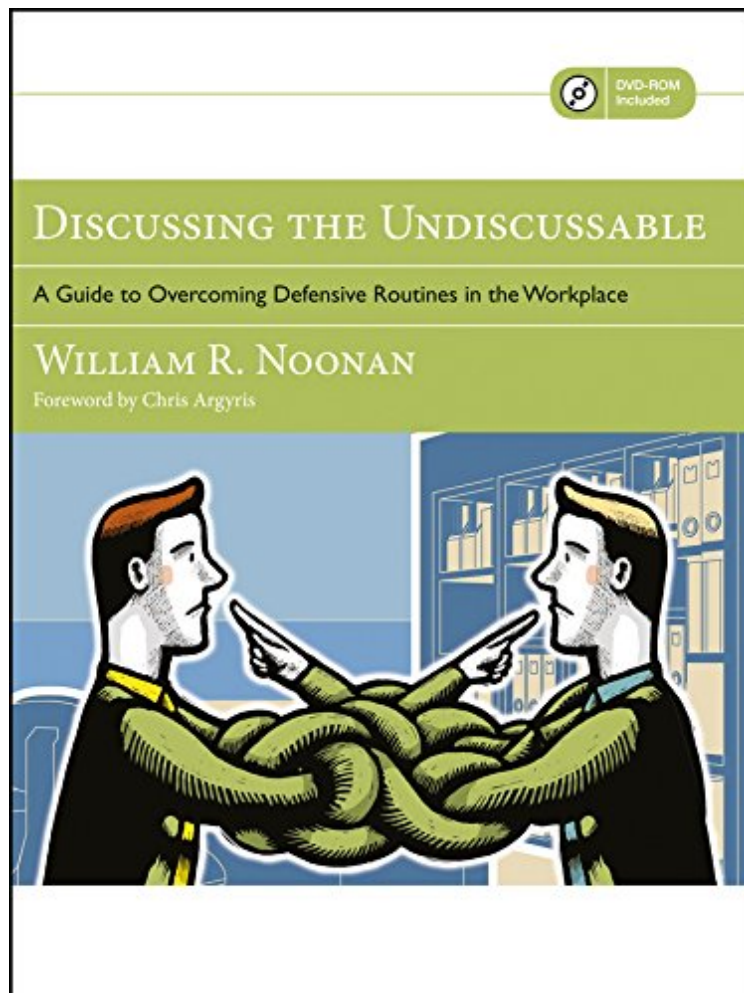


Discussing the Undiscussable: A Guide to Overcoming Defensive Routines in the Workplace

William R. Noonan

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William R. Noonan : Discussing the Undiscussable: A Guide to Overcoming Defensive Routines in the Workplace before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Discussing the Undiscussable: A Guide to Overcoming Defensive Routines in the Workplace:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Extremely Important BookBy Brandon HullThis book unveils how our personal defensive routines can stand in the way of, or even utterly undermine, organizational performance. What's great about this book are the example dialogues given. They're not hokey -- they're very believable. And the companion videos are nice reinforcements to the book's teachings. Great lessons.19 of 20 people found the following review helpful. This is brilliant!By Joey ChanI can't praise this book any higher, for 2 reasons. One is, and the most important one is, that this book is about a kind of interpersonal practice that was advocated by Chris Argyris and Donald Schon for at least 30 years, which was called action science. And there is a group of very experienced

consultants, and also students of Chris Argyris, still working on this approach. And I want to say, action science is the most powerful knowledge/practice that I have encountered in my life. It probably is one of the most important leverage on how to create a learning organization. AND, Chris Argyris though had written over 30 books on this topic, he wrote his books with two thumbs. Reading Argyris' works is always a daunting task. Before Bill Noonan's work come to live, I almost thought that it was impossible for this work to be written in "human language," and the author proved me that I was damn wrong. The reason for giving this book my highest praise, is because both Argyris and Schon's students went out and set up a consulting firm called Action Design (please google it). They are VERY GOOD, so good that I think they are, from my heart, the top-notch class of consultants. They refined Argyris and Schon's work and keep developing their own way of adopting the practice of doing an effective intervention on sticky organizational issues, and also keep teaching others how to do it. And Bill Noonan is one of them. The second reason for praising this book, is because it blends with different channels to convey Argyris's concept. It includes metaphors, story-telling method, a case-in-point, a DVD showing a lively conversation, and of course, the part that I most treasured, his personal experience and lesson-learned. Using these multi-dimensional way to help readers understand a very tedious concept, I think the author has fulfilled a very long order of demands, from everyday practitioners, with admirably success. I am still thinking if the book is writing with an assumption that readers would have the basic knowledge of action science. Saying that because I found the author writing with a no-nonsense style, jumping directly into the subject matter. And since I have many background knowledge and practice, so I found it very good and comfortable. Noonan's style is absolutely easy-to-read, so I am thinking people attracted by the title, without previous exposure to action science's knowledge, might also find it easy to follow. On the other hand, especially for those seasoned practitioners, the author suggests that even if we are familiar with Argyris and Schon's work, one could learn from his recap on those concepts. After reading the first part, I strongly agree with the author. Don't miss ANYTHING, out of this book. What makes this book special is that, the author added a lot of his personal experience into this method and tools, not only he gives live to those 'cold-stuffs,' but also many good suggestions and cautions on using those tools. And it is very valuable to any serious practitioner. Then, the whole mid-section of the book is about a very detailed scenario, Noonan gives a name on this case, he called it "Fix it now, or Fix it later." A superb case, I must say. This case vividly illustrated the stickiness and complexity of the organizational defensive routine, and how it affects organization's effectiveness. And in this scenario, there are many situations people thinks the situation is literally "undiscussable." Bill has spent a great deal of effort to convey this typical, ubiquitous phenomenon into an interactive multi-parties dialogues. With those nuance described in the details, we start to aware how these common phenomenon slipped from our naked eyes. Of course, the author also spends another great session on teaching people how to "discuss the undiscussable." And I bet anyone can learn from the author the technique, and the most important is on the mind-frame, of how to make brilliant moves out of these mucks. Later part of the book is absolutely my favorite. Bill shares not of his success stories, which many other author would like to brag on their success, rather, he shares with us his own personal failure cases, and what did he learn out of those lessons. On one hand, those stories are of very important lessons to many similiar practitioners, so it is of very high values. And also, Noonan has successfully demonstrated his practice of being a reflective practitioner. And he did it authentically. Last but not least, I particularly like to read the metaphors on dealing with defensive mechanism in organization. He used 'weeds in the garden' as a metaphor to describe organizational defense: it's a fact of life, and it is quite impossible to get rid of it totally, AND it always need people, with appropriate skills, to roll up their sleeves, gets our hands dirty, and clean it out. I find this metaphor both helpful and beautiful. Yes, the book is not cheap. but with the practice, this book will be one of your best investment in your personal development. 6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Bill Noonan realised the unreasable By Drs A. J. Ardon Discussing the Undiscussable is a book of great importance. I have read most of Chris Argyris' works and try to bring his insights into practice, which is far from easy and requires much practice. In my opinion, Argyris' work should play a pivotal role in organization changing and learning. Still, there is always a gap to bridge between his insights and the day-to-day practice of many managers (and practitioners). I think Bill Noonan succesfully contributes to bridge this gap with his accessible book: simple words, very practical examples and the DVD-ROM that clearly illustrates what he means (very helpful!). This book, that succesfully brings Argyris' brings ideas to all of us, deserves much praise! Arend Ardon

Since his 1990 landmark book *Overcoming Organizational Defenses*, Chris Argyris has extensively researched and written about how well-meaning, smart people create vicious cycles of defensive behavior to protect themselves from embarrassment and threat. In *Discussing the Undiscussable*, Bill Noonan enlivens the scholarly work of Chris Argyris through the use of reflective exercises and easy-to-read chapters that illuminate the basic human experience endemic to the creation of defensive routines. This book offers hope for altering organizational defensive routines by leveraging the greatest opportunity for change—the way we think and act. *Discussing the Undiscussable* provides a set of practical “how to do” exercises for detecting, surfacing, and discussing organizational defensive routines in a safe and productive way. The combination of text, business fable, and interactive and reflective exercises is versatile in its application to both individuals and groups. The companion DVD contains video vignettes of the book’s

business fable where the actors model both defensive routines and virtuous cycles of behavior. Readers will instantly recognize what has long been going on in the workplace, and will be able to develop the skills to talk about it productively.

"I highly recommend this book to leaders, consultants, and anyone else who wants to help teams and organizations learn to address their most challenging issues. Bill Noonan's insights, stories, and practical methods make this an important book to read." —Roger Schwarz, author, *The Skilled Facilitator*, and coauthor, *The Skilled Facilitator Fieldbook*

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"Whether at work or home we can use Bill Noonan's work to improve our lives and those of the people we interact with." —Robb E. Van Cleave, treasurer, International Board of Directors, Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM)

"In a world of increasing complexity where multiple perspectives are required for addressing work issues, the ability to guide groups in having honest discussions where both intuition and data are given full and fair consideration is more and more important." —Ralph Biggadike, professor, management division, Columbia Business School

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