



John Sturrock Podcast

(transcript)

Better Conversations, Better Outcomes

Dealing with Difficult Situations - Session 2: AARREE (part 2)

I'd like to follow up on my previous discussion of the idea of **AARREE**. Someone has asked if that six-part mnemonic might be condensed into a three parter and I have a suggestion about that which I'll come back to in my next piece.

First though, let's take an example of how you might use AARREE. Acknowledgement, acceptance, recognition, reassurance, engagement and explanation.

I should add here that sometimes I find that I need to change engagement and use exploration instead. It's the same idea but sometimes we need to find out a bit more from the other person before it's time to set out how we see things in our explanation. Understanding is crucial as always. That's something I'll come back to when we talk about questions - and how to ask really good ones to really understand what is going on.

So, back to that example of AARREE as I have seen it in my mediation work: let's take one from the family world.

The setting: Two brothers run a family business. They haven't spoken for months. They had a spat about some issue or other and things were said that shouldn't have been said. Both are proud and each carries baggage from years ago. However, their total lack of communication is harming the business and the rest of the family too. Their children don't mix. Their mother, in her eighties, is distraught that it should come to this. The staff are perplexed.

Let's assume they've set aside a day to work with a mediator. We've reached a stage in the mediation process where the younger brother who has always felt imposed upon by his older brother has said what he thinks. It's been fairly forceful. The language was choice. Older brother has heard about being a cheat, feelings of rejection, victimisation....and much worse....

The older brother now has a choice. He could respond in kind, which would be a natural reaction as the desire to fight fire with fire takes hold. It's emotional stuff. But, as with all fires, that would mean that the conflagration would just grow and spread – and cause greater damage.

Or he can pause and change the dynamics. Do something different, unexpected. Find a way of breaking the cycle. It's cycle of violence really, even if it's just violence done by words. After some private time and a conversation with the mediator, here is roughly what he said, somewhat condensed by me for this exercise:

"I've tried to listen to you really hard. It's not easy to hear. I think I can begin to understand how you feel. I accept that you see things in your way and that is different from mine. It's obviously had an impact on you and our relationship over the years in ways I have not appreciated. I want this to be better. The business is important to us both. Even more so the family. I am willing to do what I can to see what we can change. And how I can change. But I want to understand more and we need to talk more. I've also got my own things to say. I need to tell you that when..." And so on.

Note that the actual words represented by AARREE are not necessary. It is the sentiment and the tone that matters – and the order. Let's go through it again.

So, there we have AARREE in action. Next time, I'll offer a condensed version in 4 parts.

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