

## Productive Business Dialogue

Productive business dialogues are conversations that are fact based, minimize defensiveness, and draw out the best thinking from everyone involved. They are reflective of sharp critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and a spirit of openness and collaboration. What they do is encourage collaboration and creativity and open up individual and organizational learning and innovation. They require us to “know our stuff” and to take responsibility for truly understanding others’ thinking and point of view.

Emotional state or ‘frame of mind’ is crucial when it comes to engaging in productive business dialogue. Think of the last time you were in dialogue with someone else and thought you were ‘right’. Recall how, in this frame of mind, you were driven to influence others to your way of thinking – or getting them to realize what you ‘already know’. Dialogue is two way. Yet under these circumstances, it feels very one way. The whole point in having productive business conversations is to promote mutual learning; but you have to approach it with the right frame of mind.

### Evaluating The Effectiveness Of Your Business Dialogue Skills

Take a few minutes to reflect after a meeting you really hoped to have a positive impact. Put your ‘critic’s’ hat on and retrace your thinking steps. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What data did you come with?
- Where you clear on what was important to focus on?
- Did you focus on what is going well, rather than on what is wrong?
- During the meeting, what filters did you put on (i.e. a negative one?)?
- What assumptions and presuppositions did you make?
- In the end, how well did you understand others’ thinking?
- Was the outcome of high quality?

Once you have mastered your own thinking processes and understand your own conclusions and the patterns on which you base them, you are ready to share your thinking with others. (adapted from Chris Argyris)

### How to maintain the right ‘frame of mind’ for productive conversations

- See every conversation as an opportunity to learn and promote mutual learning
- Assume you may be missing things others see, and seeing things others miss
- Stay curious. Assume others are acting in ways that make sense to them