Through our annual Professional Days trainings, regional and cluster meetings, listserv, and Facebook group, we have been building ways to promote and strengthen Unitarian Universalism through effective administration since 1982.



**[auua.org](http://auua.org)**



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## **This Workshop Briefly Addresses\*:**

- Working with Members
- Working with Supervisors and Staff Colleagues
- Challenges of Working with the General Public
  
- Cultural competency and difference
  
- Communication tips for challenging conversations
- Giving and Receiving Feedback
  
- Managing Up
- Getting aligned with supervisors, staff, and teams
  
- Managing/documenting bullying, disrespectful, threatening behaviors
  
- and your choices and role



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*\*Slides and resources will be made available to all participants*



## Thoughts on Identity, Relationships, and Power

This workshop will resonate differently with people depending on your identities, relationships and power dynamics. Not all presented options will work for all people or situations.



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## Members Are

Often committed, loyal, hard working, insightful, generous as well as:

Unsupervised  
Untrained  
Unaccountable  
Unevaluated



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## Of Supervisors and Supervision:

- Supervision is one of the hardest tasks anyone can do
- Supervisors are often untrained
- Seminary does not train clergy to supervise and most people in all roles learn on the job
- Congregations often lack job descriptions, goal alignment, and review systems
- Congregations have uneven hiring policy and practices
- Many congregations lack an HR or Personnel Committee
- Congregational members who are staff members are often conflicted and easily placed in situations where they are asked for more than is possible, unable to distinguish which role they are filling when, prone to confidentiality breaches, and divided in loyalties and confidences.

But you can take courses to get better:

**The Management Center** <http://www.managementcenter.org/trainings/>



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## To Normalize Who Humans Are:

### Mental Health

- 1 in 5 adults in America experience a mental illness
- 1 in 25 adults in America live with a serious mental illness

Humans have differences in processing, communicating, cognition, language and perception

- 16 million Americans have cognitive impairment (CDC)
- 15% of veterans have auditory processing disorder
- 17% children aged 3-17 have developmental disabilities (CDC)
- 1 out of 54 children identified with autism spectrum disorder (CDC)

It is unhelpful to diagnose people, but we can note and document behavior and ask for help from others as we navigate behaviors we do not understand or that we find challenging.



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## Thoughts on Culture and Communication

White supremacy culture is conflict avoidant and lacks experience with holding difficult conversations

Americans have different understandings about how to negotiate difference and what is discussable when – and there are significant cultural and ethnic differences (ex: direct, indirect, expressive, non-expressive, etc.)

Any work you can do to improve your cultural competence, awareness and humility will benefit you

**Intercultural Development Inventory** - <https://idiinventory.com>  
(online classes now available)



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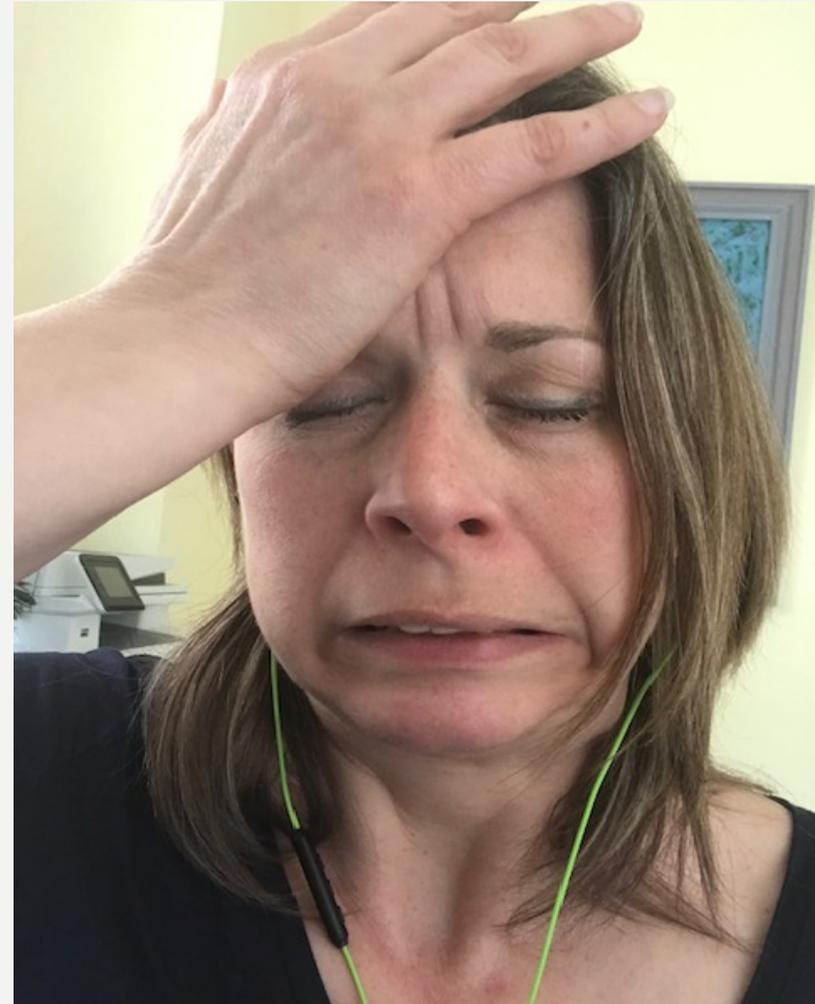
## Three Things to Accept about Yourself:

1. You will make mistakes
2. Your intentions are complex
3. You (might) have contributed to the problem

From *Difficult Conversations*



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## Difficult conversations are three conversations:

1. What happened?
2. The Feelings Conversation
3. The Identity Conversation



- Collecting stories of what happened does not necessitate blame and it can reveal different understandings, concerns, and perspectives
- Unexpressed feelings make it difficult to listen and learn (what are your feelings?)
- Become Aware of your Identities (am I competent, good, worthy of love +)



Excerpted from ***Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most***  
*Which includes a graph at the end for you to use prior to having a difficult conversation*

Also see Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Ted Talk "The Danger of A Single Story"



## DICEY Feedback

**Diversity**

**Inclusion**

**Culture**

**Equity**

**You**

“DICEY feedback is often a clue that tells you there’s an “iceberg,” where the problem on the surface is attached to a larger, multi-layered, and complex issue. How you engage with that staff member who raised the concern and how you tackle the issue they raise could have significant implications not just for your working relationship, but also your organization’s equity and inclusion journey and overall effectiveness.”

**The Management Center**

<http://www.managementcenter.org/article/how-to-spot-dicey-feedback/>



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## Most Productive Feedback

Timely (within a week or less)

Direct

Private

Pre-practice, speak with a  
thought partner  
or use the ***Difficult  
Conversation*** worksheet



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## Give More and Better Feedback with CSAW

- C** – Connect over a shared value
- S** – Share specific observation
- A** – Ask questions
- W** – Wrap up with next steps



### The Management Center

<http://www.managementcenter.org/article/give-more-and-better-feedback-with-csaw/>



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## Thoughts on Blame

Hinders problem solving  
Often keeps ineffective systems in place  
Looks back ward instead of forward  
Indicates anxiety in a system  
Can prevent productive change



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## Getting Aligned

- What success will look like (ask: What will success look like? What are the ideal outcomes?)
- What the constraints on and resources for the project are
- How to prioritize the work (What priority is this task compared to other tasks?)
- How to keep your manager engaged and informed (what will be your plan for report?)
- How you'll know if you're on the right track (How often and when will you check in?)
- When and how to debrief after a project is completed



From The Management Center - <http://www.managementcenter.org/resources/getting-aligned/>



## Managing Up Phrases (excerpt from the Management Center)

<http://www.managementcenter.org/resources/managing-phrases/>

### **If your manager frequently cancels meetings with you...**

- Say, “I know you’re really busy – but can I talk to your assistant and get 10 minutes on your calendar?”
- Consider asking to move your check-in to a time they are less likely to cancel.
- Send an agenda to your manager ahead of time as a reminder of the meeting and to demonstrate respectful use of their time with pressing issues.
- Anticipate that they’re likely to cancel your meeting tomorrow and, as a safety measure, grab them for two minutes to ask your most pressing question.

### **If your manager doesn’t get back to you about work you send them for input/approval...**

- Say, “I know you get a ton of emails and documents for review. Is there a way for me to make it easier for you to give input? I was thinking it might be easier to review if I brought it to our meetings, or maybe there’s some of it that I can move forward with on my own.”



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## Department of Labor Workplace Violence Program (Excerpt June 2020)

<https://www.dol.gov/oasam/hrc/policies/dol-workplace-violence-program.htm>

### Level One (Early Warning Signs)

The person is:

- intimidating/bullying
- discourteous/disrespectful
- uncooperative
- and/or verbally abusive.

### Response When Early Warning Signs Occur at Level One

Observe the behavior in question.

**Report** concerns to your supervisor to seek help in assessing/responding to the situation. If the offending employee is the reporting employee's immediate supervisor, the employee should notify the next level of supervision. If the offending person is not an employee, the supervisor of the employee reporting the incident is still the appropriate individual to receive and provide initial response.



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**Document** the observed behavior in question.  
Supervisor should **Meet** with the offending employee to discuss concerns.

Follow these procedures:

- Schedule private time and place.
- Coordinate any necessary union participation.
- Get straight to the point.
- Ask the employee for his or her input.
- Ask the employee what should be done about the behavior.
- Ask how you can help.
- Identify the performance and/or conduct problems that are of concern.
- Identify the steps you would like to see to correct problems.
- Set limits on what is acceptable behavior and performance.
- Establish time frames to make changes and subsequent consequences for failing to correct behavior and/or performance.
- Department's policies.



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## Resources for Support

### Intercultural Development Inventory

<https://idiinventory.com>

### Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most

by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen

### Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work & in Life, One Conversation at a Time

by Susan Scott

### Your congregation's Employee Handbook and Policies

(particularly disruptive behavior and sexual harassment/abuse)

### UUA Sample Personnel Policy Manua

<https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/personnel-manual>.



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## Resources for Support

**UUA Human Resources** (Job Descriptions, Salary, Benefits)

<https://www.uua.org/offices/staff/hr>

**The Management Center**

<http://www.managementcenter.org>

**Managing to Change the World: The Nonprofit Manager's Guide to Getting Results**

by Alison Green and Jerry Hauser

**When Moses Met Aaron: Staffing and Supervision in Large Congregations**

by Gil Rendle & Susan Beaumont

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<https://www.dol.gov/oasam/hrc/policies/dol-workplace-violence-program.htm>



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