

Reframing is the ability to take a destructive, backward-looking, or positional statement and transform it into a forward-looking, interest-based one — without losing or distorting the speaker's meaning. It is one of the most powerful communication tools in conflict work and one of the hardest to develop.

## WHY REFRAMING MATTERS

In high-tension conversations, people speak from pain, frustration, and fear. The language they use is rarely what they actually mean to communicate — it is the surface expression of something more specific and workable underneath. Reframing surfaces that something.

A skilled reframe does three things: it removes the charge from a statement, shifts the focus from the past to the future, and moves from blame toward need.

## THE ANATOMY OF A REFRAME

ORIGINAL STATEMENT	THE NEED UNDERNEATH	THE REFRAME
'You never listen to me.'	Need to feel heard and valued	'It sounds like feeling genuinely heard in these conversations is really important to you.'
'They always do whatever they want regardless of what we agree.'	Need for reliability and follow-through	'So what matters most here is that agreements are kept and people can be counted on.'
'This is completely unfair.'	Need for equity and recognition	'Fairness and being treated equitably seem to be at the core of this for you.'
'There's no point talking — nothing ever changes.'	Need to see that the conversation can lead somewhere	'What would make this conversation feel like it was actually going somewhere?'
'They have no idea what they're doing.'	Need for competence and trust in the process	'It sounds like trust in the process — and confidence in the people running it — is something you need before you can engage.'

## HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR REFRAMING PRACTICE

- Listen for the feeling before the content — most destructive statements are primarily emotional expressions.
- Find the need underneath the blame — what would the person need to be true for them to feel okay?
- Avoid the word 'but' in your reframe — it negates what came before and sounds dismissive.
- Check your reframe with the speaker — 'Is that close to what you mean?' shows respect and prevents distortion.
- Practice offline — take five statements from a recent conflict and rewrite each as a forward-looking interest statement.

## THE DEEPER SKILL

Reframing is not just a technique — it is a stance. It requires genuine curiosity about what someone really means, genuine respect for the person beneath their most difficult behavior, and genuine belief that workable ground exists. When that stance is present, reframes land. When it is absent, even technically correct reframes feel manipulative.