



Brave Conversations: Course Overview

Brave Conversations teaches individuals to surface, clarify and resolve micro aggressions, reset expectations and maintain the relationship **in real-time**.

The Scenario

- ❖ An individual receives a triggering comment, request, or feedback that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- ❖ The stakes are high (their job, safety, reputation, ability to perform and succeed could be at risk)
- ❖ There is often a **power differential** (boss and direct report) or biases (in-group/out-group, race, gender, etc...) that condition thoughts and behavior within the organization's culture.
- ❖ They cannot easily withdraw.
- ❖ Their conditioned reaction is to 'freeze,' defend themselves and/or attack the aggressor

A common scenario: an attending physician flirts with a medical student.

This Training

- ❖ Brave Conversations present an actionable framework for conducting difficult conversations in real-time.
- ❖ The training is 20% theoretical, 80% practical.
- ❖ Participants roleplay real scenarios drawn from their own experience in a safe setting.
- ❖ The framework and training is grounded in 'script theory.' Script theory sees microaggressions as triggered by biases, and biases as embedded in cultural schema that guide interactions. The key to changing biases is to 'rescript' these schema through direct conversations.

But first, a very important question . . .



Do you think the fact that you are a Black Woman helped you get this job?

It's Samantha's first day as an attending at a new hospital. During rounds, in front of ten other people—nurses, other residents, the patient—a very well-respected colleague welcomes her and states he's happy to see greater diversity in the department . . . and then asks Samantha whether she thinks that her race had an impact on her hiring decision.

She freezes. Rather than express hurt and shock, she smiles and says she doesn't know. No one else says anything. The moment passes. It nags her in the weeks to come. Her level of engagement drops.

Compounded by the high stress environment of her department, a few months later she begins looking for a new job. She receives an offer, and swiftly jumps ship.

The hospital loses a star.

The attending remained completely ignorant of the impact of his actions.

Samantha went on to talk about the “constant barrage of micro aggressions” at her old hospital.

It could have been worse.



The Brain

In an uncomfortable situation your brain has three choices: Fight, Flight and Freeze. The brain is wired to perceive this comment as a potential threat, the amygdala can get hijacked.

- ❖ Freeze. Shock or paralysis of thoughts and words. Unsure what to say or how to respond
- ❖ Fight. Defend yourself. Give away your feelings, position, say something you might regret. Possibly overreact.
- ❖ Flee. Withdraw. Complain to others.

The Freeze

- ❖ **The Freeze is a common response to being placed in a compromising position by someone in a real or perceived position of power.** It can be triggered by a single comment, or a loud outburst. A close cousin of fight-or-flight, it is poorly understood, though just as prevalent.
- ❖ **The Freeze is a universal experience that everyone, regardless of gender or race, has experienced,** although the triggers will be different for each of us. Indeed, a situation that causes a 20-year-old intern to freeze wouldn't cause an executive with 20 years of experience to bat an eyelash.

The Impact

- ❖ **For the individual on the receiving end of the dynamic,** it is often accompanied by feelings of shame and self-blame. *I should have said something. Why didn't I say something?* They replay the situation in their heads, over and over, where it often gets magnified.
- ❖ **The other person often remains ignorant to the impact of their actions.** Often, individuals are truly horrified to learn that something they said, or a way they acted, had such a negative impact, or that their motives were misunderstood. Rather than have the opportunity to apologize and rectify the situation, these individuals remain oblivious.



- ❖ **For the Team or Organization**, at best, the decreased psychological safety leads to lower quality decisions. In the worst-case scenario, these behaviors can escalate to the point of creating liability or adverse patient outcomes.

One situation we see again and again is that aggressors “hide in plain sight” because no one confronts them, but no one trusts HR to do so, either.

Why This Training is Different

Biases that cause micro aggressions are deeply embedded in culturally derived schema that guide our interactions. To change these biases, schema need to be re-scripted. **Culture change and personal growth occur through direct conversations between peers; not via mandatory annual PowerPoint sessions delivered by external consultants.**

Other approaches to biases and micro aggressions often make things worse. Training people to recognize and label biases ends up with name calling and arguing over labels. Teaching people to recognize micro aggressions and report them to HR results in an environment where everyone is afraid to discuss sensitive topics (walking on eggshells). Often as not, micro aggressions are unintentional or poorly worded statements that can easily be resolved.

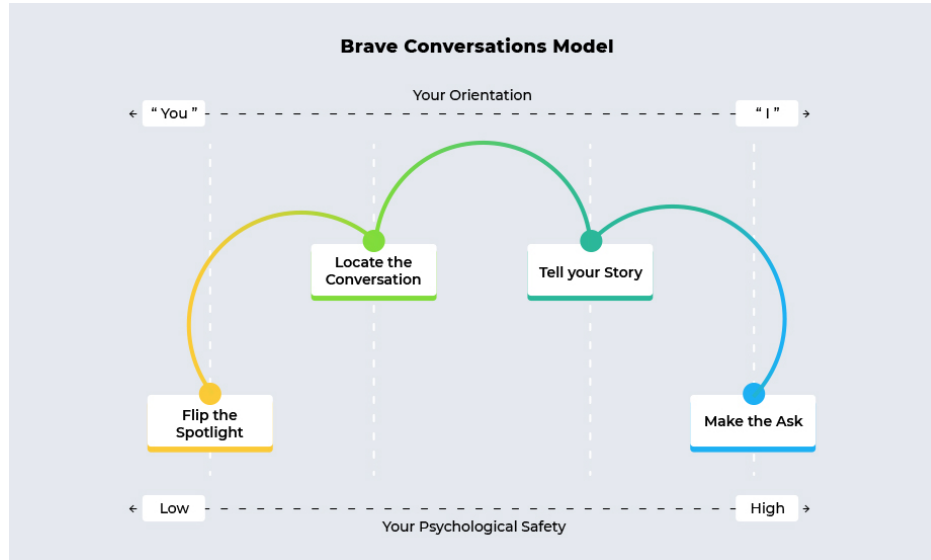
Instead of employees going to HR to file complaints, or surfacing them after an adverse outcome, we empower them to speak up in the moment. The skills learned in Brave Conversations empower participants to recognize moments where they freeze and provides them with tools to break out of the freeze, in real-time, in order to both inform the dynamic as well as to gather more information.

This is the first step to creating cultures where conflict can exist without violence, and harmony can exist without conformity.

Rather than simply expose “inappropriate behavior” and draw red lines, participants are empowered to create a self-regulating mechanism within the organization.



The Brave Conversations Model: Moving through Conflict Towards Psychological Safety



Flip the Spotlight

- ❖ Ask a question in order to break the freeze and return the attention the other person.

Locate the Conversation ("It seems like . . . is that true?")

- ❖ Clarify their intention with precision.

Tell your Story

- ❖ Leveraging the whole message model (Facts, Thoughts, Feelings), inform the other person of the impact of their words/actions.

Make the Ask

- ❖ Make an ask that clarifies future behavior and creates accountability.



We're interested! What are the next steps?

We develop each course specifically for each organization based on their specific scenarios and circumstances. It is a collaborative process that demands buy-in of staff at all levels of an organization.

For this reason, we recommend starting with a **low-commitment lecture and Q&A** in order to determine if there is a good fit between us and you.

Prior to COVID, we have been delivering lectures and trainings over ZOOM. It is a format we love, and an ideal one for this next, first step.

Who would facilitate?

Rubén Flores Montenegro

Rubén Flores has spent 15+ years figuring out how to deliver training in a way that changes what people **do**, not just what they think.

Rubén Flores is the co-founder of The Academy, an organization that teaches women the art of leadership and power dynamics. Over the past seven years, The Academy has trained thousands of women around the world to change their workplaces, communities, and families.

Before turning his attention to training, Rubén Flores served as a Program Coordinator for Doctors Without Borders and other humanitarian medical organizations, leading emergency healthcare teams in response to natural disasters, epidemics, and armed conflict in numerous countries in Central Africa, Asia, and the Americas. As a former hospital administrator and NYC Paramedic, he has unique insight into the world of healthcare and its unique challenges and personalities.

Rubén is a graduate of The George Washington University and holds an International Diploma in Humanitarian Affairs from Fordham University. He is fluent in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and German, and is an avid climber.



Sonia K. Narang

Sonia K. Narang is an architect of change - real change for people, for Business and for Good. Sonia has 15+ years of experience in Organization Effectiveness, learning and development and executive coaching in global organizations.

For the past five years Sonia has been consulting to organizations such as Microsoft, Estee Lauder, Annapurna Pictures, Caterpillar, Red Bull, and Vice on culture and change management, performance enhancement, organization design, inclusion & diversity, and building digital capability.

Prior to starting her own practice, Sonia served as an internal Organization Development Consultant for Sony Pictures Entertainment, ABC Media Networks, The Walt Disney Company (EMEA) and American Express. Sonia relishes in the challenge of consulting to different sectors and helping people and organizations on the brink of new chapters in life or work.

Sonia is a graduate of the University of Southern California and has a Masters in Organization Behavior from Teacher's College, Columbia University. Sonia's "soul" work includes helping refugees and survivors of torture navigate the Western job market and culture. Sonia is an all-around nerd, loves to read, work out, eat food at hole in the walls and is a Bollywood and Hollywood movie enthusiast.