



Greenwood  
Village South

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**Lean In When Others Dig In:  
Communicating Better With Others When  
You Disagree**



A LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

# Greenwood Village South

## 2026 Workshop Series

All sessions are in-person

**Building a Culture of  
Trust & Accountability**

March 19  
1-4 PM ET

**Lean In When Others  
Dig In**

May 7  
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**Creating Problem-Solving  
Minds**

August 6  
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**Between Sessions:**  
application exercises, follow-up, and reminders

# Connection Discussion



What one word would you want someone to use to describe your leadership at GVS?

Think on your own and capture your word in your handouts.

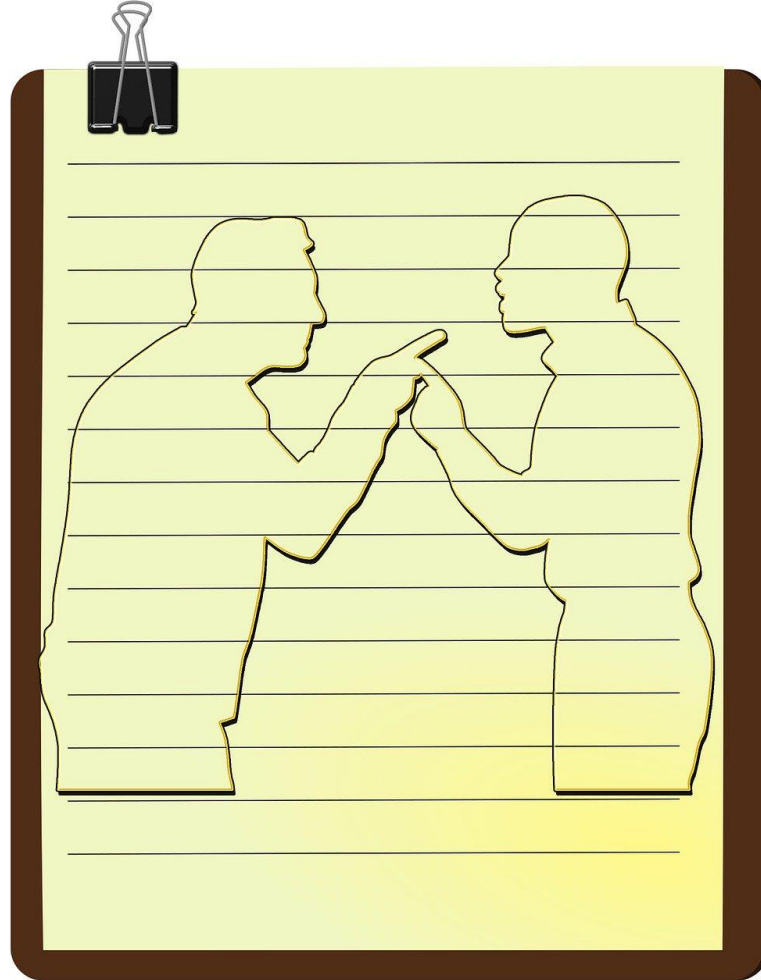
Now share with your table group.

Each table group choose the table's **top 1 or 2 words**.

# Today's Objectives

- Understand the brain-based reason people tend to dig their heels in about topics
- Learn strategies for leaning in during times of disagreement to promote unity and accomplish business objectives

# Have You Ever...?



# What Do We Do When We Feel Challenged?





iSpot.tv

# What Did You Notice?

- What behaviors stood out?
- What made them funny...or familiar?

# We Do This, Too...



# When we feel challenged, we tend to react



I beat them over the head with facts and data that they “can’t refute.”



I enjoy verbal strategy to try to back them into a corner where I can launch my undeniable argument.



I’ll happily shout my opinion from the rooftops; I don’t care who’s listening.



I argue and/or yell until they see my point of view (or pretend to by acquiescing).

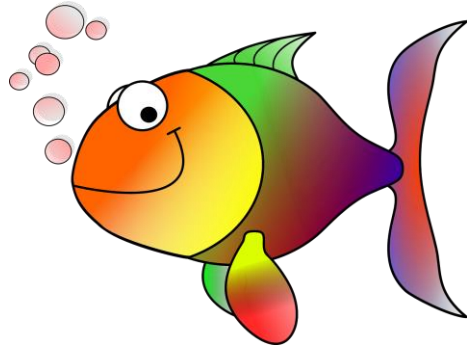


I make fun of their perspective to their face.

# More ways we show up...



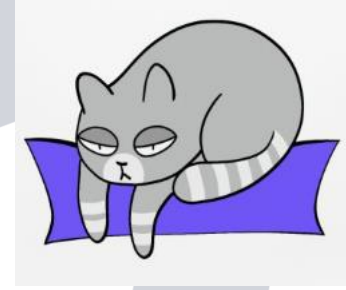
I make fun of their perspective behind their back.



I pretend to listen but tune them out and wait it out.



I hide from all possible debates, disagreements, or arguments.



I know I'm right and can't be bothered to engage with this... *person.*

# Quick Reflection

Which one do you tend to become when you're at your worst in moments where you feel uncomfortable, challenged, or like you have to defend your perspective?



# Pair & Share

- Which one did you choose?
- What does that tend to look like for you?



# What Happens Next?



- How do people tend to respond when you show up that way?
  - Does it move things forward or shut things down?
  - Do they lean in...or **dig** in?

# The Pattern

**Our default reactions often create the opposite of what we want.**

# So what's actually happening here?



# Why Do People Dig In?

When beliefs feel personal, disagreements feel like a threat.

If you're attacking what I believe, you're attacking ***who I am.***

# What the Brain Does



## Threat → Defense

- We protect what we believe:
  - We look for confirming evidence to support our beliefs.
  - We resist new information that challenges them.

# Why Arguing Backfires

**More facts ≠ more openness**

Instead, often leads to:

- Digging in
- Defensiveness
- Stronger attachment to beliefs

People don't  
re-think.  
They **dig in.**

# Think of a time...

You had strong facts...and the other person still didn't budge.



# The Pattern

**Challenge → Threat → Defense → Dig in**



**What should we do instead?**

# When Others Dig In...LEAN IN

Your goal is not to win. Your goal is to understand.

If understanding isn't happening, NO ONE is winning.

# Three Moves

1. Ask
2. Reflect
3. Share (Carefully)

# Move 1: Ask

1. Curious
2. Open-ended
3. Non-defensive

**Instead of:** “I can’t believe you think that.”

**Try:** How did you come to that perspective?”  
or “What’s been your experience with that?”

# Move 1: Ask

1. Curious
2. Open-ended
3. Non-defensive

You're trying to understand what's underneath the position—not just the position itself.

# Questions to Avoid

- Leading
- “Why?”
- Loaded

# Spot the Problem

With a partner, discuss:

- What's the issue with these questions?
- What might be the impact on the other person?

1. Don't you think this approach is risky?
2. Why would you do it that way?
3. Do you seriously support this flawed process?

# Make it Better

With your partner, choose ONE of these and make it better (less leading, less loaded, more open).

1. Don't you think this approach is risky?
2. Why would you do it that way?
3. Do you seriously support this flawed process?

# Let's Make it Better

~~Don't you think this approach is risky?~~

→ What concerns, if any, do you have about this approach?

~~Why would you do it that way?~~

→ Can you walk me through your thinking?

~~Do you seriously support this flawed process?~~

→ What's your perspective on how this process is working?

# Move 2: Reflect

Asking opens the door.

Reflecting keeps it open.

Help them feel understood.

# Three Ways to Reflect

1. Mirror
2. Label
3. Loop

# Mirroring

Repeat 1-3 words.

Encourages them to keep talking.

# Partner Activity: Mirroring

Turn to a partner.

**Person A:** Make a simple statement about something mildly frustrating at work or home.

**Person B:** Your only job is to mirror—just repeat a few key words.

# Labeling

Name the emotion.

“It sounds like...

“It seems like...



# Partner Activity: Labeling

Turn to a partner.

**Person B:** Share something mildly frustrating at work or home.

**Person A:** Try labeling what you think they might be feeling.

# Looping

Summarize and check.

“Did I get that right?”

Shows that  
you’re trying to  
*understand*—  
not just  
respond.

# Move 3: Share (Carefully)

Share your experience. NOT your opinion.

**The goal is to humanize yourself instead of turning yourself into a talking Powerpoint.**



# Move 3: Share (Carefully)

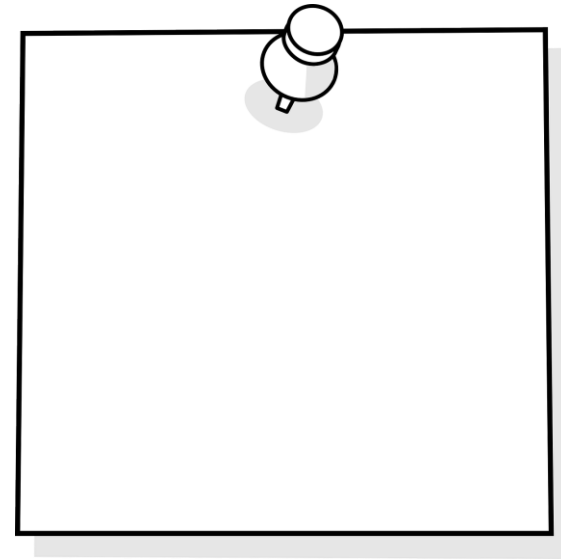
Share your experience. NOT your opinion.

## **PRO Move:**

Ask, “Would you be open to hearing something I’ve experienced?”

# Keep in Mind...

- This process takes time.
- Expect progress to be incremental.



# Let's Practice!

- Choose a topic
- Take different sides
- Your goal:
  - Ask
  - Reflect
  - (Optionally) share



# Let's Practice!

- Your goal is NOT to win.
- Your goal is to help them feel understood.



# How to Practice

- **Person A:** Ask + Reflect ONLY (NO persuading!)
  - ❖ *Use the tips in your handouts.*
- **Person B:** Hold your perspective (you don't have to be difficult; just be real.)

Then switch.

# Practice Debrief

- What did you notice?
- What worked?
- What was harder than expected?
- What did you notice about the difference between trying to win and trying to understand?

# Action Planning

- What is one high-stakes conversation you need to have?
- What will you do differently?
- What will be hardest?

# Remember...

Leaning in doesn't mean pushing harder.

It means creating space for what's **real** before we move forward.

# Your Next Steps

- Practice having at least one high-stakes professional conversation.
  - Be prepared to report back how it went and what you learned.
- Read and discuss prompts from HRD-provided Discussion Guide.



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# Questions?

