

## The 3x3 Approach to Win-Win Conversations

*“One of the Biggest Mistakes We Make is Thinking Other People Think the Way We Think.”*

*Laura Lanham, CMCS, ACC*

We all have those frustrating conversations that lead nowhere. What we get out of the actual conversation is far from what we intended. We hope to get some answers and often leave frustrated when we don't. It doesn't have to be that way for either side. Hopefully, following this simple guide can create positive outcomes for both participants, a win-win.

This approach will not only help change the outcomes of your conversations, you will also walk away with more clarity and direction. It requires you to remember 3 skills, 3 questions and 3 steps. The skills that need to be practiced are **Preparation, Listening** and **Summarizing**. The questions you need to ask should answer **What, Why** and **How**. The steps you need to apply these are **Before, During** and when **Ending the conversation**.

The following are two common scenarios clients are often challenged with. Both can follow the 3 x 3 Approach with successful outcomes.

- 1) *“My boss doesn't give me any feedback on my performance. I leave meetings wondering what I'm doing wrong to not earn a promotion.”*
- 2) *“Every time I ask my son anything about school, he gets angry and avoids talking all together. I can't figure out what is bothering him.”*

### **Before** the Conversation:

First things first, **PREPARATION** is a key skill to guiding the conversation. Always prepare before beginning a difficult conversation, if possible. To do this, you need to reflect on what and why you are wanting this conversation to happen.

Ask yourself: **What** do I want to get out of this conversation?

*Boss- I want to know what I need to do and how long I need to wait to get the promotion I have been working toward.*

*Son- I want to know what specifically bothers him when I bring up school.*

Then ask: **Why** is this important to me?

*Boss- I am always getting good reviews and have been doing the functions of the position for 2 years. I should have been promoted by now.*

*Son- School is important for academic and social well-being. If he is struggling, I'm*

worried he is not happy or might be in trouble.

### **During** the Conversation:

Now that you have prepared what YOU want out of the conversation, you also need to prepare how you will ask the questions. Know that what you hear from the other person can change the trajectory of the outcome. The key here is to ask them those same two questions but really **LISTEN** to their perspective. You often need to ask more than one question, here are some examples.

First, you want to determine: **What** is their perspective of the topic you are addressing?

*Boss- What am I doing well? What do I need to do more of? What is keeping me from getting this promotion?*

*Son- What is happening at school? What are you struggling with?*

(\*Notice these are all open-ended questions to get them to talk about it.)

Second, you want to identify: **Why** are they feeling that way?

*Boss- What examples can you give me? What would I be doing different at that level of performance?*

*Son- What are you feeling before (during, after) school? What would be an ideal school day for you?*

### **Ending** and Following-Up:

This is where we take both perspectives and create an outcome that is mutually beneficial. Let them share what they think will work first and build on that.

You ask: **How** can we achieve the desired outcome (promotion, liking school better)?

*Boss- What are specific actions I can work on? What would be the desired outcome?*

*Son- What would make you like school better? What is an area you can change that you have control over?*

Finally, **SUMMARIZE**. This step is so important and often missed. It ensures the two of you are on the same page and will take steps toward the solution. It should be done at the end of the conversation but ALSO, send an email or text so you have it in writing and as a reminder. Here are some examples for both scenarios.

*Boss-*

*Thank you for meeting this morning. It was helpful to hear what I can do to earn the promotion. I have outlined specific steps we talked about below. I too, hope this frees up some of your time and helps clients build more trust with me. When can we revisit to see how I have applied the feedback?*

*Son-*

*I enjoyed our talk last night. I am sorry you are struggling with making new friends. I agree it's hard to fit in as a freshman at a new school. I think that the idea you had to meet a couple of your soccer teammates for lunch after the game on Sat sounds great. I will provide the rides. I hope you know you can always talk to me.*

This method is simple but remembering to use it in the moment can be difficult. Unfortunately, conversations don't always happen when we expect them to. When this happens, we can get flustered and let our emotions get in the way. Don't get discouraged. Visit this method afterward, and reflect on what you did well and how you can improve next time. Eventually, a blend of your own style with this approach will become habit. Over time, you'll see yourself making small changes and getting better results.