



# The Art of Disagreement

by

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## 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.



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## 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



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## 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.



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- 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.



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## 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.



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➤ 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.



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### 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



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- 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



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## 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



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## 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.



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## 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!



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- 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?




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## 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.




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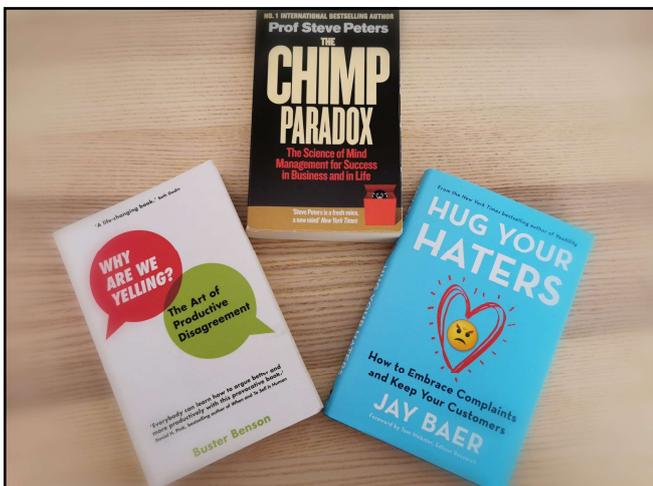
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## The Art of Disagreement in Summary

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.



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## 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.



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