

Challenging Conversations

Hamline University School of Law

Dispute Resolution Institute

Professor Michael Tsur, Adv.

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Course Syllabus

July 13 & 14, 2013 9:00 am- 4:30 pm

1 law school credit

Course Description

This course challenges students to master key communication and conflict processing skills. Negotiating when we are personally and emotionally involved is one of our greatest challenges. But is it possible “not” to be involved? Can we “check our feelings at the door?” Communication skills, like handling challenging conversations, allow negotiation to happen, and help us get back on track when things get stuck. The course methodology is based on the book Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most¹ authored by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen from the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School. We will focus on two skills dimensions: “internal skills” - the ability to work with your thoughts and feelings before and during a conversation; and “external skills” - the things we need to say and do in a conversation to help it go better. Mastering these skills offers the possibility of negotiation success even when your negotiating partners do not share your aspiration to collaborate.

Course Format

The course is constructed as an intensive workshop, including group discussions, simulations, and challenging conversations set in a wide variety of contexts.

Course Reading Materials:

Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen, DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS, HOW TO DISCUSS WHAT MATTERS MOST, ISBN-13: 978-0143118442, (Penguin, 2010).

Please read the entire book before the first class session.

Academic Rule AR-105(B)(8):

A student who does not take a scheduled examination will receive a grade of "F" for that examination, unless properly excused. In addition, any student who does not turn in a required paper on the scheduled date will receive a grade of "F" for that paper, unless properly excused. Failure to meet any course requirement can be the basis for a final grade of "F" in the class, unless properly excused.

¹ "Difficult Conversations (R)" is a registered trademark of "Difficult Conversations Associates."

Class Contents and Schedule:

Saturday, July 13, 2013, 9:00 am-4:30 pm (including breaks mid-morning, for lunch, and mid-afternoon)

- My Challenging Conversation
- Challenging Conversation's Definition
- The Three Inner Dimensions
- Internal Skills - The Five Shifts
- Preparation Stage
- Exercise : Preparing to a Challenging Conversation
- Conducting a Challenging Conversation
- External Skills - Opening Sentence

Sunday, July 14, 2013, 9:00 am-4:30 pm (including breaks mid-morning, for lunch, and mid-afternoon)

- Stories Exchange – Inter-Active Listening+ simulation
- Stories Exchange – Framing, Re-framing and Transparency
- The Problem-Solving Process
- Method Implementation

Course Grading Policy:

1. Attendance and Meaningful Participation (25% of course grade)

Class participation is an **integral** part of the learning process in this course. It includes mandatory attendance, preparation for and participation in class exercises, and active participation in class discussions.

2. Written Assignments and Oral/Video Summary (75% of course grade)

There are two required writing assignments (the second of which includes the requirement to orally present a summary (either on video or audio tape):

a) After the first session the students will be required to write a one page personal reflective essay on the session materials and simulations (1 pg., double-spaced, 12 point font, with standard margins). Bring your essay to the second class. This essay is worth 15% of the course grade

b) Final assignment- an analytical report on a personal experience regarding the implementation of the challenging conversation suggested method: from preparation, to learning stage, until the conclusions (6-8 pages, double-spaced, 12 point font, with standard margins). You must also orally "present" your report either on video or audio tape.² This written analytical report and oral summary is worth 60% of the course grade and is due **Monday, July 29**. Further information regarding preparation and submission of your final assignment will be provided during the last class session.

² More detailed information about acceptable media formats will be provided during the first class.