

An executive coach shares 7 tips for disagreeing effectively at work

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- Joel Garfinkle, [SmartBrief](#)



Take time to look for places you can agree. [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#)

No matter how much we try to work with others and get along, the time comes when we can't agree.

It might be with a co-worker, a customer, or a boss. You don't want to get into an argument. You don't want to appear disagreeable.

Yet, you can't just go along. [Difficult times call for difficult conversations.](#)

Here are seven ways to help you look reasonable, interested and supportive, even as you disagree.

1. Find common ground

You may disagree on a point, but likely there are [many things you do agree on](#). Perhaps you recognize the purpose or goal is valid, while you believe the steps to get there should be different. Take time to look for places you can agree.

2. Support and praise

Start with supporting and praising those areas that you find in common. You might complement a co-worker on being a hard worker or on taking time to consider this problem. You might express appreciation to your boss for taking time to listen and for his clear expectations.

There are always things that are good about others. Praising them first deflects the impression you are attacking them when you disagree. These steps will help with [employee retention](#).

3. Ask questions

When you see flaws in a plan, rather than just disagreeing, start by asking questions. You might say any of the following:

QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK

“I’m not quite seeing how this will work out. What about [share concern]?”

“Have you considered...?”

“How do you think XX will respond to this direction?”

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Asking careful, thoughtful questions opens up the opportunity to find common ground. You may learn things that change your perspective. The person you disagree with has time to consider possible obstacles and change his or her viewpoint.

4. Look and act pleasant

Little of our communication is conveyed through the words we speak. Most comes from tone of voice, inflection, body language, facial expressions, etc. While your words may sound professional, your inflection and body language may say something else.

The tone of voice and body language always influence more than the words alone. Make sure you don't sound disagreeable. Cultivate a cooperative, interested, concerned tone of voice.

5. Reframe the situation

While you may not agree on method or action, you will agree on something larger. If possible frame the situation as both of you working to solve a common problem. When you are both on the same side, it's easier to work things out. You might say, "Hey, John, both of us want to move this project forward. How can we work this out in the best way?"

6. Recognize critical emotions

We think we make decisions by reason, but often they have emotional components. Our pride might be at stake. Our desire to win or be right might be stronger than reason. Recognize these emotional components even as you share the reasons behind your point of view. Find a way for the other person to save face.

7. Agree to disagree

At times, you may not be able to resolve the problem. You cannot find middle ground. No one is willing to change. This may be the time to step back and simply agree to disagree. You can show respect for the other person and their idea, even as you show respect for your value and plan.

There is an [art to disagreeing without being disagreeable](#). The workplace runs more smoothly as you add this skill to your talents. And you step above the crowd when you master it.

Joel Garfinkle is the author of "[Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level](#)." As an [executive coach](#), he recently worked with a manager who had to provide constructive feedback to one of his poor-performing employees. [Sign up](#) to his [Fulfillment@Work](#) newsletter (10,000+ subscribes) and you'll receive the free e-book "41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!"

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