

# How to challenge usefully - TalkWise worksheet

Challenge and challenging are two of the most overused words in the occupational vocabulary. When a word becomes so commonplace, it becomes dulled and fuzzy. We lose touch with its meaning. And that compromises its value. VoicePrint uses the word Challenge in a very particular sense: Challenge is the voice of interruption. But not mindless interruption.

What challenge is	What challenge is not
Interruption in order to re-focus	Intentionally combative
An invitation to move in a new direction	An attempt to take control
Momentary	Recurrent or prolonged
Intended to help the dialogue	Selfish or parochial

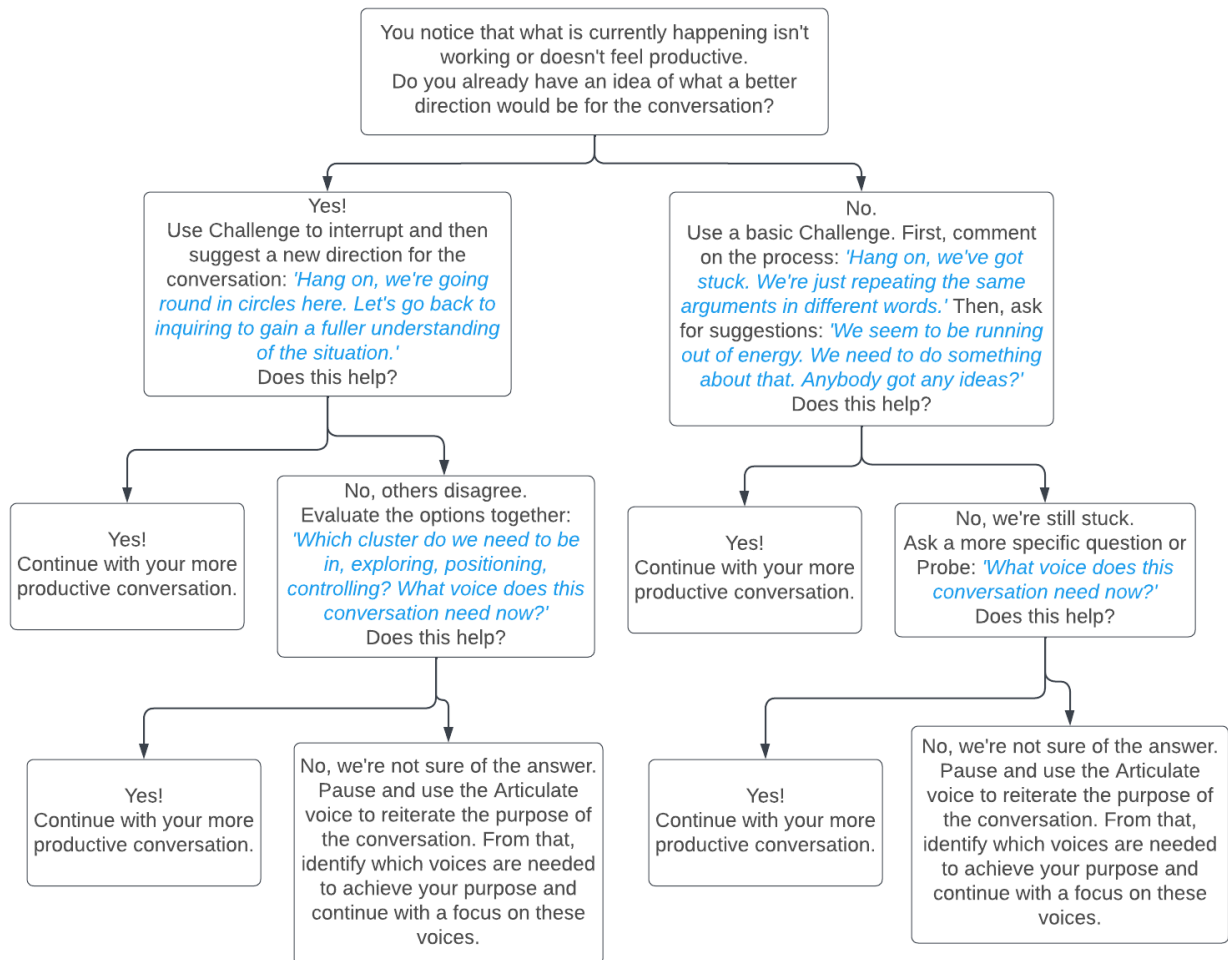
We often see reluctance to use the Challenge voice and yet, many of the frustrations experienced in day to day communication could be well-served by making intentional use of this voice. This worksheet is designed to help you expand your use of the Challenge voice, by identifying when it might serve you well, and by reflecting on previous missed opportunities to learn what you might do differently in the future.

**Think of a recent occasion when a conversation got stuck, or was unproductive. Use the flowchart and reflection questions below to think back over that occasion and identify when and how making use of the challenge voice might have served the conversation well.**

As you will see in the flowchart, a good challenge includes two elements:

- First, the interruption
- Then, a proposed shift towards a different voice.

A key point to remember about the Challenge voice is its **momentary** nature. If it's working, and serving to make the conversation more productive, then you don't need to linger in it. It invites and facilitates movement.



#### Reflection questions:

- What was the momentary clue that the Challenge voice might be needed?
- How did you notice this clue (was it something you felt or something you observed)?
- With the benefit of hindsight, what might you have said (in a collegial) Challenge voice?
- If you say it aloud, is there anything you might usefully change to make it land positively?
- Now think ahead. What are the forthcoming occasions when you might need to use your Challenge voice?
- What sort of utterance might that require?

**There are two TalkWise strategies that are particularly useful to making good use of the challenge voice: Noticing, and Inviting. Read on for some top tips on each of these strategies:**

**Noticing** is essentially about attending to the conversation as a whole, not just your own spoken contributions. Noticing involves being mindful of all the available clues and signals - both external and internal - about 'how this is going' - whether it is working or not. Listen to your gut and your instinct for this initial 'going well or going badly' feeling, then act on your noticing! Intervene to make it go better, by using the Challenge voice.

**Inviting** is a facilitational action and skill that encourages collaboration. It's useful, because productive conversations and meetings are always dependent on getting some form and degree of involvement from others. When an interaction has become stuck or sticky change the dynamic by introducing a different voice. This could sound like:

- 'Does anyone have a very different perspective on this?'
- 'What's the question that we should be asking ourselves?'
- 'What voice does this conversation need right now?'