



Disagreeing well

The four types of people we may disagree with, what we can learn from them, and how to improve our relationships with them

by Rev Chris Mann

Disagreement. It happens all the time.

For many of us, as we look at our lives, there tends to be one 'type of person' with whom we often end up in conflict (or avoid being in conflict).

These 'types of people' are likely from one of the four categories listed below:

1. Those who appear rude, abrupt and direct, running over the top of others in order to get what they want.
2. Those who don't take things seriously, turning hard conversations into light-hearted moments, or always looking on the bright side and rarely embracing hard truths.
3. Those who avoid conflict like the plague, becoming people-pleasers running from confrontation, even changing opinions based on who they are with.
4. Those who are stuck on the process, pointing out every missed detail with unending precision and without apology, making life difficult for those who aren't all about the details.

We each may have a problem with one – or more – of these 'stereotypes.' And, if we are honest, we may perhaps sometimes become one of these stereotypes as well.

The truth is, each of these people have a gift to offer our families, our workplaces, our community groups, and our society.

1. Those who appear rude, abrupt, and direct, are very good at moving people forward towards goals and aspirations. They often move people through hesitancy into decision making and action, moving people and organisations forward. If it weren't for these people, sometimes inertia would take over a community. Their bias for action can bring hope. We can refer to these people as the **Direct personality**, as they find the straightest path to a result.
2. Those who don't take things too seriously help us see the positive side of life, even when it is tough. Even when things are difficult, their unending optimism can often be enough to help a group of people through a crisis or a problem, giving hope to others through an infectious positive attitude. We can refer to these people as the **Inspirational personality**, as they encourage and inspire others with their enthusiasm.
3. Those who avoid conflict and keep people happy help our workplaces and families run smoothly. They are great at mediating conflict, smoothing over differences, and listening empathetically to people who are sad, angry, or disappointed. They are very good at putting others first, kindly and patiently working with people in pain. They give hope to others through being a great support. We can refer to these people as the **Steady** or **Sensitive personality**, as they know the mood of those around them and keep things stable.
4. Those who point out errors in process and missed details help us see important things we missed and understand the implications of our decisions or thinking. They see things others don't see, and remember previous occasions where something similar happened, and can identify what went wrong. They give us hope because someone

is watching our back – they don't share their thoughts to embarrass us, but rather to protect us and those around us. We can refer to these people as the **Conscientious personality**, as they dot the i's and cross the t's.

So, what can we do to disagree better with each of these people?

Well, all relationships are complex. There is no one 'silver bullet' that will remove all conflict from our lives. But the following tips can help.

1. **If you are disagreeing with a Direct personality**, know that they want to get to the point. They aren't (as) afraid of disagreement and conflict as others. They likely need you to remind them that others are – and that is unlikely to change, especially as they may appear to be aggressive to others. From their lens, this may appear 'weak', but from the lens of others, they can come across as 'unkind'. To help you disagree well, remind them that to get a good result, they need to consider not just the work of the team, but also the feelings of the team – the team that feels the best, works the best. Disagreeing well means talking about not just actions, but also emotions, and considering the needs of others.
2. **If you are disagreeing with an Inspirational personality**, know that they want to see the positives. They are naturally more optimistic than most others, and believe in themselves – and in others – that things will be worked through. From their lens, others may appear far too pessimistic. To help you disagree well, remind them that embracing the hard things helps the good things be better, and that things will be ok if the team works together on making them ok – that believing things will be fine only works if people work together on making things ok.
3. **If you are disagreeing with a Steady and Sensitive personality**, know that they want to care for you, and for others, and are often willing to sacrifice to make this happen. They likely need to know that you care for them too – after all, in their people pleasing, they are less likely to care for themselves. To help you disagree well, show empathy towards them, and to those they care about. Acknowledge their feelings, be grateful for their support, and ask them to tackle the difficult issue together with you. If you can demonstrate that you are on the same team, and that you care about them no matter what, they will be far more likely to engage in a disagreement with full honesty. It is also likely that this personality needs time to think things through, so give them an opportunity to reflect and come back to you.
4. **If you are disagreeing with a Conscientious personality**, know that they find certainty and confidence in accuracy. Don't try to explain away a mistake, disagreement, or conflict through stories or half-hearted apologies. Instead, ask for their help in getting across the right information. From their lens, they may see you as ignoring evidence, research, facts and information that can lead to a better outcome. To disagree well, let them use their strengths to get a better understanding of a situation, and how you could move forward together.
5. Lastly, remember that in any disagreement, **it is a sign of maturity**, not weakness, to listen well, and **to consider the perspective of another person**. It is a sign of strength to be able to reflect back what we hear from others in a way that validates both who they are and their perspective, even if we disagree with it. We all trust people who hear us, value us, and respond to us with insight and compassion. So, when we are disagreeing with others, we serve our families, our workplaces, our communities and our society best when we do so with empathy, with compassion, and with maturity. It gives them hope, and it also gives us hope – hope that we can handle difficult situations well, both now and into the future.

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