

Transformative Leadership Through Conflict Management

Sara Kim, PhD

George G. B. Bilsten Professor
in the Art of Communication with
Peers and Patients, Surgery

Associate Dean for Educational Quality Improvement
School of Medicine, University of Washington



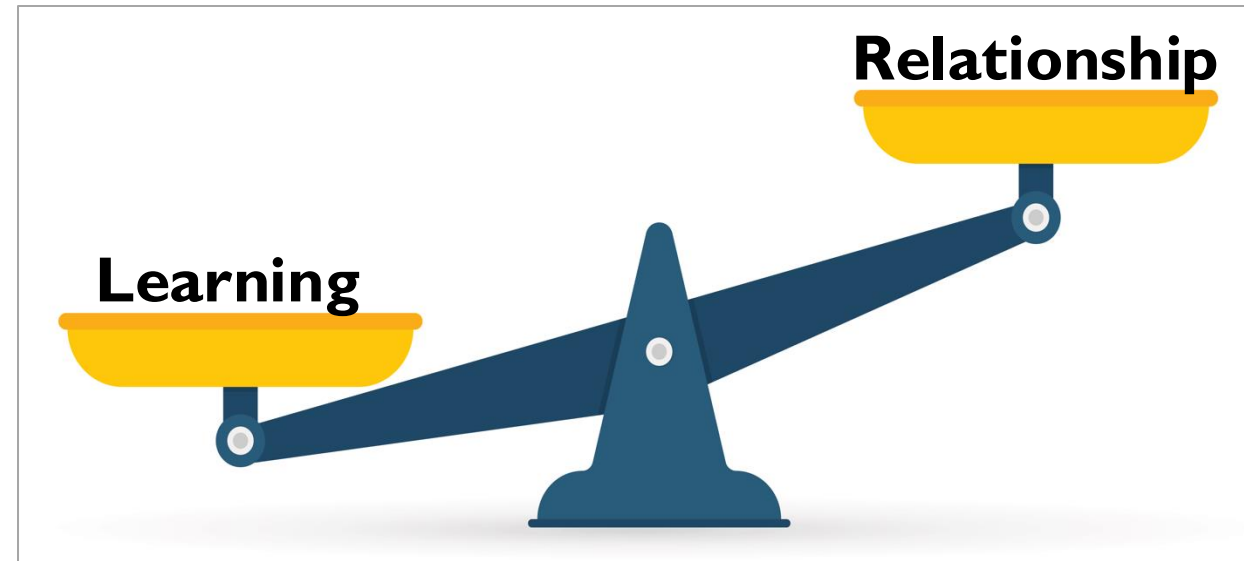
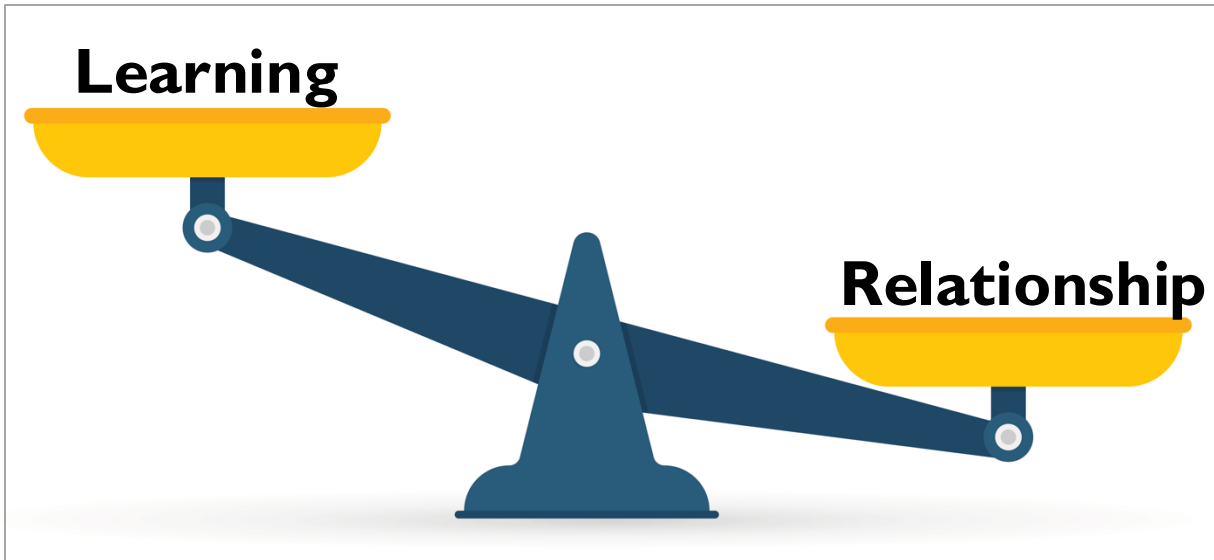
Team Science Seminar Series
Institute for Translational
Health Sciences
April 2, 2025

Session Objectives



- Develop self-awareness (conflict style, emotional responses)
 - Practice perspective-taking skills
 - Apply skills for handling difficult emotions

Gift of Conflict: Learning & Relationship



Scenario

I'm a research team lead at a medical center. A clinical trial is underway, and the PI—who's juggling several other projects—is slow to respond to protocol questions. You feel pressure from looming deadlines and send multiple follow-up emails about an urgent IRB submission. The PI replies curtly, calling me "too anxious" and suggesting I may be overreacting. I feel dismissed, while the clinical staff are left uncertain about how to proceed with recruitment.

What would you do?

"WHEN HARJO CONFRONTS TRAGEDY, SHE BECOMES OUR CONSCIENCE."
— WASHINGTON INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF BOOKS

CONFLICT RESOLUTION
FOR HOLY BEINGS

POEMS

JOY HARJO
WINNER OF THE
WALLACE STEVENS AWARD



*“Do not feed the monsters.
Some are wandering thought
forms, looking for a place to set
up house.
Some are sent to you deliberately.
They come from
arrows of gossip, jealousy or
envy - and inadvertently from
thoughtlessness.
They feed on your attention, and
feast on your fear.”*

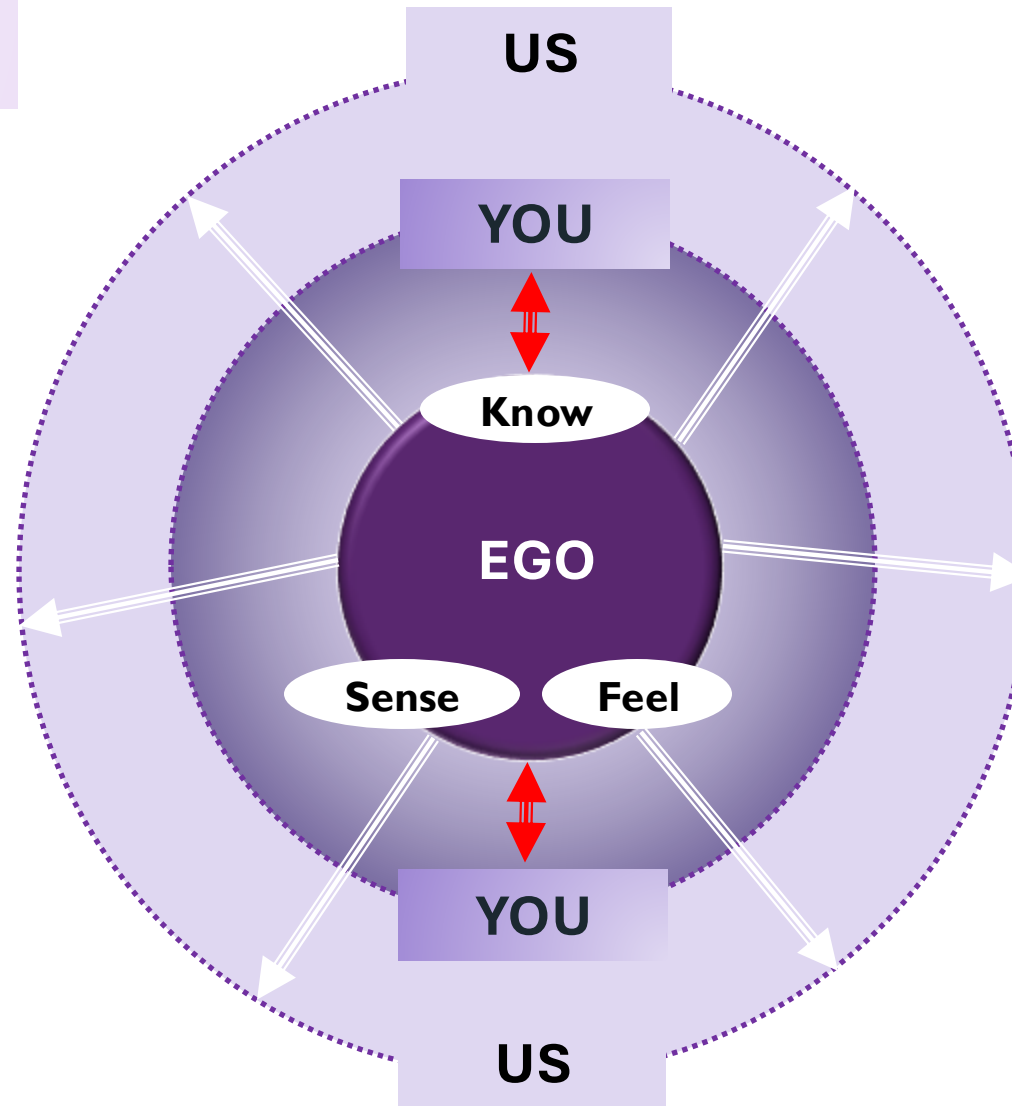
(Joy Harjo, 2017)

Conflict Engagement

The capacity to effectively enter into and address conflicts of various types, at various depths, and over differing time frames, ranging from short-lived interactions to more complex and protracted disputes.

(Scott, C. and Gerardi, D., 2011. A strategic approach for managing conflict in hospitals: responding to the Joint Commission leadership standard, Part 1. The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety, 37(2), pp.59-69.)

Cultivating Self-Awareness Skills



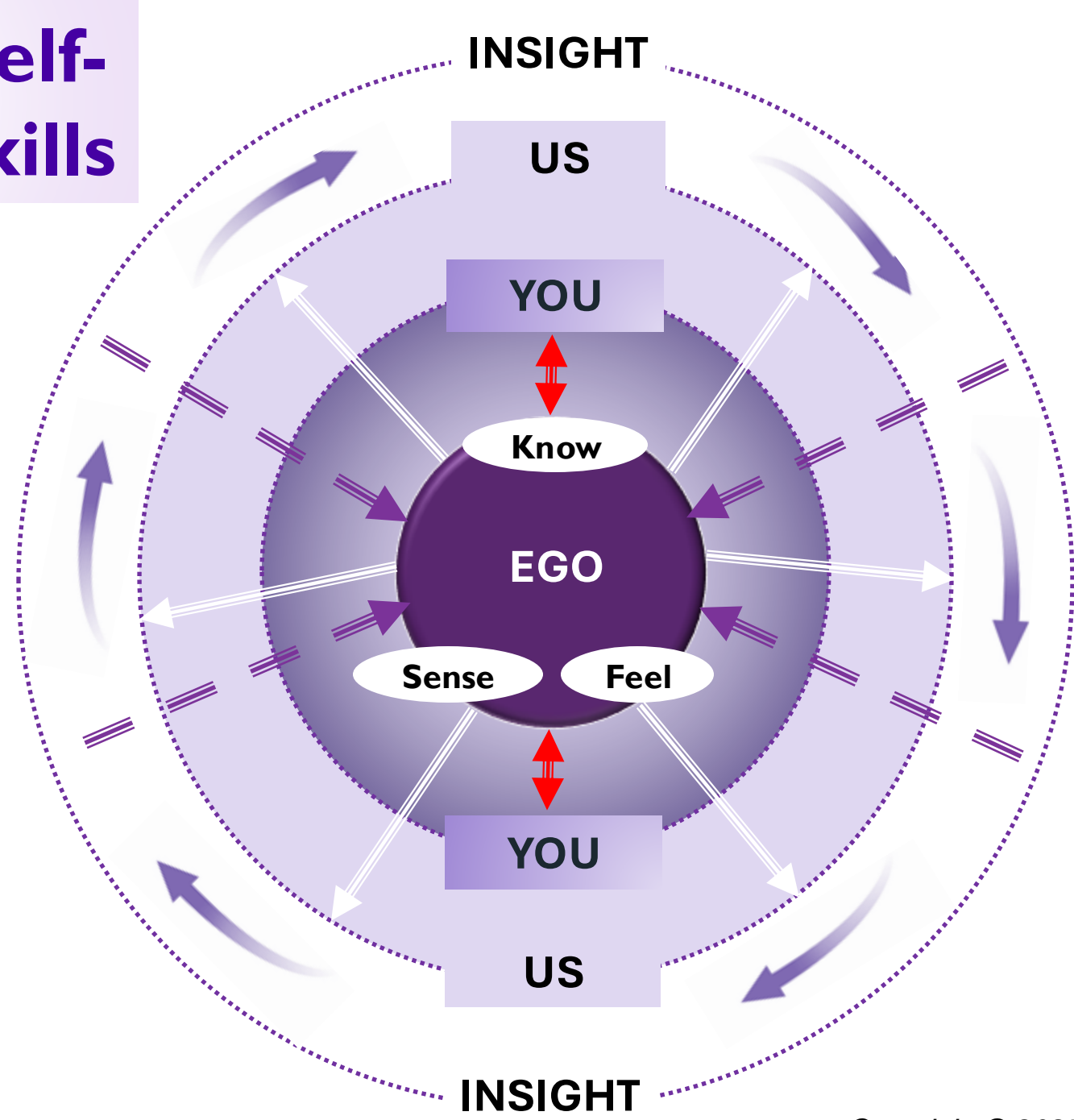


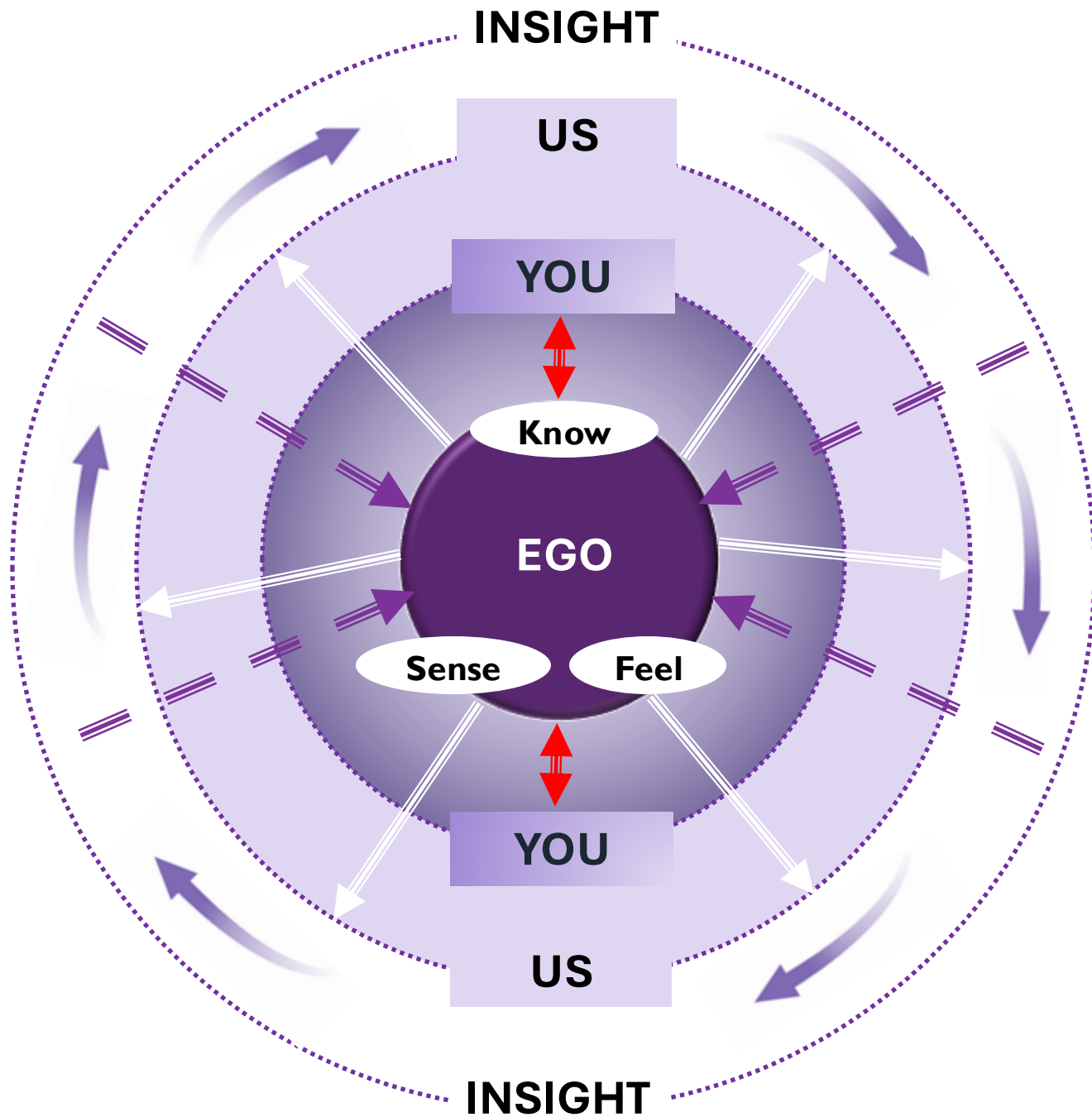
How Do I Know...



- How others see and experience me?
- How I behave when others' accomplishments eclipse me?
- How I react when my ideas are dismissed in public?
- How I may steer my impulsive emotion in the path of gentleness?

Cultivating Self-Awareness Skills

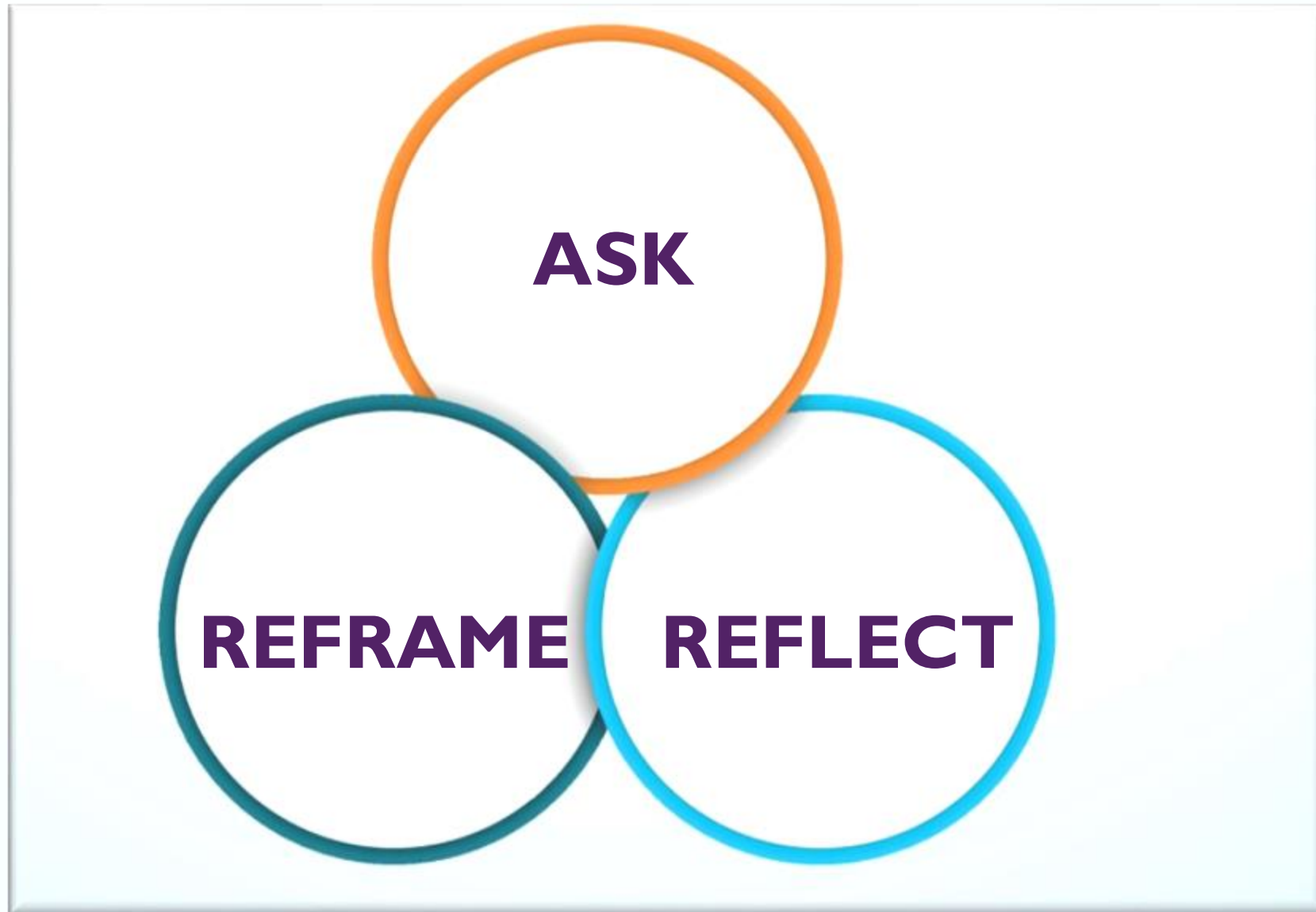




My Insight-Inspired Tools

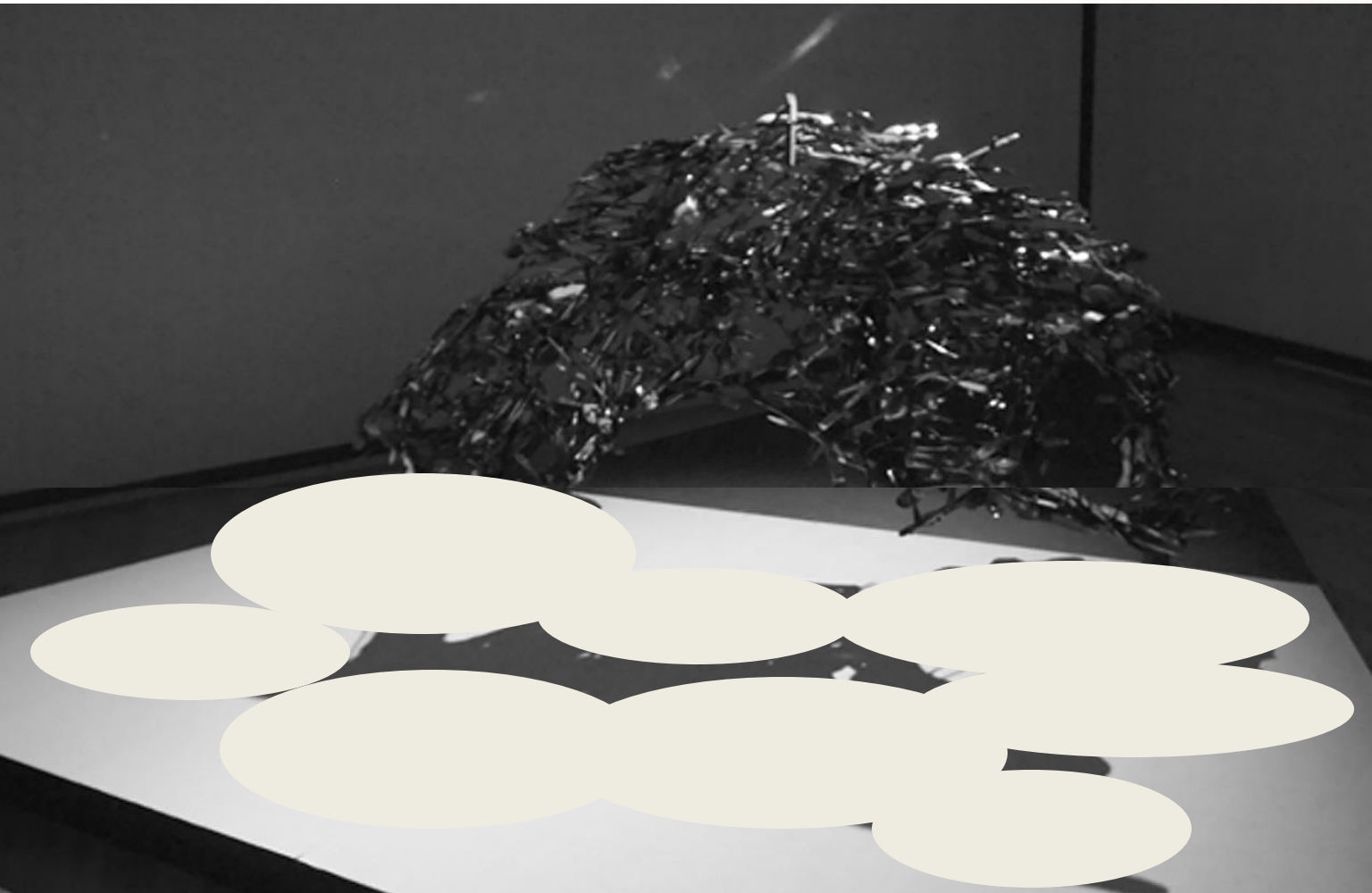
- Minimize surprises, especially with superiors → Communicate early, frequently, and collaboratively.
- When I cause harm, ask, **What do you need most from me to heal or move forward?**
- If I'm too upset to continue a conversation, take a pause and say, **I'm struggling here. Can we take a break?** or **This is getting difficult. What about you? How is this conversation landing with you?**

Conflict Management Tools



Conflict Management Tool ASK

- **Ask Questions**
 - **What & How** (*What made it difficult to...How can I help set a clearer expectation?*)
- **Tell a New Story & Tell It Again**



Shigeo Fukuda, "Lunch with a Helmet on" 1987.

Asking Questions

1 **Why don't you listen to me?**

What makes it difficult for you to hear me out?

2 **Why do you fail to see my point?**

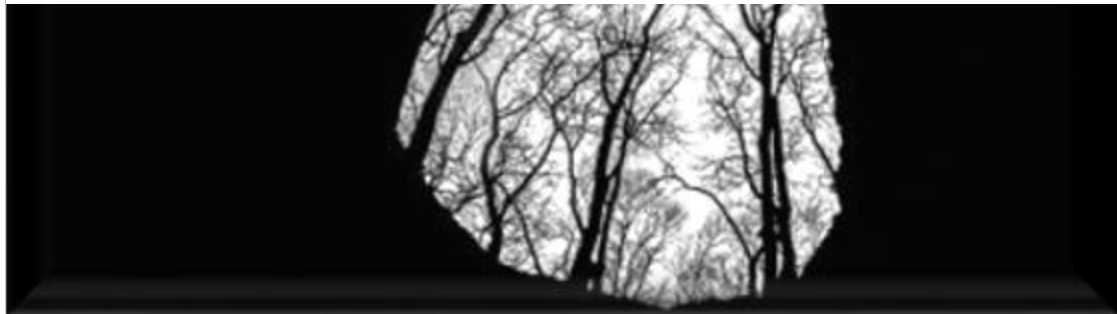
How do you see the matter differently? What concerns you the most?

3 **Why do you always have to lead?**

What may make it possible for some of us to take on the lead role?



*Csaba Daróczi, Winner of the 2023 Close-up
Photographer of the Year; Bird of the Forest*



Conflict Management Tool **REFRAME**

- **Take Two**
 - **Shift the 'Lens' from Me to You**
- **Balance Multiple Matters**
 - **My & Your Wishes**
 - **Content & Relationship**

Reframing Practice

- 1 I decide things around here.**

No doubt you are in charge. Perhaps, knowing my concern may further inform your decision.

- 2 You need to do better. This is below my standard.**

We both value high quality work. There were some real barriers. Why don't I explain my experience.

- 3 I bring 20 years of experiences. I know what's best for my patient.**

That's right, 20 years of experience leads you to be concerned. How about if we try your way first and...

Conflict Management Tool: REFLECT

Signal to Others You Get How Others Feel

- That sounds frustrating.
- I would be equally upset as you are.
- I am sorry this is so tough on you.
- It's been a hard day.



Signal to Others How You Feel

- You can imagine how surprised I'm to hear that.
- It was disappointing to hear you address me in that manner.
- I would have hoped to see you do X.

PRACTICE

My lead administrator requested a 100% telework arrangement. He had moved to a house two hours south of Seattle during the pandemic

I tried to obtain an approval, which upper management denied. When I delivered the news, the administrator said, “Clearly, you didn’t have the courage to stand up for me.”

I understand this is disappointing. I wish the circumstances had allowed a different outcome.

Thanko

Sara Kim

sarakim@uw.edu



References:

Daróczy, C. (2023). *Bird of the forest* [Photo].

Fukuda, S. (1987). *Lunch with a helmet on* [Sculpture].

Harjo, J. (2017). *Conflict resolution for holy beings: Poems*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Scott, C. & Gerardi, D. (2011). A strategic approach for managing conflict in hospitals: responding to the Joint Commission leadership standard, Part 1. *The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety*, 37(2), 59-69.