LEAD Book Club 2013 – Discussion Questions
Difficult Conversations
by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen

The following are suggested questions to reflect on while reading in preparation for your discussion group in July.

1. In Chapter 1, the authors say that each conversation is really three conversations: what happened, feelings, and identity. Do you believe this is true? Is there anything missing?

2. In Chapter 2, the authors discuss how we all have implicit rules that surface during conflict. What implicit rules do you have? And how do they impact your professional or personal life?

3. Chapter 3 is about intentions and how we most often assume the worst of other people. Can you think of a time when you assumed the worst of another person and ended up being wrong? What was the impact on you, the other person, and your relationship?

4. In Chapter 4, the authors say that “Other than in extreme cases, such as child abuse, almost every situation gives rise to a conversation that is a result of a joint contribution system.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

5. Chapter 5 highlights the importance of exploring your ‘emotional footprint’ in order to get in touch with your feelings? What does your ‘emotional footprint’ consist of? What childhood experiences or circumstances have shaped it?

6. In Chapter 6, we learn to “regain [our] balance” when we have an “identity quake.” Have you ever had an identity quake in which you questioned your competence, whether you were a good person, or if you were worthy of love? What was the result? Which of the recommended steps do you think would have helped you?

7. Chapter 7 raises the question of when to have a difficult conversation, if at all, and offers several criteria to help you decide. Which of these criteria resonated with you the most? Why?
8. Chapter 8 outlines how to begin difficult conversations. How did you begin your most challenging conversation? Was it effective? Would the conversation have been different if you used the "third story" to begin?

9. In Chapter 9, the authors tell us that listening to our "inner voice" is crucial to our ability to listen. Do you agree? Why or Why not?

10. Chapter 10 is about telling your story. Do you typically feel entitled to tell your side of the story during a difficult conversation? What challenges arise for you?

Write in your own question(s) to pose to your discussion group:

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Action Planning: Based on what you’ve read and your answers above, what is ONE change you are going to make in your work and/or personal life?

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