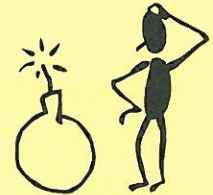


Focusing Frames: Talking About Bias Finding Your Voice When You Are Hurt or Offended



A focusing frame is a tool that helps you to speak up when you experience discomfort with another person's comments or behaviors. These frames are "conversational recipes" that can get you started on a difficult conversation. It takes time and practice to use them well. Initially, you might feel like you're reciting a formula for communication, but as you experiment with these frames, you can find ways to make them feel more natural and you can certainly adapt them to your own speaking style. They are the first sentences that can initiate a deeper conversation and can help you and another person gain greater clarity in your communication.

These frames are particularly useful when we want to improve communication around complex topics—such as responding to comments that involve bias.

Focusing Frame 1

I observed/heard _____
(behavior - see/hear statement)

Can you help me understand what your intent was? or

Can we talk about what this means? or

What conclusions would you form?

This is a very basic conversation starter and can be the opening to a larger discussion: "After our staff meeting, I heard you speaking to others in the hallway about the 'stupid decisions we're making in trying to reach immigrant children and families who can't change and are never going to.' I know we have challenges in working with our clientele, but I'm hoping you can help me understand that comment."

Focusing Frame 2

I'm not sure of your intent when you _____, but the impact
(behavior only)

on me was _____
(describe effect)

This is a very powerful frame. It focuses on inquiring about the intent of a person's behavior—rather than on stating your belief about that behavior ("You're a racist." "You don't respect your supervisor because she's Latina.") The speaker only states the impact on himself/herself of the behavior. So, this might sound like: "I'm not sure of your intent when you said that if Martin wasn't African American he wouldn't have gotten that promotion, but I'd like to share with you how your remarks impacted me. I felt hurt (or disrespected or personally attacked or humiliated or confused) . . ."

Focusing Frame 3

I am _____
 (describe the emotion/state: sad, hurt, disappointed, glad, confused, betrayed)

when (when someone) _____
 (describe behavior)

I'm not sure of your intent, but I need to tell you what the impact was on me. I felt _____

 (impact statement- how you are affected)

[You may need to pause here for a response]

I need (I need to know) _____
 (describe change you want considered – positive)

because _____
 (why you think change will ease situation)

[You may need to pause again, here]

Can we talk about this? or Can you help me understand more completely?
 What do you think we should do next?

Listen

This is a format that is useful both for planning and for starting a conversation. It combines several sentence stems from other focusing frame, but it's more extensive and includes the expression of what the speaker needs to resolve the issue.

In the first "I am . . ." sentence, it is important for the speaker to identify the root emotion or state of being—try to avoid saying "mad" or "angry"—so that there is a clear statement about the feeling or emotion a person's behavior triggered. If you have trouble getting to a clear definition of the emotion (maybe you need to have the conversation to clarify that for yourself!), you can use terms like "disappointed" or "puzzled" or even terms like "thrown off balance." The speaker must describe behavior as factually as possible and, then move on to the intent/impact idea. This opening statement might be, "I'm hurt and disappointed by some behavior I saw in your interaction with a Samoan child earlier this week. I know this child has had some challenging moments in his behavior, but when you were talking to him you said, 'Maybe when you grow up, get fat, and go around with tattoos and hair long, you can act like this, but you can't behave like that here.' I'm not sure of your intent in that moment, but I wanted to talk let you know how your words and behavior impacted me. I felt . . ."

The last section allows the speaker to state what he/she needs in a positive way: "I need to know that you'll look at this behavior and reflect upon where it came from—maybe on a stereotype you're carrying around because I . . . [believe these children should work with people who see them as individuals" or I'm concerned that stereotypical thinking injures our relationships with children, families, and one another" or . . ."