Reframing difficult conversations

Below is a range of examples of the ways difficult conversations can be reframed.

Are there any ideas in these examples you can use to develop a reframe for the difficult conversation you're thinking about?

Reframe A

From: "This is going to be a difficult conversation."
To: "I don't want this to be an unpleasant experience. How can this difficult conversation become one that creates value for us both? How can it become a creative conversation?"

Find out more about creative conversations.

Reframe B

From: "The person with the greatest power is going to win."
To: "We both have different types of power. How can we create an opportunity in which we use our power generatively and are both likely to get things from our conversation?"

Reframe C

From: "I need to reach X point/goal in this conversation."
To: "In certain circumstances a paradox can arise in a difficult conversation where both parties do not reach an agreement and are able to live with this difference because they better understand each other's point-of-view."
To: "When conversations are difficult we are both working at a learning edge, so we need to notice what we're learning in the process and how this may reflect on the kind of outcome that may be reached."

For more about learning zones, take a look at Thempra's Learning Zone model.

Reframe D

From: "I've told them everything they need to know, I'm not sure why the difficulty is persisting."
To: "I'm able to engage in a dialogue to support people digest this information and discuss the consequences"

Reframe E

From: "I'm the expert here, I should have the answers."

To: "I'm able to ask questions that give me new insights."
To: "We're all human beings, we're not perfect, and we're doing our best."
To: "There are other people out there that do things differently and may do things better, and I'm open to the fluidity of learning and unlearning."

Reframe F

From: "This is going to be a battle."
To: "This is going to bring different groups together around things they both care about. If we look beyond the simple thinking of winning or losing, we use our differing perspectives to understand the problem better, and explore what could be achieved if we combined our resources to achieve a goal that meets both of our needs."
To: "What's the bigger picture my passion is directed towards, and how can I use this energy to this end in this conversation?"

Reframe G

From: "It will be really useful to listen to their point-of-view because I know little about the experiences they've had and it will be helpful to understand more."
To: "Am I getting more than I'm giving in this relationship, and if so how can I address this?"

Reframe H

From: "I just need to get through this conversation and then it will be over."
To: "Difficult conversations aren't always wrapped up after one conversation. The nature of conversations being both dynamic and difficult means some people need to take time to reflect and come back to discuss things again. You might end up having a series of difficult conversations."

Reframe I

From: "I'm in a professional environment, my feelings don't come into this, or at least I don't want to show or share them."
To: "I'm in a professional environment and my feelings are part of this environment and this conversation. If I decide how much of myself and my feelings I'm comfortable sharing in this conversation this will help me express myself safely

Thempra's 3 Ps model is helpful to explore ways to express yourself in a professional environment.

Reframe J

From: "This person is difficult"
To: "I wonder how safe this person feels having this conversation, and having it with me?"

To: "I wonder what kind of processing patterns this person tends to use to make sense of things?"

To: "How can I make a meaningful connection with them, even if I don't agree with them?"
To: "I wonder what this person's unmet needs are?"

Reframe K

From: "I hate conflict'
To: "Disagreement is potential. Conflict is bringing different groups together around things they both care about. If we look beyond the simple thinking of winning or losing, we use our differing perspectives to understand the problem better, and explore what could be achieved if we combined our resources to achieve a goal that meets both of our needs. Channeled in the right direction, initial disagreement can create the energy for positive change."

Reframe L

From: "Why am I getting upset?"
To: "Why do I find this difficult?"