
managing uncomfortable situations

How to handle difficult issues

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In Brief

Business throws up all sorts of situations. Many are those that we handle easily. They play to our strengths or experience and we can find solutions without difficulty, often automatically. Invariably though, situations arise that we find uncomfortable to deal with. They may provoke anger or fear and are often the issues we procrastinate about.

Take a common business example. A key customer is an extremely late payer. Cash flow is tight. Your relationship with the salesman responsible for the account is poor. The customer is scary and confrontational. You find it hard to deal with. It's a can of worms and you put off handling it. In the book Recharge, we that work through a process to manage the situation step by step.

It's process can be applied to any issue that is bothersome. In this module, we run through seven simple steps to find a solution and put it into action. Much of it is common sense, but there are two key elements that make it work: one, you find someone to work with on the issue, and two, you honestly acknowledge your emotional responses to the situation and discuss them with whom you are working with. Having done so, you are ready to deal with the reality. The essential process in handling any uncomfortable situation is to face what makes it uncomfortable. A short summary of the process is:

- Acknowledge your feelings
- Put them in context
- Deal with the facts

In the pages that follow, each step is briefly explained. A sample worksheet is developed at each stage. The last page is an empty template for you to work through to find a solution to your own uncomfortable issue.



Seven Steps



Get Advice

Step 1

Identify a person or team, inside or outside your firm, with whom you feel you can honestly and comfortably discuss all aspects of this situation. Be prepared to examine each step with them



Define the Outcome

Step 2

Visualise the exact outcome that would represent a positive solution. Include all aspects: who, what, where, how, when. Discuss with your advisor all the steps it will take to reach that outcome.



Issue Worksheet

1. Advisor(s):	Your mentor or think tank
2. Desired outcome:	Describe it here



Address Concerns

Step 3

Write down exactly what makes this situation bothersome to you. Make a frank account of your fears, anger and real concerns around this issue. If you are procrastinating, ask yourself what is really holding you back? Make this an honest assessment.



Issue Worksheet

1. Advisor(s):	Your mentor or think tank
2. Desired outcome:	Description
3. Fears (for example)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If I fail I will look weak• I will lose the customer• My team won't support me	



Clarify Issues

Step 4

Compare your fears with reality. What are the objective, commercial issues that are facing you, your firm and other parties involved? These are the facts of the situation. They will form the basis of your solution.



Issue Worksheet

1. Advisor(s):	Your mentor or think tank		
2. Desired outcome:	Description		
3. Fears (for example)	4. Facts (for example)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If I fail I will look weak• I will lose the customer• My team won't support me	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If I fail to act I will look weak• The customer will make a commercial decision• My team will support a positive solution		



Improve Your Hand

Step 5

Examine what you can do to generate a win-win solution to this issue. What can you do to improve the situation for you, and for the other parties involved? Develop your solution. Discuss it with your advisor. Fine-tune it and write it down.



Issue Worksheet

1. Advisor(s):	Your mentor or think tank	
2. Desired outcome:	Description	
3. Fears (for example)	4. Facts (for example)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If I fail I will look weak• I will lose the customer• My team won't support me	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If I fail to act I will look weak• The customer will make a commercial• My team will support a positive solution	
5. Develop win-win solution based on facts		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• outline a positive result• list advantages for all parties		



Take Action

Step 6

Handle this yourself. Be open to alternative suggestions but stay focused on reaching a solution until you do. Address the issue with all parties. You have acknowledged your emotions. Now set them aside. Propose your solution. Use commercial language. Deal with the facts.



Issue Worksheet

1. Advisor(s):	Your mentor or think tank	
2. Desired outcome:	Description	
3. Fears (for example)	4. Facts (for example)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If I fail I will look weak• I will lose the customer• My team won't support me	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If I fail to act I will look weak• The customer will make a commercial• My team will support a positive solution	
5. Develop win-win solution based on facts		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• outline positive result• list advantages for all parties		
6. Negotiate solution and implement		



Review

Step 7

Review with your advisor. Did the process work? Is the solution satisfactory? Is more negotiation necessary? Are follow up actions required? If so, what are they and set them in train. Lastly, look at how you can avoid this problem recurring in the future.



Issue Worksheet

1. Advisor(s):	Your mentor or think tank	
2. Desired outcome:	Description	
3. Fears (for example)	4. Facts (for example)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If I fail I will look weak• I will lose the customer• My team won't support me	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If I fail to act I will look weak• The customer will make a commercial• My team will support a positive solution	
5. Develop win-win solution based on facts		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• outline positive result• list advantages for all parties		
6. Negotiate solution and implement		
7. Review		



Worksheet Template

1. Advisor(s):	
2. Desired outcome:	
3. Fears	4. Facts
5. Develop win-win solution based on facts	
6. Negotiate solution and implement	
7. Review	



For more information, visit my website www.alanhargreaves.com

Hi, I'm Alan Hargreaves. I specialise in simplifying complex business problems. In over 35 years as a business executive, I have never found an issue that cannot be addressed through identifying the essential but simple steps required to make any problem manageable. It might be your career, your firm, your team or your strategy. It doesn't matter. All hurdles can be lowered through dispassionate analysis, and all executives can embrace simple processes to take them forward. Using these techniques, I have helped hundreds of people through the various stages of their business or career development. It may be the challenge of taking on new responsibilities; it could be the task of managing a business you have created yourself; it may be handling a difficult team in the midst of major change. I use a straightforward combination of key principles to get results: collaboration, adaptation, simplification and action. You can contact me anytime at alan@alanhargreaves.com.



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