

Basic Sharing or Hard Conversation Structure

The following framework is a helpful way to guide individuals through situations that can be potentially awkward. First, it provides clear boundaries for sharing in a group, so that no one individual dominates the conversation. Second, it provides a clear path for a hard conversation where a change needs to occur.

- **The issue is:** A brief description of the challenge being faced. The issues could be as wide-ranging as a frustrating parenting situation, a question of calling, a house that's not selling, differences in marriage, personal temptation while traveling, tough academic load, debt challenges, feeling distant from God, or finding it hard to connect with worship at church.
- **It is significant because:** Why is this important to me? Why am I feeling this tension?
- **My ideal outcome is:** What is most important to me? Who, what, when, where, how do I want this to unfold for the good of me, my family, anyone involved?
- **You should probably know:** Here is where you share any relevant background information. The key word is *relevant*. Not necessarily the whole story in detail. The magazine sidebar version, not the novel or short-story version.
- **What have I done so far?:** Is this something you've invested a lot into, or a new challenge? Have you tried all the solutions, or are you just starting to think about it?
- **The help I want from the group is:** Do you want prayer? Counsel? Advice? Someone to come with you? Specific assistance?

So, here's an example of this being used in a **sharing environment**:

- **The issue is:** My boss is asking me to do things that I know are unethical at work.
- **It is significant because:** I want to honour Christ, but I also need to provide for my family, and I don't know how to stand up for what is right without putting my job in jeopardy.
- **My ideal outcome is:** I would express my misgivings to my boss, and he would agree that it wasn't the right course of action, or, if he disagrees, that I would have the courage and faith to trust God to take care of me even though I might lose my job.
- **Any relevant background information:** My boss claims to be a Christian, but doesn't always live that way in the marketplace; we are friends; I left my former job to join his team, and in the process lost all my seniority, so even if I could go back to my old job, I have lost all my seniority. I feel afraid, but convicted that I need to do the right thing.
- **What have I done so far?:** I have asked my boss if there's another way to do it that wouldn't involve these practices, and said that I'd be more comfortable with those. He has shrugged it off.
- **The help I need from the group is:** Prayer for wisdom, courage, and faith; any advice for how to approach my boss with integrity.

Here's an example of how this could be used for a **hard conversation** with an individual.

- **The issue is:** One person's challenges are overshadowing others' needs in the group.
- **It is significant because:** It's important that everyone in the group feels an equal opportunity to be heard and supported. When that doesn't happen, ownership of the group starts to drift and it becomes more difficult to sustain a supportive community for everyone – something we all want.

- **My ideal outcome is:** Everyone in our group would feel like they can share, no matter how ordinary or difficult their challenges may seem to be, and that they would receive support and prayer for that.
- **Any relevant background information:** (Could be personal experience in another group; observations of the present group dynamics; perhaps some observations that nothing has changed, no progress has been made.)
- **What have I done so far?:** Perhaps you've noticed that I've cut you off. It's not because I don't care. We have given lots of time for you to share. What have I not done? I have let it go longer than perhaps I should have, and must do something now... thus this conversation. I am committed to providing the support you need.
- **The help I need from you:** understanding of the need to let others share; commitment to respect boundaries and time limits.