Turning Difficult Conversations into Opportunities

Arden M. Morris, MD, MPH
Professor of Surgery
Stanford University
Disclosures

• No financial disclosures
• Epiphanies are hard-earned
• I love pie
A page from the Dimick playbook
Ingredients of a negotiation

• **Definition**: Communication about a conflict over resources or relationships
• **Preparation**: Reflection and reconnaissance
• **Goal**: Win the best deal possible!
Negotiation 101

- Assess: current, desired, alternative
- Prepare: define/ prioritize
- Adopt a powerful mindset
- Ask: anchor the offer vs respond
- Package: all the pieces on the table

➢ Best strategy ever: Make a bigger pie!
Difficult conversations: a little more nuanced

• How do you define?
• Emo > logic; uneven power; misaligned expectations
• How do you know if you’re about to be in one?
Recognize conflict behaviors

- Emotional overload — attack mode, freeze mode
- Silent resentment — dream of future revenge
- Interactive — speak and listen
Managing the conversation

- Be clear about the issue(s) and know your objective
- Mindset of inquiry and statement of facts
- Acknowledge emotions and allow silence
- Preserve the relationship
- You’ve already had lots of practice
What about opportunities?

- Resources (i.e., increase productivity/ work-time)
- Professional growth
- New or deeper relationships
- Personal growth
- Difficult conversations threaten known opportunities
How to recognize new opportunities?

• Define your big mission
• Discuss with others
• Anticipate your counterpart’s mission
• Brainstorm (don’t analyze) opportunities that
  – Could fulfill both
  – Bridge the gap between here & where you want to be
Unsalvageable situations

• How to recognize
• What to avoid
• When to cut and run

• Personal M&M
• Preserve the relationship ≠ Be a push-over
Putting it all into practice

“In theory there is no difference between theory and practice; in practice there is.”

• Prepare when possible
• Practice situation awareness
• Common ground / $\Psi$ safety
• Reflect and keep communicating
• Brainstorm the strategies; focus on the objective
Bon appetit!