

ASK THIS

1 What would happen to you if this went ahead as planned?

instead of asking whether someone agrees

2 What is the strongest objection to this?

instead of asking for feedback, which invites agreement

3 Here is what I understood. Is that what you meant?

instead of correcting someone's account of their own situation

4 When will this be decided, by whom, and on what basis?

instead of accepting that a process exists as an answer

5 Who has not spoken yet? Then wait.

instead of reading the silence in the room as consent

SAY THIS, NOT THAT

When something you said landed badly

SAY I think that came out as a criticism of you, which is not what I meant to do.

NOT I did not mean it that way.

The first ends an escalation. The second asks the other person to accept your account of your own meaning over their experience of its effect.

When someone raises a substantive point

SAY Here is the point you have raised. This is what I am going to do about it, and by when.

NOT I understand your frustration.

Sympathy acknowledges the person and settles nothing, and it is much harder to push back against than a refusal.

BEFORE YOU READ A SILENCE

● Who in this room would bear a cost for speaking?

● Who is not present at all?

Silence can mean agreement, calculation, exhaustion, an accurate reading of the cost, not knowing the register, or absence.

WATCH FOR

How an exchange escalates

Attribution of intent: what you did, plus why.

Generalisation: this happened, this always happens, you are this.

Audience recruitment: spectators make retreat expensive.

Procedural weaponisation: all accurate, nothing addressed.

How an issue gets set aside

The issue reframed as the manner it was raised in.

The sympathetic close: acknowledged, nothing settled.

Asymmetric documentation: one version recorded.

IF YOU ARE THE ONE CHAIRING

● Take written contributions as equivalent to spoken ones.

● Circulate the questions before the meeting, not only in it.

● Restate what you understood and ask whether that was the point, so the correction does not have to be claimed.

AND BEFORE YOU USE ANY OF IT

Communication is an intervention, and interventions redistribute risk. Whose risk are you changing, and did they choose it?