



WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS, INTENTIONS, AND EXPECTATIONS?

What are your intentions? Often, many of us wander into conversations across the divide with good-enough intentions, only to find ourselves lost in a minefield of rage. If your intention is to attack them and fight the good fight, then have at it. However, if your intention is to try to better understand – to learn something about the other side’s concerns and the complex problems you are both facing – then you need to take another path entirely.

These two objectives – prevailing and learning – engage two very different processes in our brains – one a more narrow, closed and automatic process of tactical persuasion and influence, and the other a more open, systematic, but effortful process of discovery and learning. And when conversations begin as a contest, they are hard to de-escalate and change course. So, decide before you speak.

SELF INQUIRY

When preparing to engage in a potentially tense conversation with someone—or even when you just come to realize you’re already in a tense interaction—ask yourself:

- What are my intentions or goals in this interaction?
 - Am I trying to persuade or convince? Am I trying to learn? Am I trying to be understood? Am I trying to understand? Am I trying to win? Am I trying to find common ground? Am I trying to understand divergent views?
- How do these intentions impact how I’m approaching this interaction right now?
- Have I seen others manage situations and goals like this well?
- What are some of the possible reactions I may receive?
- What are my short term goals here? My longer term goals here?
- Play this out—how will I feel tomorrow about this?
- How do I feel myself reacting? Does this align with how I want to respond?
