

DEALING WITH CONFLICT & CONFRONTATION

“How to keep your cool, stand your ground, and reach a positive solution”

Introduction

Many conflicts are a result of what you consider another person's difficult behaviors: temper tantrums, personal attacks, manipulation, threats, and refusals to communicate. The underlying cause of conflict is individual differences. Perhaps we should be amazed not at how often we have conflict, but at how much give and take are a part of our everyday relationships. We do it so often and so automatically that we are unaware of the numbers of situations in which we compromise, problem solve and influence each other.

Dealing with conflict and confrontation is one of the most important skills you can learn. Most of us have a certain dread of confrontation—we fear being cheated; we're scared of letting others know what we really think and feel, for fear they'll use it against us; we believe our honesty will hurt others so we avoid confrontation or put on a strong front.

ANALYZING CONFLICT

You'll eliminate a significant portion of your conflicts by distinguishing between disagreement and conflict, and realizing that you don't have to resolve disagreements.

There are three types of disagreements

1. Different opinions about facts
2. Different interpretations of reality
3. Blame for past wrongdoing
 - a. Can lead to the worst kind of argument

Disagreements don't have to be resolved

There are four ways to handle disagreements without resolving them.

1. Agree to debate for the fun of it.
2. Refuse to argue about the conflicting opinions.
 - Use silence –just don't take the bait.
3. Agree to disagree.
4. Forgive past grievances or keep them to yourself.
 - Arguing can be costly in terms of time and good relationships.
 - Focus on how you can change the situation now and in the future, and let go of what is done.

CONFLICT

True conflict is another matter and can jeopardize productivity at work and healthy relationships at home or at work.

Definition of conflict

“A perceived divergence of interest, or a belief that the parties’ current aspirations (goals) cannot be achieved simultaneously.”

Simplified: A belief, not necessarily a fact, that if you get what you want, I can’t get what I want.

Two primary reasons for conflict

1. We have different interests.
2. We have the same interests, which are in conflict.

Position versus Interest

Position = what you want (vehicle)

Interest = why you want it (cargo); your motivation or reason

It’s important to talk about interests, not positions. If you focus on interests, you might find you have some of the same interests, and some that are different. You might discover there are many vehicles (positions) to transport your cargo (satisfy your interests) to where you want it to be.

Don’t start with solution to conflict; start with interest.

“Win/win” doesn’t mean it will be conflict parts.

The two faces of conflict

Most of us dislike conflict. However, it’s important to realize when it can be good.

Conflict is good when...

- It is a symptom of discontent.
- It produces change for the better.
 - Signs: old, outdated policies; social inequities; etc.
- It produces gains or innovation and new ideas.
- It fosters unity and understanding; stable relationships..
- It brings about behavior changes
 - The dissonance can be so uncomfortable that you change your behavior in order to establish harmony between what you believe and what you do.

When people address conflict, they talk about their interests and get to know each other better. Greater empathy and understanding occur; people learn that diversity can be handled and can be interesting and productive.

Conflict is bad when...

- Conflict escalates

Researchers have identified five levels by which the parties become true enemies.

1. There are accusations and threats..
 - Parties get angry, blame, accuse
2. Issues proliferate

- From one to many
3. Specifics are replaced by general issues.
 - From a specific behavior to the entire relationship
 4. Concern for self turns into retaliation.
 - Primary interests become hurting the other person or getting even.
 5. The number of parties involved increases or spreads.
 - Factions and cliques form

Be alert to the escalation process. It usually happens in this order, so it's easy to predict what will happen next. The earlier you intervene, the better the chance for problem solving.

2. Conflict leads to hostility and fear.
 - When struggle leads to stalemate, parties experience negative psychological changes that are often irreversible
3. Conflict is suppressed (denied)
 - Many people's response to conflict is to:
 - a. Give up
 - b. Give in
 - c. Ignore the situation and pretend nothing's wrong
 - This is often seen as the only alternative to fighting.
 - a. It only sends the conflict "underground" and channels energy from constructive endeavors to destructive behaviors.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES AND THEIR EFFECTS

Five classic conflict-resolution strategies, and the pros and cons of each

Your choice of strategy will depend primarily on how much you care about meeting your goals versus how much you care about the other person meeting their goals. A concern for both parties' interests is called the "dual concern model" and provides the best chance for improved relationships.

1. Yielding

- Giving in to the other person
- A unilateral coping strategy
 - you don't need cooperation or permission from the other party to use it

Yielding occurs when.

- You have low aspirations
 - You realize what you want isn't that important compared to something else
- Others' goals are more important than your own
 - The relationship is unstable
 - New love, new job
 - The trust level is still low and you feel insecure
- Approval from others is more important ("buying" the relationship)

- People feel threatened.
 - An expectation of punishment, loss or deprivation

Advantages

- Use it as a bargaining chip.
- Making concessions on a low priority interest can save time and hassles.
 - You can move on to more important issues.
 - It can prevent conflict escalation.
 - Gives the impression that you're willing to negotiate.

Disadvantages

- It produces low joint benefits.
 - No effort is made to be creative and improve the situation.
- If you yield to threats, you're rewarding intimidating behavior.
 - Invites repetition of intimidation.
- You can end up regretting giving in.
 - You may feel cheated or manipulated.
 - You may feel angry at yourself or the other person.
 - You may carry a bitter feeling of loss.

2. Withdrawing is ...

Escape from the conflict, physically or psychologically

A unilateral noncoping strategy

Accomplished two ways

Breaking off (voluntary)

Giving up (involuntary)

Withdrawing occurs when ...

There is high concern for self, and low concern for others

People have better alternatives

--If I have an alternative that seems more attractive than settling my conflict with you, I can break off without any negative consequences.

--When the other party withdraws from a conflict, ask if they have a better alternative (especially important for sales)

People feel angry and spiteful.

--The classic pouter

People feel threatened

--Fear of an emotional explosion.

Advantages

- It diminishes sense of frustration.
 - Saves time to do other things.
- It can force you to develop better alternatives.
- Temporary withdrawal can mean buying time.
 - A good cooling off strategy.
 - It allows people to simmer down.
 - Can also remind the other party of the stake he or she has in the relationship.

Disadvantages

- Conflict doesn't get resolved
- Low joint benefits
 - No opportunity for improvement in the relationship.

- High frustration level possible.
If you want to talk and other person won't cooperate.

3. Inaction is...

- A unilateral, noncoping strategy that arises from either
procrastination (maybe the problem will take care of itself)
denial (there is no problem)

Inaction occurs when...

- There is low concern for both parties' goals.
The issues on both sides seem unimportant
It's not worth the time or effort to resolve the conflict
- People are afraid of conflict
- People don't want to make waves (rock boat).
If the messenger of bad tidings gets shot in your organization, you tend to avoid
being the messenger

Advantages

- When time can take care of the problem, avoiding it may be your best option
- When the issue is sensitive.
- The person will become defensive.
- When confronting the conflict would escalate it.

Disadvantages

- The disadvantages far outweigh the advantages.**
- Hostilities grow beneath the surface.
- The problem compounds.
- No joint benefits.
You're doing nothing to solve the problem.
- High social and economic costs, high stress..

CONFRONTATION

The first three strategies were non-confrontational; that is, each party could act (or not act) alone.
The next strategy involves both parties.

4. Contending is ...

- A bilateral coping strategy; it won't work unless you cooperate by pushing back or
giving in
- This takes place with
The mind-set that only one can win (and better me than you)
A scarcity mentality (there's a limited amount of any resource)

Contending occurs when...

- There is high concern for self and low or no concern for others
- "I'm right and you're wrong."

People are scared of losing

People feel hostile

- "You made life hard for me, so I'll make life hard for you."

People are rigid in their positions
--"My way is the only way."

People believe that joint gains aren't possible (the size of the pie is fixed)
--Conflict as a sports event (winner/loser), not as an opportunity for creativity and innovation

People have the ability to contend
--Position, power, resources, better alternatives

People believe the other will give in
--You believe I'm not firm and don't know what I want
--I appear to have no good alternatives

Six contentious tactics

A contention tactic is any influence or pressure people use to get what they want; the concern is primarily for oneself.

1. Ingratiation

Based on the "principle of liking"
--The more you like me, the more you'll cooperate.

There are four factors that influence the degree to which someone likes us and, therefore, will give us what we want.

1. Similarity in beliefs, hobbies, organization, etc.
2. Flattery and compliments
--Especially effective when the other person feels insecure and when delivered following a criticism.
3. Doing favours
--Doesn't work if the other person realizes it's being done only to get a favor in return.
4. Demonstrating a positive image ("toot own horn")
--"Actions speak louder than words."

NOTE:Paradox

The more powerful you are, the better this works and the less you need it. The less powerful you are, the less it works but the more you need it.

2. Persuasive argumentation

This strategy works by getting others to lower their demands through a series of logical arguments (making them more flexible, about their goals).

It works two ways:

Convincing you it will cost me too much
--"If I grant your request, it'll cost me my job."
--Laying a guilt trip on them

Convincing you it's in your favor to ask for less
--"If I grant your request, it'll cost you your job."
--The fear factor

3. Promises

Offering a carrot, payoff or reward in exchange for compliance.

"If you do this, I'll do that." This is a relatively light tactic that can foster goodwill, but there's good and bad.

The Good News

- Promises usually beget promises.
- Promises create a sense of indebtedness that people want to get rid of.
- Promises are a good problem solving skill because they're based on a sense of fairness.
- Positive incentives generally beget greater commitment than negative incentives.

The Bad News

- Promiser has to make good on promise.
It costs the promiser something.
- The reward offered can lose its effectiveness over time.
Then you'll have to offer more.
- Promises can create excessive dependence.
"I won't do it unless you give me something."
- Promises can be costly if broken.
Future promises won't work if expectations are not fulfilled.
Disappointment, anger, frustration, distrust will occur if promises are not kept.
- It's hard to know how much to promise.
Promise too much and you'll pay more than you have to.
Promise too little and you won't get any cooperation

In general, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

4. Gamesmanship

There are two types of maneuvers, and both can be nasty tactics. They are one-upmanship and manipulation. The major difference between these two tactics is that one-upmanship is intentional and manipulation can be unintentional. Manipulation is often learned early in life.

1. One-upmanship) It is done intentionally
 - Maneuvers to distract and fluster
 1. Intended to rattle you so you can't think straight.
 2. This only works if you don't know what's going on.
 3. It's important to increase your awareness of these tactics.
 - Their number is only limited by people's imagination.
 - The secret is to pull it off without making you suspicious.

Some gems

- Making you wait.
- Suggesting you might find it hard to understand something
- Taking real or fake phone calls during negotiations with you
- Lack of eye contact
- Making you sit on uncomfortable furniture

Don't become overly suspicious.

--Look for multiple clues.

--Watch for repetition of the maneuvers.

2. Manipulation

--Maneuvers to exert emotional pressure, especially guilt, to get what you want.

Three types of manipulation

1. Playing victim

--They give you a "hard luck" story; you feel sorry for them and take care of them (helplessness).

2. Crying or pouting

--Getting attention through inappropriate means
You tiptoe around them.

Tactic: Let them sit and compose themselves and then continue the discussion.

2. Blaming you for being selfish when you make a healthy choice

--You refuse to violate your interests, but they make you feel ashamed or guilty.

Another form of blame

--Making you a member of a "nasty group"

"You're a women's libber."

"You're a socialist."

"Why can't you be like?"

5. Threats

--Making "if/then" propositions with punishment as the outcome (as opposed to promises that result in positive incentives)

--Can be spoken or unspoken

The Good News

--They cost nothing if they work—no rewards, no punishment.

--They're more effective in the short run than promises.

The threatener appears more powerful.

People are more motivated to avoid losses than to gain rewards

--Threatener can benefit even when renegeing on threat..

Can be seen as humane, kind, compassionate.

--Risky, but not as risky as renegeing on a promise.

--Threats are often seen as consistent with a sense of justice,

"If you don't do what's required, you deserve what you get."

The Bad News

Far outweighs the good news.

--Threats elicit similar behavior in others.

Counter threats, which escalate the conflict.

--Lead to dislike, suspicion, hatred, and aggression.

--Threats often lead to compliance ("have to do it"), but they typically don't lead to commitment ("want to do it").

--Those threatened tend to avoid the threatener and the entire work setting; possible loss of productivity.

--When threats don't work they result in a lose/lose outcome.

Dirty Tactics

When people feel threatened, they often hit below the belt. We'll look at three typical dirty tactics. Of all the strategies and tactics used in problem situation, dirty tactics are the least productive way to deal with conflict.

1. Personal attacks

You are the problem instead of your behavior.

2. Lies/Deceit

--Giving you phony facts to get their way

Lies are hard to deal with because if you accuse the other person of lying, they act outraged and the conflict increases.

3. Sabotage and back-stabbing

--Instead of talking to you about the problem, they talk about ____ as the problem.

--Passive-aggressive behavior

6. Irrevocable commitments

--Two forms:

1. Threat of mutual disaster

Making a commitment to a course of action that will end in mutual disaster unless you concede to certain demands.

2. Contest of wills

Refusing to budge

--"It's company policy."

--"Take it or leave it."

Bring resolution attempts to standstill..

To get around this tactic--Focus on interest--Ask "How is it in your best interest to stop our negotiation now?"

CONFLICT ESCALATION

We've been looking at contentious tactics, moving from light to heavy. Conflict escalation is the process of becoming enemies. We'll look at this process and the psychological damage that results from it.

The regressive spiral of push-counter push:

Most people think escalation goes up, but a regressive spiral goes down.

Escalation is a regressive spiral because it only leads into a pit.

What happens when a conflict escalates?

It's a process of fighting fire with fire. With each new turn of the spiral, the conflict intensifies and becomes more hostile, more vicious.

--First we accuse and threaten

--Then we find more issues to fight about.

--We generalize our specific problem to the entire relationship.

--We continue until we hate each other's guts and waste our energy on getting even..

--Finally, we enlist other people to help us fight the battle.

Psychological changes

The psychological changes that occur are not just temporary; they leave an irreversible impression.

1. Selective Perception

Once I've decided you're my enemy, I'll look for evidence to prove I'm right.

If I think you're a liar, I'll try to catch you in a lie.

If I think you're cutting me down, I'll interpret most of what you say as a personal attack.

If I think you backstab and sabotage, whenever I see you talking to someone I'll think you're gossiping about me.

I'll never notice anything good that you do.

The expectation is you're out to get me.

2. Self-fulfilling prophecy

Once I see you as an enemy, I'll treat you like the enemy I think you are.

The likely result: You'll give back as good as you get.

--I'll say you act like my enemy.

3. Ceasing to communicate.

--We reach an impasse.

--Very seldom, if ever, do we re-establish trust.

--We may work politely together, but we're wary, and bitterness remains.

The good news: Escalation can be stopped at any time by problem solving.

Four Reasons Impasses end

If you're at an impasse, keep in mind they usually end under the following conditions:

1. Contentious tactics have lost their fight (bite).
 - a. "There are worse things than being called pond scum."
2. Disputants have run out of resources.
 - a. The parties involved have run out of time, energy and money.
3. Lack of support for the fight.
 - a. Everyone else is sick and tired of hearing you complain and no longer supports you.
4. Risks have become too large.
 - a. Examples: divorce, losing the kids, losing the job, ulcers, substance abuse, suicide attempts

**Three ways to break an impasse

1. Give in
 - Begin the process.
 - Does not mean you are giving in on all your interests.
2. Break off
 - Find another job, another relationship, and promise yourself you'll never make another pit stop.
3. Problem Solving
 - The best way to break an impasse.

*More often than not, problem solving is the first thing people try in a conflict situation. When it isn't successful, they use contentious tactics, the conflict escalates until it reaches an impasse, and finally they're force back into problem solving.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Definition: Any effort to locate a mutually acceptable solution to controversy.

Preconditions

You need all four preconditions to be met for problem solving to occur.

1. Show concern for mutual gain.
 - a. There are 2 kinds of concern:
 - i. Genuine
 - ii. Instrumental or strategic (you can still show concern even though you don't like them)
 - b. The premise of dual concern: cooperation and enlightened self-interest
Knowing that helping you meet your interests can help me meet my interest.
 - c. Maintaining or improving the relationship
2. Flexible on Solutions, firm on interests
 - a. Solutions = positions = vehicles
 - b. Interests = cargo
 - i. Violation of your interests is reason for conflict..
 - c. Being firm on interest and flexible on Solutions is the best chance for satisfying both parties and appearing negotiable.
3. Creativity
 - a. Develop a Plan B.
 - i. Good alternative to an agreement.
 - ii. Two reasons for having a Plan B are:
 1. Gives you more power
 2. Basis for comparing any agreement.

Determine:

- What can you do by yourself to satisfy your interests ?
- What can you do to influence the other side to respect your interests?
- How could a 3rd party help to further your interests?
- Never bluff about having a Plan B.

90 % of time is spent in preparation

- b. Willingness to brain storm
4. Separate the people and the problem.
 - a. Be soft on people and hard on the problem.
 - Ask "what is the problem?". Visualize the problem in front of you while both are sitting on the same side.
 - b. Two elements influence problem solving
 - Trust
 - Firm aspirations (goals)
 - Communicate to their self-esteem.
 - Remember the adversary is the problem not the person.

The four steps of problem solving

1. Eliminate false conflicts by determining if the situation is a disagreement or a true Conflict of interests.
 - a. If a disagreement, offer one of the four solutions discussed earlier.
 - b. If a misunderstanding:
 - i. Ask the person to state his or her viewpoint ..
 - ii. Restate what you heard.
 - iii. State problem from your viewpoint.
 - c. *If it is a conflict, go to Step 2.*
2. Analyze your interests and their interests . (What is the problem)
 - a. Make a list of your interests and prioritize according to:
 - i. Concessions I can give away
 - ii. Concessions I can trade
 - iii. Concessions I won't make
 - b. Set reasonably high goals and stick to them. Put yourself in their shoes and ask "What would I do in their position?"
 - c. Discuss the problem before the solution .
 - i. Ask "Why, why not, what if...?"
3. Find possible solutions to both parties' problems.
 - a. Brainstorm solutions; generate ideas together. (make sure you both understand it is just inventing not deciding .
 - i. Rules for brainstorming are: (1) all ideas are accepted, write them down (2) no criticism is allowed (verbal or non-verbal, i.e., rolling eyes, sighing, etc.); (3) review ideas; (4) select most promising ones; (5) invent improvements.
 - b. Don't dictate; ask a question..
 - i. An imposed agreement is not stable .
 - c. Sit side by side to create a feeling of partnership .
 - d. Start with the easy issues, then go on to the harder ones.
4. If Step 3 doesn't resolve the situation, make some mutual low-priority concessions
Recycle Steps 3 and 4 until you reach decision
Be patient; persist until Plan B becomes a better choice.
Put agreement in writing and set a follow-up date

Three consequences of problem solving

It is efficient.

Best chance of maintaining or improving relationships

Produces more lasting agreements.

Getting the other party to problem solve

Often the other party isn't automatically willing to problem solve.

A. Keep your composure by:

1. Focus on your interest. (Keep your eye on the ball.)
 - a. Have a list of your interests to look at. It will:
 - b. Keep you focused on the real issues.
 - c. Leave you flexible on solutions.
 - d. Help you maintain your composure.

2. Recognize the nasty tactics.
 - a. Be alert but not overly suspicious.
 - b. Look for multiple clues or incongruent communication.
 3. Know your "Hot buttons" and know how to deactivate them.
 4. Pause and "leave your body." (count to 10, 100 or 1000!)
 - a. Break the automatic link between emotion and action.
 5. Maintain a healthy skepticism.

Just because you are paranoid doesn't mean people are out to get you.
- B. Play it 'side by side'; align with the other side.
1. Put yourself in their shoes.
 - See the situation from their viewpoint not your own. ("walk around the elephant")
 - Express empathy; show respect, not hostility. (Walk a mile in their shoes in order to possibly recognize what is going on with them.)
 2. Express concern for the relationship.
 - "I don't want us to be enemies."
 3. Let them _save face.
 - Make a reasonable request ("You won't mind if I check this out?")
 4. Ask questions and use silence. Wait for the answer.
 - "What would you do in my place?" "What do you mean and how do you know?"
 - Invite specific criticism.
 5. Use humor.
 - i. Laugh at yourself or the situation.
5. Let others know you are firm but agreeable to negotiation.
 - a. Stand up for yourself. (Warn but do not threaten)
 - Pinpoint the behavior. (Use "I" statements).
 - Respond to reason, but not to force (no personal attacks).
 - Let them get it off their chest.
 - Say, "I respond to suggestions a whole lot better than to threats."
 - Take sarcasm at face value.
 - Sidestep the attack by focusing on the interest and keep on talking about the problem.
 - b. Warn, don't threaten.
 - There's a fine line between the two.
 - Threat: "Here's what I'll do to you."
 - Warning: "Here's what the situation will be."
 - c. Look to the future.
 - Ask, "What do you think will happen if we don't resolve this conflict?"
 - How do we make sure this never happens again?"
 - d. Let them know your Plan B, but always leave the door open.
 - Example for sulking: "I'm ready to talk when you are. Until then I'll just go about my business."
 - e. You can walk away (break off).
 - Leave the door open.
 - f. If all else fails, suggest a third party (mediator).

10 on-task communication rules for problem solving

1. Both parties state their problem.
 - Use "I" statements.
 - Acknowledge the other's problem and indicate a willingness to help.
 - No zapping (name calling, put-downs).
 - No cross-complaining.
 - Don't answer a complaint with another complaint.
 - Deal with one thing at a time.
2. Let them talk and you listen.
 - Don't interrupt.
 - Acknowledge; verbal and non-verbal.
 - Restate what you've heard.
 - Offer an apology when appropriate. ("I regret"..., "I'm sorry"...)
3. Ask clarifying questions.
 - Why? Why not? What if? Etc.
 - Not accusatory "why" questions, i.e. "Why are you being so stubborn?"
 - Use silence to convey you are waiting for an answer.
4. Stay in the present and the future, not the past.
5. Stick to the topic at hand.
6. Look for areas of agreement.
7. If the discussion escalates, withdraw, but not before scheduling the next discussion.
8. Use mutual restating and paraphrasing.
 - If either party feels misunderstood, agree to restate what the misunderstood person has said until the latter feels he or she has been understood correctly.
9. All requests for change should be stated in behavioral terms.
 - Don't ask for a change in attitude.
 - Don't ask that the other person "feel" differently.
 - Don't ask the other person to be different.
 - If the request is to "stop doing" something, tell him or her what to do instead.
10. Body Language rules.
 - Be consistent with verbal and nonverbal messages.
 - Rely more on words rather than facial expressions when communicating negative feelings.
 - Show confidence; relax, don't fidget; use good eye contact; show interest and optimism, etc.