

Delicate Issue Chart Instructions

Reflect upon your interactions with friends, significant others, a boss or colleague, your spouse or children... What are the conversations or issues, (topics you should have a conversation about...) which you're avoiding, delaying, postponing, or simply not raising? This is an ideal tool for conversations/situations where you are uncomfortable and stakes are high.

Part I – « Avoidance »

Box 1a: Context/Situation

Describe the context and/or the conversation.

What is the conversation about?

Box 1b: What's at Stake?

What's at stake in this situation/conversation?

Be specific vs. general. What are the potential consequences of avoiding the conversation or issue (for me, my entourage, the company, etc.)?

What do you want? (for you, others, the situation)

Box 2: Explanations/Justifications/Rationale

What easy excuse do you give yourself for why you have not yet had this conversation or why you avoid this issue?

Box 3a: Underlying Concerns (fears, worries, anxieties)

What's holding you back? Behind your easy excuses, what are you afraid of? What might happen or how might you feel if you brought up the topic and had the conversation?

CHECK: Are you feeling the anxieties or are you just writing them as an intellectual exercise? The leverage in this tool comes with connecting emotionally with it.

Box 4a: Optimal Behavior

What "should" I do? What is the "right" way to handle this situation?

Box 5a: Behaviors

You are not having the conversation, so what you are doing instead? How are your fears, concerns, anxieties (box 3a) impacting your behavior with/around the person or with others? How do you "avoid?" These are knee-jerk counterproductive behaviors.

Box 6a: Benefits

What are the benefits of avoiding the conversation/situation? What ego benefits do you achieve from the behaviors in box 5a?

Box 7a: Costs

What are the costs of avoiding the conversation? What are the costs of your behaviors in box 4a? Capture the costs for you, for the other person, for the relationship, for your common goals, etc. Are there consequences over time if you continue to interact with the person in this way?

Conclusion Part I – « Avoidance »

1- Avoiding delicate conversations may allow us to keep nice and harmonious relationships on the surface with people but it has major costs.

In the same way, we may thrive on “telling it like it is” and hurt people’s feeling but that has major costs.

2- Behind our usual explanations and justifications for our behavior, there are often more emotional drivers (i.e., fears) that are more difficult to acknowledge and hold us back.

3- It is difficult to acknowledge these fears because we feel vulnerable.

4- A major cost is that we increase the probabilities of the worst happening and create what we are the most afraid of through avoidance.

5-Avoidance is not the solution!!!

Part II – « The Flip Side of our Behavior »

At this point, we have begun to identify an automatic response in our communication. We may think that we should have the conversation, even want to have it, and yet we delay or avoid doing so because of our fears. We want to avoid the discomfort of these conversations to the point that we usually don’t admit, even to ourselves, the real reason we are not doing it. **Let’s imagine that you decide to have the conversation now...**

Box 3b: Anxieties/Fears Once I have started the Conversation

You are now in the conversation - what fears/anxieties do you have? What do you anticipate may happen?

Box 4b: Optimal Behavior

What is the “right” way to handle this conversation? How “should” I behave in the conversation?

Box 5b: Behaviors

Describe how the fears you listed in 3b are likely to influence your behavior?

Would you come across harsh or off? How about tentative, apologetic, awkward?

When we are overcoming fears and years of habits, we usually do not behave in a perfectly centered fashion. Search to see how you would be (or are, since we often manage to do the opposite) in these moments.

Usual Reaction	Opposite Reaction
I don't say anything or I sugar coat my feedback to others.	I say what I think no matter what, I do not care how they feel about it.
I am too flexible and vague; I don't take a stand on issues.	I'm overly rigid or harsh – I leave little or no space open for others' points of view.
I get mad at the other person and tell them what they should do.	I restrain myself, force myself to be quiet and let things pass.

Box 6b: Benefits

What are the benefits you get from the behaviors in box 5b?

Box 7b: Costs / Consequences

What are the consequences or impacts of your behavior in box 5b? Capture the impacts to you, the other person, your relationships, the situation, your goals, etc.

Include the dissatisfactions that you are likely to feel during the situation or afterwards in thinking about how it went when you take the risk to step out of avoidance? How do you feel at the end? In situations like these, what are your typical dissatisfactions at the end? (May also be in terms of the final result, performance, collaboration, quality of the communication, how you feel during the event)

Conclusion Part II – « The Flip Side »: Being stuck

- 1- Either I avoid raising issues, or I address them ineffectively (awkwardly or aggressively). In both cases, I have fears (emotionally charged fears) and they play an important role.
- 2- The result is that, in the long run, I contribute to create what I fear the most.

“Damned if I do / Damned if I don't”

Part III – « Image Management »

Let's apply Image Management to our Delicate Issue.

Box 8a: Desired Images

How do you want to appear in this situation/conversation? How would you like others to perceive you or think of you?

Box 8b: Dreaded Images

How do you absolutely dread appearing to others in this situation/conversation? What do you not want others to think of you or judge you?

Box 9a: Behaviors – What do I do?

What are you likely to do to make sure you appear as your **desired** images?

Box 9b: Behaviors – What do I do?

What are you likely to do to make sure they don't see you like (or you don't expose) your **dreaded** images?

Box 9c: Behaviors – What do I avoid doing?

What are you likely to AVOID doing to make sure you appear as your **desired** images?

Box 9d: Behaviors – What do I avoid doing?

What are you likely to AVOID doing to make sure they don't see you as your **dreaded** images?

SHIFT

Box 10: Goal(s)

What is your goal for this conversation?

Contribution Goal –	Learning Goal –
What purpose is it serving me to have this conversation? Who do I want to do this for and why? <i>Unintentional purpose/something larger than me</i>	How is having this conversation a meaningful opportunity for me? What can I learn? How do I want to grow through the situation?

Box 11: Practice(s)

IF/WHEN you see yourself falling back into one of the counterproductive behaviors (that you have identified in 5a/5b) THEN what can you practice instead? What can you practice in advance to avoid falling into these behaviors?