Constructive Conflict

By
Elaine
Yarbrough, Ph. D.

Part of the Volunteer Management Series of VMSystems

Constructive Conflict

By
Elaine
Yarbrough, Ph. D.

Part of the Volunteer Management Series of VMSystems

ISBN #0-911029-12-5

The "Volunteer Management Series" offers monographs on various subjects of interest and use to non-profit organizations and agencies that utilize the efforts of volunteers. It is designed and published through VMSystems - Heritage Arts Publishing, 1807 Prairie Avenue, Downers Grove, IL 60515. (312) 964-1194.

Other Books by the Author

Training Strategies: From Start to Finish. Prentice-Hall. 1985.

CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT

CONTENTS

About the Author

Elaine Yarbrough heads Yarbrough & Associates, a training and consulting group in Boulder, Colorado, that specializes in communication and conflict management for individuals, groups, and organizations. During the past 18 years, she has assisted more than 400 organizations all over the country including, businesses, educational institutions, local, state and federal governmental units, and nonprofits. Dr. Yarbrough has a Ph. D. in Communication and Human Relations from the University of Kansas. For seven years, she taught at the University of Colorado where she received both university teaching awards given by students and faculty. She currently lives in Boulder with her husband, Mike, and daughter, Lindsay.

Chapter 1

How Can Conflict be Constructive?

I have a friend who is one of the happiest people I know. No matter what the situation, she reframes it as an opportunity. She is not lost in a city: she is getting to meet new people. And she gets it honest. Her mother was very ill in the hospital, her heart beat constantly monitored. As she watched the peaks and valleys of the lines on the monitor (the normal pattern), she thought she must be in precarious shape. But when she saw the line momentarily go straight on the monitor (the death pattern), she knew she was finally improving and her spirits soared.

Creating Meaning

How we respond to others and situations is based on the meaning we make. Some can be on a vacation where nothing is going according to plan and delight in the adventure. Others are sad or mad because original expectations are not fulfilled. Meaning is created, not found.

And so it is true of our response to conflict. Unfortunately, when asked what words and meanings they associate with conflict, volunteer managers often say stress, anger, avoidance, loss, fear, disillusionment, and battle. When framed in this way, the meaning of conflict is negative, creating negative actions. For if I fear loss or dislike anger, I likely will avoid conflict: passively, aggressively, or passive aggressively. For example, some hope to avoid conflict by being nice and pleasing; some by eliminating the opponent; and some by a combination: appearing pleasant while turning a knife in the back. The irony is that chronically avoiding conflict makes it worse. For ignored conflict does not disappear but goes underground, only to erupt later in confusing and often destructive ways: foot dragging, rumors, stalled decisions, tardiness, low commitment, resentment, low productivity and energy, scapegoating (often the leader), and other forms of sabotage (albeit unconscious).

On the other hand, some words associated with conflict that leak into the discussion are change, growth, opportunity, excitement, energy, and improved relationships. When we believe conflict can have positive outcomes, our actions change: from drawing battlelines to exploring differences; from winning to seeking mutual solutions; from feeling helpless to hopeful; from belittling to encouraging; from dreading differences to embracing them; from avoiding conflict to regulating it. Constructive conflict has enormous benefits.

There are many ways to regulate conflict: from discussion in which there are mild differences to war. In between those extremes are situations that call for face-to-face negotiation; heated up instances in which people campaign to win or must call in third parties; and cases that call for litigation.[1] I am talking here about situations that call for negotiation, back and forth communication between people who have some goals in common and some in opposition.[2] And the benefits of using constructive negotiation skills are that many situations will improve, preventing the use of more extreme means of managing conflict; and the creative energy of the situation will be tapped.

Barriers to Constructive Conflict

The reason that many people get bound up in the unproductive conflict cycle is that they view the world in terms of opposites. Volunteer managers, for example, usually want to be seen as sensitive, caring, giving, helping, cooperative people and

see these qualities contradictory to conflictual, controlling, strategic, and tough behavior. In choosing the former, they forgo the latter; with several important consequences for managing conflict. The first was alluded to earlier: conflict is ignored, goes underground, only to erupt later. A cycle of avoidance and accusation is set in motion. Within this cycle, the soft qualities like caring seem false since the only way to be truly caring is to know when to be soft on people, nurturing them, and to be tough on them, drawing the line. (Tough love is a concept embracing both the soft and hard.) I have heard of some programs being damaged when a volunteer manager would not fire a disruptive volunteer. I have heard even more talk of burn out and exhaustion because many volunteer managers believe helping means total accessibility to others, saying "yes," rather than a balance between taking care of self (controlling their own time and space) and extending to others. Giving to self is seen as self-ish while giving to others is self-less. Thus they are depleted and can give little to anyone. Rather than seeing qualities as opposites, it is helpful to see them creating a balance between the soft and hard dimensions of ourselves. In my experience, volunteer managers must learn to develop the hard side while understanding that when the soft and hard are balanced, the connection to others and to self is indeed more genuine and helpful.

The second consequence of seeing conflict as negative is that it often is mistimed. Some problems become conflicts because complaints are not followed up in a timely manner. In one case, some volunteers had been complaining about the autocratic style of the professional advisor of their project. The manager promised to address the issue but waited several months. The volunteers finally went to the next level of management and the conflict erupted unproductively.

A third tendency when conflict is seen in opposition to caring has to do with misreading the conflict: focusing on surface vs. real issues, encumbering your goals, and pushing for conformity vs. creativity.[3] For example, a volunteer manager in a church planned a special youth mass, and the assistant pastor was 20 minutes late. Instead of addressing the problems created, directly expressing feelings about the incident, or making agreements for the future to help prevent mishaps, they argued about whether being late meant a lack of consideration.

When you are unclear about your own goals in a conflict you may encumber them: have too many goals which are sometimes contradictory themselves. For example, some of you may not only want to solve difficulties between volunteers but also want everyone to be happy. Happiness seems to be measured by degree of agreement and reduction of differences, two conditions which block the creative use of conflict. One manager confronted two volunteers who expressed their anger at each other by slamming doors and blocking the other's work. She said she wanted them to "to understand the other's position." After the discussion, both clearly understood but did not agree with the other's viewpoint, but became politely cordial at work. Even though the stated goals of the conflict were met, the manager judged the conflict unproductive and tension for her remained because the volunteers did not *like* each other. The tension is largely unnecessary if conflict is viewed as problem solving and not as a way to make everyone close friends. The insistence that everyone like each other may even worsen and prolong the conflict.

You may encumber your own goals because you *too* want approval from others as well as a part of their budget for your volunteer program. It does not make sense if you are vying for limited resources that others will approve of you. They can respect you and defer to you, but may not like you for having used your organizational power. Many of you may be halted from developing effective programs because someone does not approve of you and your mission. At that time, you must make a choice between being liked and being effective. You *do* have to meet some interests of others in your organization as you meet your own; but if others need you, are served by you, they do not necessarily have to *like* you. And it is ironic that when you use your power well, to serve others effectively, you will probably get more approval in the long run not because you were nice and accommodated everyone else, but because you were effective. And it is true that some people approve of you only when you conflict openly with them rather than sweetly agreeing.

You may also misread the conflict because you unconsciously push toward conformity rather than use differences creatively. In one church program, the volunteer manager reported that the pastor was interested in her program to increase his power while she wanted only to serve the clients. She was so disturbed by his motive that she could not work with him. These two motivations are not necessarily in conflict and can be used to get both people involved if we do not have to be alike in order to work together. She might even have presented him with an award in front of his peers for his support of youth community programs, satisfying his need for influence and her need for budgetary support. A *particularly* deadly trap is to push for value conformity in a conflict. It has been my experience that volunteer managers, to influence others, often try to change others' values rather than focusing on the problem to be solved, thus polarizing the conflict. One volunteer director said her Board was composed of "a bunch of chauvinists" and when she tried to change the attitude of the Board about male/female issues, the members increased their control by appointing more men of the same persuasion to the Board. There are strategies of influence other than challenging another's values. Once your goal in a conflict switches from solving concrete problems to proving you are right and the other is wrong, both sides usually solidify and constructive conflict is stymied.

The last consequence of seeing conflict as negative is that your agreements may be ineffective. Even when you confront a problem and clear the air, the conflict may worsen if you do not make specific agreements. For example, one director of volunteers wanted an employee to be on time in the mornings. She talked about the problem; the employee promised to do better, but continued to be late (though not as late as before). The director was angrier than before the conflict because she believed her employee had broken an agreement. The employee was frustrated because she *was* "doing better." "Doing better" is not an effective agreement. Rather, agreements need to be concrete and measurable. When, specifically, should the employee be at work? At what time does the director consider him late? What are the consequences for being late?

The difficulties described above point to the areas we need to consider to improve our handling of conflict: using flexible approaches to conflict vs. perpetuating the cycle of avoidance and accusation; understanding the real interests of the conflict so problems can be solved vs. pushing for conformity for false harmony; reaching good agreements vs. settling for ambiguity that fosters later resentment; and preparing yourself internally, examining your beliefs and feelings that foster frustration or kindle hope. Conflict can be constructive: let us begin.

FOOTNOTES

1. John Keltner views conflict on a struggle spectrum that covers 6 stages of escalation: mild difference, disagreement, dispute, campaign, litigation, and fight or war. In each stage, the conflict parties get further apart and by the third stage see each other as opponents. Behavior goes from problem-solving to violence; goals initially include the other person and then exclude them; communication moves from open and friendly to guarded and hostile. John Keltner, "The Struggle Spectrum" handout material, Self Awareness and Interpersonal Communication Workshop, 1987.

2. This definition parallels the one used by Roger Fisher and William Ury in Getting To Yes (Houghton-Mifflin: Boston, 1981).

3. Many of these negative patterns of managing conflict became apparent when I asked 100 volunteer managers to describe productivity and unproductivity conflicts. See Elaine Yarbrough, "Managing Conflict," The Journal of Volunteer Administration, III: 3, Spring, 1985.

Chapter 2

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

I woke up one Saturday morning stressed and irritated; nothing was right and everyone was in my way. Of course, errands had to be done while dragging the whining toddler along. I begrudgingly went to Wal-Mart, a large discount store, for several items; stomped in and grabbed a cart. An older gentleman whose job description, I suppose, was to assist customers with the carts, smiled broadly at me. He gently picked Lindsay up, talked to her in a grandfatherly way and she settled down. In a low, understanding tone, he said, "Some Saturday mornings are tougher than others, I know. If I can help, please let me know." None of this "Have a Nice Day" stuff with smile pasted on and eyes diverted to the next customer. But a clear, soft focus and a spirit that seemed genuinely glad to be out among people, greeting them and easing the day. My perspective changed; I felt better; my family reaped the benefit all weekend of this one small, yet significant interaction.

And so it is with the power of communication. After all, how we communicate with each other is all we know about each other. I can guess about your thoughts and feelings; but my connection to you is our communication. And it has a profound effect on the process and outcome of all encounters, especially stressful ones like conflicts. It usually takes only one person in the conflict to communicate effectively for the direction of the conflict to change.

Tom Crum in his book, The Magic of Conflict, uses the image of Aikido to describe the power of effective response to discord. In this martial art, if someone is attacking, you can resist the blows, but you must have much greater strength to win or change the direction of the conflict. Resistance of course perpetuates the struggle. You can try to avoid contact with the person, moving or running away. Often that only angers the other and the attack is more furious. Or you can move with the energy of the other, aligning for a moment with his movement, thus using his energy to re-direct the attack.

I had an Aikido experience one evening at a gathering for women at the home of one of my dear friends. One of the discussion leaders led us in a communication exercise in which partners drew a picture inside a circle without talking. I had been mediating a conflict all day and was in a rather hard mood. My partner, whom I had never met, began and drew little pink circles inside the larger circle. I thought to myself cynically, "How sweet. Life is not a series of little circles, it is harsh and tough." So with my dark blue pen I drew jagged lines through her circles. She hesitated. She drew more pink circles on another part of the page. I drew more jagged lines. She paused longer and then, to my surprise, followed my lines with her pink pencil. I was suspicious and tested her by drawing another series of harsh lines. She followed my lead again, and then I softened. She wasn't fighting my energy but going with it. At that point, I drew several little blue circles. Once we had seen each other's point of view, we no longer competed about perspective but were free to create quite a lovely picture. In a 3 minute, nonverbal exercise I had experienced how a conflict can become harmonious rather than discordant when at least one person risks using another style and seeing the world through the other's eyes.

Communicating effectively in conflict has several characteristics:

- ❑ flexibility
- ❑ appropriateness
- ❑ maturity

Flexible Communication

Flexibility means using a variety of communication styles to fit the situation. Four styles[1] that can be used are

- ❑ *Aggressive/Confrontive*
- ❑ *Assertive/Persuasive*
- ❑ *Observant/Introspective*
- ❑ *Avoiding/Reacting*

To be an effective conflict manager, you need to be able to use all of these styles, each at the right time. None is inherently good or bad, but rather the effectiveness of each depends on how and when it is used.

Style 1

Aggressive/confrontive means being directive, with a need to control situations and/or people, having non-negotiable demands.

Style 2

Assertive/Persuasive means relying heavily on verbal skills, having a proactive approach to conflict, convincing the other and sometimes yourself of another perspective.

Style 3

Observant/Introspective is a more receptive style and means listening and analyzing conflict situations.

Style 4

Avoiding/Reacting means withdrawing from conflict, avoiding confrontation.

Normally, each of us has a preference for more or less active styles (Styles 1 & 2 vs. Styles 3 & 4), a preference for the one or two styles we feel most comfortable using, and a preferred sequence (some are aggressive and if they can't win, avoid the conflict; some observe and then persuade; some avoid until the pressure builds up and then explode.)

There are several *traps* that restrain our effectiveness in conflict:

1. We overuse styles that are comfortable to us. Each of us has learned a style very early in life that works for us. We practice it; sometimes find a career that supports and encourages it; and fail to update and add other styles needed for new situations. It simply doesn't occur to us to communicate another way. In fact, if a favorite style is not working in a conflict, we usually do more of it. If aggression is not influencing another, we bring out the canon. If passivity is not reducing the conflict, we go catatonic. The rule of thumb is "If a style is not working in a conflict, change. Don't keep doing the same."

2. We blame others for starting an unproductive conflict and then say we are not responsible for our communication: "I yelled at him, but he started it and what else could I do?" Effective communication means being responsible, choosing a style that will regulate the conflict, not playing follow the leader. The man at Wal-Mart had every "right" to be irritated with me; but that response would not have produced a satisfactory outcome. Instead of trying to get others to be more constructive; change your style. That change likely will influence the outcome.

3. We confuse communication style with identity. We see ourselves as tough or nice or quiet, and we use the style that reflects that identity, even when it doesn't help the conflict. It seems difficult to be flexible because changing style then means changing identities. Tough guys feel weak avoiding conflict. Nice people feel mean being aggressive, even when confrontation is needed. This trap can be released if you

realize your style is not your identity. You are many things, and your communication can reflect your rich diversity.

4. Even if we want to use more flexible styles, we often don't know how. The only image you might have for persuasion is a used-car salesman; for aggression, a political, Mayor Daley type; for observation, a no-nothing whimp; for avoidance, a weak coward. Since you don't want to be those things, you may resist using styles other than your preference. If this is the barrier, you need to find role models who use each style well so you develop a new image for the styles. The next two sections give you ideas of how to use each style constructively.

Appropriate Communication

You could know how to use each style but still blow the conflict because you have not used it in the appropriate situation. There are at least ten things you ought to consider when choosing a style to promote constructive conflict.

1. Desired goal

The way you act ought to move you toward your own and others' goals. That means first you have to know your goals. If for instance, you want others to cooperate with you in the long run, it does not make sense for you to yell at them. If you want affection from another and are not getting it, some typical strategies of withdrawal, pouting, and anger usually do not get your goal. If you want others' support for a program, convincing them they are wrong will not likely get it. Make your style or strategy match the goal.

2. Other's style

As a constructive conflict manager, you should consider the other's style and how you must relate to him/her for a desired outcome. If you are dealing with a bully, you may need to avoid part of the conflict to sidestep his energy or you may need to confront if that's the only way to get his attention. There are no recipes: vary your style until you get the attention and cooperation of the other.

3. History

It is helpful to know what has happened previous to the current conflict in order to know what style to use. There was physical fighting in one organization for which I consulted. My first inclination was to be aggressive; setting them straight. Then I learned of the stress and pain they had tolerated with a former boss, and I softened my style to facilitate the most important goal of healing.

4. Long-term goals

It is seductive to want to approach a conflict and get it solved in the short run. You may push a decision through without consulting the stakeholders. Temporarily you have solved the issue; in the long run, you have gotten more resistance.

5. Power-balance

You ought to consider how much power you and your counterpart have as you choose a style. Using the more active styles assumes you have some power and are willing to use it. At times you may need to postpone a conflict with an influential person until you understand or can amass enough power to get heard by him/her.

6. Location and timing

Where you are, at what time should guide your use of styles. Surprising someone with a confrontation in a public meeting will not likely be effective.

7. Stakes

Understand how important an issue is for you and the other as you decide how much energy to give to a conflict. You do not have to accept the invitation to each battle. On the other hand, if you are a chronic conflict avoider, do not excuse yourself from all conflicts by saying nothing is important enough to fight about.

8. Relationship: current and desired

If trust is high, you can take more risks with styles. If you blow it, the damage is minimal. In higher risk situations, you likely will feel more constrained. This doesn't mean that if a style is not furthering the conflict, you ought to stay with it. It just means that you will have to be more thought-

ful in choosing your next style by watching how the other responds and by asking people about the other's preferences.

9. Energy level

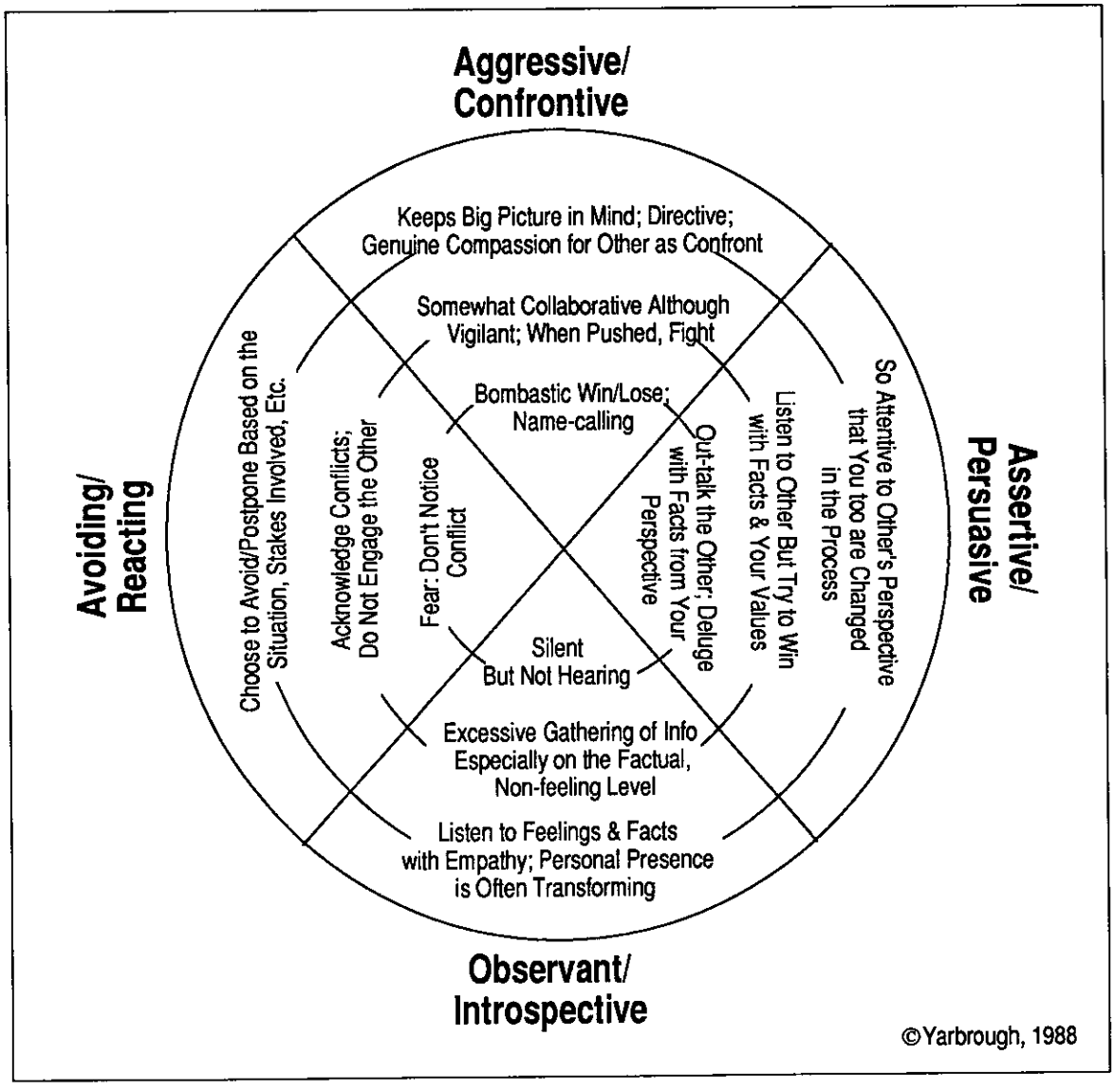
If you are drained, having had one too many conflicts or changes, your choice of style may need to be altered. Your confrontation may be mistimed if pursued. Avoidance may be better. You ought to consider others' energy levels also. Even though you may be ready to conflict, having worked up your courage to talk about a burning issue, the other may not be able to listen at that point.

10. Organizational culture

You need to remember that you are making style choices within a broader context—your organization—which has a culture of hidden rules about what is acceptable and unacceptable. In fast moving, high tech firms, aggression is more acceptable than in a bureaucratic bank. You may have to modify your style or the intensity of it based on your culture. Remember, however, constructive conflict requires risks, and to justify your destructive conflict because everyone else is doing it only perpetuates the cycle.

Mature Communication

Not only do you need to know when to use styles but also how to use them well. The circumflex model below indicates the use of each style from primitive to mature as you move from the inside to the outside circle.



Primitive aggression involves yelling, name-calling, assuming you are right and all others are wrong. As you move toward the outside ring, you become more mature, gradually understanding that sometimes you have to be directive, have non-negotiable demands, insist that others conform in a certain way as you keep the big picture in mind and communicate caring for the other. It is important to realize that in some difficult conflicts, you will decide to win, e.g. you *want* the grant; you *will* establish a program; you *will not* tolerate a destructive subordinate—or boss— and will do your best to remove him. When you make these decisions, you can still fight without malice. Gandhi is a good historical example. He was able to get discriminatory laws changed while affirming his opponent. Gandhi even apologized to General Smuts in South Africa for the inconvenience he may have caused him and his family during the fight for greater freedom for Indians there. The essence of nonviolent resistance is to be tough on the issue of injustice but compassionate for the perpetrators of the injury. In that way, not only is the law changed but also the opponent potentially transformed. As you might guess, this strategy, used in social movements or in everyday relationships, requires a great deal of maturity.

Primitive persuasion is also from a win/lose perspective. I may have a silver-tongue, but you will feel manipulated and not heard. Mature persuasion involves us both. In order for you to persuade me, you must listen so carefully to my view, values, and feelings, that you too will be transformed. We likely then will arrive at a joint solution, having both been persuaded. And even if one "wins" the substantive argument, we are affirmed as people.

Primitive observation is fear-based: you think I am listening but I am just not talking. Thus, I can contribute little to a solution. Emerging maturity (the inner ring) means gathering information but usually facts, not feelings. At this stage, some don't know when to stop collecting data and to start acting. Mature observation is empathic and involves attending to the other's feelings and underlying concerns as well as surface ones.

Primitive avoidance is a knee-jerk reaction: conflict is believed to be bad and often not even noticed. Employees or volunteers could be yelling and fighting, and a chronic avoider reports that "things are just fine." At the next phase, the avoider acknowledges conflict but would not consider involvement. At maturity, you choose to avoid based on the actual conflict: you need to postpone it so others can be prepared; stakes are too low and you need to choose your battles; you don't have enough power in a situation and the conflict would be dangerous.

Primitive use of styles is characterized by fear that produces a win/lose frame of mind. Maturity is marked by greater awareness, more choices and feeling of connection to others even as you conflict with them. You understand that all of us form a whole; we are in the dance together; and that it is not so much a matter of who gets what but rather how we solve problems and accomplish our aspirations for the good of all in the long haul.

FOOTNOTE

1. These are the styles described by Marc Robert who also has developed a self-assessment instrument using these styles.

Chapter 3

DISCOVERING THE REAL ISSUES

I was at a health resort for my annual spring retreat. One man, about 60, complained at length about the absence of meat on the menu and, daily, left the resort in a frenzy, heading for town to eat meat. He returned saying how good he felt. Our group was glad to be eating such deliciously prepared vegetarian food, cleaning our systems, and reducing our stress. We chatted with him, but felt morally superior. The last evening at dinner, he was lobbying each table to put a request for chicken (at least) on our feedback forms. I didn't want meat; his focus on the topic was getting irritating; and, as a last resort, I asked him why he was so intent on changing the menu. With a little boy look, he said his father had been a meat packer; and he just didn't feel right not eating meat. It had been so much a part of his family—their livelihood, their image. I softened, felt compassion, even affection. I was reminded that everyone has a story. All of us see the world from our unique experiences and to understand that means we are less judgmental, more empathic with others and ourselves. And even if I didn't request chicken, I could appreciate him, treat him with respect—and that's more important in the long run than chicken or vegetables.

To create constructive conflict we must understand the other and ourselves in terms of the real needs in the conflict. It ought to make sense that we should know what we're fighting about in order to solve problems. But many continue to conflict over surface issues and thus problems go unsolved; agreements do not stick; and people are often more frustrated. So what do you need to know about the real issues? How do you find out what they are? How do you understand the real issues when the other is either attacking and criticizing or avoiding the conflict? Why is it important for you to understand your own needs?

THREE POINTS TO REMEMBER

To manage conflict constructively you need to remember three things.

1. There is a difference between positions and interests. An interest is a desire, concern, goal, fear or need. A position is a solution to a problem or concern. A position is something you decided on; an interest is what caused you to decide. For example, one conflict between a volunteer center director and her board began when the board wanted to fire some staff. The director resisted, and the fight was on. Firing and retaining staff were positions. The real interest was solving a $5000 budget deficit. When the problem or interest was identified, the director and board began to brainstorm different, less destructive ways of recouping the deficit.

We usually jump to conclusions about how to fix a problem and argue with others about the "fix" rather than analyzing the problem to understand if there are other, more effective solutions. And then the conflict reaches a stalemate, with the person or group having the most power winning the battle and sometimes losing the war. When we focus on interests, the conflict is loosened because there usually are multiple ways of solving problems and we discover we have interests in common with others. The similarities draw us together and help prevent polarization of the conflict.

To understand the distinction being made, you might ask yourself if the following requests represent a position or interest:

- ❑ A hospital volunteer wants to change jobs and manage the gift shop.
- ❑ A secretary demands a raise.
- ❑ An administrator supports a community outreach program but not staff expansion that you feel is desperately needed.
- ❑ Activity leaders argue for making their own volunteer assignments.

If you answered that each of the examples was a position, you were right. Wanting to change volunteer assignments could indicate a number of interests: more status, greater challenge, proximity to friends, more interaction with the public. If you identify the interest, there may be many ways of meeting the need even if you cannot reassign the volunteer to the specific job requested. Demand for a raise, likewise, could be for specific financial reasons, for a gesture of appreciation, for competitive reasons (Sue, in the next department, makes more than I do and she is not as competent as me). If, for example, the interest is appreciation, there may be better ways to express it than a nominal raise. To know the interest means you have flexibility and more problem solving options. What interests might there be behind an administrator supporting one kind of program and not another? Behind activity leaders' demands for making their own assignments?

2. Interests are always on two levels: the *content* and *relational* levels. The *content* or substantive level has to do with the tasks to be accomplished and the information exchanged as we go about work: what resources are needed, how to coordinate volunteers, division of budget, strategic planning. The relational level is how we treat each other based on how we see and feel about each other. All people, to varying degrees, have needs: security, esteem, power, inclusion, love and affection, recognition, meaningful activity. If these needs are ignored, it is difficult to impossible to reach agreements on the substantive level. Think about how differently a negotiation proceeds if, on the one hand, you trust, respect, and like another person vs. one in which you do not. The same substantive issue could be at stake: the process and outcome are usually dramatically different.

Relational interests are often harder to understand because they usually are communicated nonverbally. It is rare that someone at work will say to another: "I need to be liked by you; and until you signal that you like me, I will resist your proposal;" or "You have more influence than me; and until you share some, I will make your life miserable;" or, on a more positive note, "You are the kind of person I respect and I know you think I am competent so I can easily see the benefits of your ideas." Yet, those messages are underneath the substantive discussion and facilitate or block it. The message is: you need to understand your own and other's relational needs and meet them if at all possible. A caution: sometimes people have needs and want them met in a particular way. For instance, I need more influence and want it by controlling every aspect of a project. The distinction between want and need is the same as that between position and interest. You perhaps can facilitate the negotiation by meeting the need (not the want) in another way that is more acceptable to all parties.

3. To manage conflict constructively you must prioritize your interests and decide what is of primary importance to you. In most negotiations, you have to give up more goals than you get; and that sacrifice is necessary for you to be congruent in your communication and thus effective in your bargaining.

I often tell the story of being at the airport en route from Colorado to California to speak at a large conference. When I presented my ticket to the agent, she said the flight had left. When questioned, she said the schedule had been changed, apparently without notification to the travel agents. My priority interest was to get to California in four hours: my challenge was to find a strategy to do that. I asked her for help to get on the next available plane. With hostile indifference, she said there were no seats. I next begged her to help: she refused. I tried humor: "strap me to the toilet seat, I don't care." She did not think that was funny. My time was running out. I went to my last

strategy: hysteria. I walked to the middle of the concourse in my business suit with briefcase in hand and began hollering in distress. The management, wanting to maintain the illusion of safety, quickly got me a first class seat on the next flight.

I had to give up many things to accomplish that goal: dignity, approval, preferred style of behaving, and anonymity to name a few. I actually hurt no one; was able to meet mine and the airline's legitimate interests; and had a good time doing it. Had I had the encumbered goals of getting to California on time, using my favorite style of communicating, with everyone's approval, while remaining anonymous, I likely still would be at the airport. Decide on your priorities; notice what you have to sacrifice so as not to contaminate the conflict.

Identifying Interests

There are at least *10 ways* to get beyond position to identify interests. They move from more to less direct means, assuming that sometimes people can and will tell you their interests and sometimes they can't or won't.

1. *Ask the person.* There are many ways of doing so:

   - ❑ What are you concerned about?
   - ❑ What is your goal?
   - ❑ What problem are we trying to solve?
   - ❑ What would need to happen for you to feel satisfied?
   - ❑ What will it take for you to cooperate with me?
   - ❑ What do you want?
   - ❑ What is the ideal situation for you?

2. *Ask "Why not?"* If you request something of another and get resistance, ask the other what prevents him/her from agreeing. You will need to take those objections into consideration as you seek a joint solution.

3. Notice the *triggering events* to the conflict. Often what happens prior to a conflict gives you clues about the underlying issues. For example, if a conflict erupts among the staff after every board meeting, the conflict may be about feelings toward the board and not about what is happening among the staff.

4. *Notice the themes* in an interpersonal or group discussion which can be picked up through the kinds of jokes and stories told, the kinds of images and metaphors that emerge, the topics that generate the most energy or the ones that freeze the group.

   One group may spontaneously tell "put-down" jokes which may indicate their sense of powerlessness in the face of some conflict. Another may use military words and themes to describe interaction which give you clues about the dynamics of the conflict. Those relational issues may need to be addressed rather than continuing on substantive ones.

5. Ask others for their *requests for change*. Often, people will complain, lecture one another, or attack without saying what they want the other to do. When these things are happening, it is often effective simply to ask, "What do you want me to do?" or "What does that mean about how I should change?" For example, a school janitor complained when community groups used the building for meetings and did less than adequate cleaning. At first, the community school director tried to persuade him to do better and suspected him of being uncommitted and lazy. Finally, she asked what he needed to improve his performance. He answered "a new vacuum cleaner." She had not been looking at the problem from his perspective and had been making wrong guesses about what he wanted. From there, she launched into attacks on the character and motives (in thought if not words), making the conflict even more difficult to resolve.

6. *Observe nonverbal communication*, especially incongruent cues. If a person is saying pleasant words while frowning, yelling "I am not angry," or turning away while insisting she is interested, you can guess there is an unresolved issue, probably relational. Do not make the mistake of thinking you know what the issue is. Just notice there is an incongruency and begin asking for other interests so you do not leave important ones unexplored.

7. *Meet the obvious needs* of the other if you cannot get to the underlying ones. As you do so, hidden interests may surface.

   For example, someone may insist that a problem really would be solved if only a trouble-maker is removed from the office. You may have noticed that the office has a history of finding scapegoats and expelling them, only to find the problems still exist and that another scapegoat must be found. If you cannot get to the underlying pattern, you may solve the immediate problem and then confront the patterns when tensions are not relieved. A less drastic example involved a committee chairwoman who vehemently refused to bring flip charts to a meeting. She argued they were too costly, heavy, and were unaesthetic in homes where meetings were held. The organization president guessed there were underlying issues but could not get to them. She solved the flip chart problem, only to find that the chairwoman moved her complaints to other targets. At that point, the president confronted the patterns and in the discussion discovered the issue was the woman's need to feel important and that being a go-fer diminished that need.

8. *Notice the location* of where things are discussed to derive the interests and the level of risk of the interest. In one organization, the public relations issue was discussed in the committee meeting; the need for mutual respect, in the parking lot; and the need to have power and influence over the phone. As you might guess, it took considerable time and commitment for the members to discuss the power issue openly.

9. *Ask others* in the organization about the substantive and relational interests of those you must influence. Keep your informal communication channels open and alive.

10. *Notice what others surround themselves with*, talk about, and spend most of their time doing: things associated with status, the family, achievement? You can derive many relational interests from those observations.

Responding to Attack and Avoidance

It is more difficult in some situations than others to hear and respond to others' interests. Two situations are when the other is angrily attacking or adamantly avoiding the conflict. First, suggestions are given about how to clarify interests under attack when the normal tendency is to defend yourself. Remember, defensiveness just escalates the conflict.

1. Seek more information

   - ❑ ask for specifics.
   - ❑ guess about specifics.
   - ❑ paraphrase the speaker's ideas.

   For example, if another says "You never take me seriously. Everything I say goes in one ear and out the other," you might respond with "I'd understand what you mean better if you could give me some examples of when you think I ignore you." (specifics)

   "Are you talking about last week when I went ahead and sent that report after you suggested not to?" (guess)

"It sounds like you're mad at me because you think I'm just humoring you. Is that it?" (paraphrase)

2. Agree with the speaker

   - ❑ agree with the facts.
   - ❑ agree with the critic's perception.

   "I suppose you're right. Sometimes I don't pay attention to what you say. It's usually when I'm tired or preoccupied." (facts)

   "I can see how from your perspective it might seem like that, and I want you to know my perspective." (perception)

3. Make reassuring comments

   - ❑ about how hopeful you are that the problem can be resolved.
   - ❑ about the relationship: you care about the other and how you work together.
   - ❑ about what you guess is frightening the other and how the fear might be reduced.

4. Role-take

   - ❑ ask the other to take your position: "What do you think I think?" "What do you think would happen if I did what you want?"
   - ❑ take the other's position: "From your position, I would think the same thing."

5. Slow down the process

   - ❑ talk more slowly.
   - ❑ pause before responding.
   - ❑ take time-outs: for coffee, for the bathroom, until the next day.
   - ❑ write down what the other is saying to clarify in your own mind what he/she is asking.

6. Control the process productively

   - ❑ arrange the physical surroundings for collaboration: at a table, not behind a desk.
   - ❑ set mutual ground rules: all involved get their turn, no interruptions, emotions are legitimate, description and not judgment, etc., to guide the process.
   - ❑ admit error: "I think my decision was a mistake. It didn't have the effect I intended."

Remember, the goal is to defuse the conflict so you can begin to understand the concerns of the other. It is not to win and trick the other with these tactics. Once you and the other are in dialogue, the real work begins.

When you are confronted by a conflict avoider rather than attacker, there are several things you may consider to engage the other in a constructive conflict. If you are the one who regularly refuses to conflict, it may be important to remind yourself of these ideas.

1. Reiterate your goals and what you can give to the other.

2. Remind the other of your interdependence and what you both will gain and lose by refusal to fight.

3. Talk about the process you both are using to manage your differences and what it is doing to the relationship. "It seems we both want to remain friends, but when we don't talk about resentments, I find myself becoming distant from you."

4. Ask the other on what basis he/she is making the decision not to talk. Is it because of the way you respond when the other openly engages you in conflict, e. g. , you may criticize the other's ideas excessively or go blank when the other talks.

5. Re-define your interdependence. Do you need the other to accomplish your goal or can you get someone else to help? You may have to give up your preferred way of handling a problem and go for what is possible.

6. Clarify your goals and be honest with yourself. Do you want to solve a problem or prove the other wrong? You usually cannot have both.

7. Use threats productively. Let the other know what is happening or will happen if you do not get the problem solved. Try to make the consequences independent of what you will do but rather what will happen naturally: the program won't be approved; you both will lose credibility with the board, etc.

8. Be persistent and acknowledge your commitment to solving the problem or improving the relationship.

Meeting Human Needs

You may have noticed that meeting relational needs is critically important for constructive conflict. It is easier in one sense to meet these needs because they are not limited like material resources. Love, power, and esteem are infinite: they do not exist in little units that when divided, I get so many and you get the rest. The basic nature of relational needs is that when they are used, they increase. When I give my love away, I get more in return. When I share my power, power increases.

Why then do we not meet our own and others' needs in conflicts so that all of us are more content and more able to solve substantive problems? The following are typical reasons given by people in workshops that prevent them from meeting relational needs. Notice that most of the reasons assume that relational needs are a scarce resource.

1. "People should not have needs. It is childish to have them." So the person refuses to acknowledge needs or puts the other down for expressing them.

2. "If I can't get my needs met in life, you aren't going to get yours either."

3. "I won't have anything left if I give you something."

4. "Since I don't get my needs met, I have nothing to give you."

5. "If I need something from you, I'm vulnerable and that scares me (you'll take advantage.)"

6. "If I give you what you need, you'll be better than me."

7. "How could anyone want what I have to give?"

8. "It takes too much energy to figure out needs and I'm tired."

9. "Meeting interpersonal needs wastes time and gets in the way of the real work."

In reality, a failure to recognize and meet your own and others' needs results in spending more time on work issues since the trust usually deteriorates; getting further depleted and burnt out; communicating in an infantile way; and competing over who is the most pitiful. People in the helping professions have a tinge of the victim in them anyway: "Look at all I do for others;" "There's never enough appreciation;" "I can't say 'no' because of all the people who need me." And when, in addition, they do not plan ways of getting their own needs met, they complicate conflicts through their martyrdom. Not only do I want you, for example, to furnish resources for my program, I also want you to be eternally grateful for my assistance.

When I put too many demands on you, I likely will not even get my simple requests met. You likely know people who must have everyone's approval even when it is not a necessary issue in the conflict: I don't have to approve of you in order to O. K. your budget.

So when you know and meet your own needs by relating to others who nurture you and by letting in their caring, you reap several benefits in managing conflict:

- ❑ You will be clearer about others' needs since you are not peering through the veil of yours assuming everyone needs what you do. This would be akin to someone with unknown power needs saying about others, "My, everyone sure is power hungry here," when that may or may not be the case. If, however, you respond to others as if they are power mongers, they likely will be defensive and reinforce your assumption.

- ❑ You will not be need deprived in stressful, conflict situations. Thus you will resist constantly seeking approval or power or affection, needs which may impede a conflict agreement. Some people will not or cannot give you these things, especially as an opponent; and to unconsciously demand them, puts a strain on the conflict process and increases your personal frustration.

- ❑ You likely will give others what they need: graciously and unconditionally. Your gift will be returned four-fold.

In conclusion, the real issues in a conflict are interests, not positions. They have two dimensions, content and relational, the latter of which controls most of the meaning of the conflict. It is important to know and meet your own and others needs, in order to reach mutual agreements and form strong, trusting bonds with others.

Chapter 4

REACHING GOOD AGREEMENTS

You may have mastered communicating flexibly and have discovered the real interests in the conflict. Now the challenge is to move to agreement, sometimes difficult when interests seem so far apart. To reach good agreements, you need to focus on three areas: creating a common vision; loosening deadlocks; and creating specific expectations and consequences.

Creating Common Vision

Recently I participated in an outdoor learning experience. The challenge was to get our group of eight over a 12 foot wall without ropes or other aids. It is often said by groups that the task is impossible. They cannot envision the outcome. Once we believed it was possible, the actual planning began; and people of all heights, shapes, ages, and physical abilities went over with the help of the group. If you can think it, you probably can make it happen. If people agree on an overall direction, believe a problem can be solved and use their multiple resources, the seeming impossible happens. Conversely, not much of importance happens without a vision. You stay in motion, fill a calendar, focus on difficulties; but there is little progress or meaning because your actions lead in a circle, going nowhere. Further, innovative solutions are impossible; you keep doing more of the same. Columbus sailed because he envisioned the world round and took a risk to try something different.

A similar process holds true for managing conflict. If you believe constructive conflict is possible, it probably is. And to use all resources, to see complex problems in new ways, it helps to start with a common vision. The more diverse the group and the more polarized the issues, the more critical is this step and the broader the vision must be. Volunteers from key groups in a city were attempting to cooperate rather than compete for the good of the whole community. Because of their special interests it was important for them to decide what they had in common before discussing their differences. They all wanted a liveable city, with clean air, business and cultural opportunities, and managed growth. No one said they wanted pollution, congestion, and bad schools. The acknowledgment that they had a similar vision both on the process (the need to cooperate as a community) and outcome (general description of a liveable community) helped heal the antagonism and put people in a better frame of mind to tackle the difficulties of how to get to that vision. No matter how big the conflict, an encompassing vision can usually be found or created. Even countries with strong ideological differences can agree to dialogue because their common vision may be survival at least and peace at best, interests which serve both sides.

Always begin a conflict with what you have in common: it binds you, reduces the perception of the other as enemy, and smooths the relationship. If you become embroiled in a conflict before you acknowledge commonalties, stop and do so. The conflict often will change directions or at least de-escalate.

Loosening Deadlocks

Sometimes it seems that people want diametrically opposed things; and if one person wins, the other loses. The following case, involving a nursing home director and volunteer manager (VM) at the home, presents the conflict from two perspec-

tives and then proposes 8 ways to loosen the apparent stalemate. The volunteer manager is fairly new (4 months) and action-oriented. She is proud of the library she has improved for the seniors, having acquired many new volumes, recruited volunteers to keep the library open more hours, and increased the usage. Residents have been learning about current events and are particularly interested in personal growth books—popular psychology, communication, etc. She has even begun some classes for the seniors. Currently the volunteer manager wants a small computer to index the books and other resources in the library for maximum use of the facility. One day, the VM is in the library talking to some residents, when the director enters.The VM approaches her and informally requests permission to get the computer which she believes is affordable. The director, with raised voice, accuses the VM of disturbing the library patrons and of wasting limited resources.

From the director's perspective the conflict looks different. She has been at the home for 17 years and likes things to run smoothly and orderly. She likes to know where everyone is and what they are doing at all times. There have been attacks from the media lately about the questionable care at nursing homes, and the director wants to be ready if any of the bad publicity comes her way. The new library program has her worried a bit: residents are reading self help books and becoming more assertive. It puts more pressure on her, especially when the state is requiring more and more paper work. She has had a bad week: everyone wanting everything. She feels she has gone out of her way to accommodate the VM. She feels unappreciated, and all she hears is residents singing the praises of the VM. She enters the library where some seniors are talking and laughing with the volunteer manager. The library seems crowded, and she's afraid the residents may fall as they hobble around. While the director surveys the scene, the volunteer manager asks her for a new computer. She tells her firmly about other priorities of the home, that others must now come first, and that the residents need more rest.

The VM wants something; the director says "no" while criticizing the VM. From the VM's viewpoint, how could she break the deadlock and reach some satisfying agreement with the director?

1. Expanding the pie

This process involves increasing the perception of resources being considered in the negotiation. It involves asking the question: "What other things, people, or events does the person value?" Can you trade on these? The director is barraged with legalistic paper work. Could the computer also be used to meet that interest. If the VM could assist the director in some say with that task, the VM's request might be honored. Likewise, if the director's relational need for appreciation were met, there may be more open discussion of the computer. Even more expansive might be introducing the director to a local media representative who could potentially report positive aspects of nursing homes. In other words, think of all the resources you have at your disposal and introduce them into the conflict so that maximum interests get met. Remember, people always have multiple interests; and that fact serves you and others well in constructive conflict.

2. Cost-cutting

This involves getting what you need by cutting the other's cost of conceding. An important question to ask here is "Why won't the other buy the computer?" If the VM saves face for the director by pursuing the conversation in private or frames the argument from the perspective of saving the director increased hassle, agreement is more likely.

3. Compensating

You can often reach agreement in a conflict by rewarding another for conceding: relationally or substantively. In this case, could the VM compensate the director by offering appreciation for her support, openly in view of the residents. Could she find a volunteer to assist with the legalistic paperwork that burdens the director?

4. Log-rolling

This process occurs when one person concedes on issues of low priority. For example, the two could agree that the highest value was teaching the residents self-confidence and that library use was more important than having everything run quietly and smoothly. Sometimes, after the heat of the explosion, when values and overall mission are discussed, a resistant person will concede the point.

5. Bridging

This occurs when a totally new option is developed that satisfies all people involved. To get to this solution, the two would have to discuss some common vision they have for the home and residents, perhaps increased learning. Instead of arguing about whether or not to buy a computer, the two could come up with another route to the broader vision. A computer might provide quick access to books; but with less cost, perhaps there could be a study session in which new books were reported on. In this way, the conflict has spurred creativity.

6. Agreeing on solutions of different strengths

Sometimes a solution cannot be found that solves all of a problem right now. So, to break deadlocks, it is important to legitimize ways of moving ahead, albeit imperfectly. Some dimensions of these kinds of solutions are

Permanent	Temporary
Comprehensive	Partial
Unconditional	Conditional
Substantive	Procedural

A computer could be leased, for example.

7. Setting objective criteria

Sometimes interests are more opposed than others in a conflict, and you and the other cannot come to a solution. At those times, you may need to step back from the problem and agree on criteria that a solution must meet. Then you will be engaged with the other in discovering solutions that best meet the agreed upon criteria rather than arguing about who wins. It could be that both the director and VM agree that a retrieval system for the library can cost no more than X dollars; has to be easy for relatively untrained volunteers to use; and has to be operable by a certain date when the nursing home will have an inspection.

8. Compromising

This literally means splitting the difference: we divide the resources in some way. This process is used too fast and too often, usually just to finish the conflict when another, more elegant way could produce a more solid agreement. If the people in this example do not or will not discuss their concerns thoroughly, they might agree in the name of fairness to split a certain amount of money that each can use for her purposes. Often, when this method is used, neither gets her interests met since both have less money than needed for her projects. It is similar to the story often told in negotiation material about the orange. Two people want an orange and decide the best they can do is split it. One person peels his half, throws away the rind and eats the pulp. The other peels her half, throws away the pulp, and grates the rind for flavoring orange cake icing. Because their interests were different (hunger and cake baking), they could have had more of what they needed. But because they were too quick to compromise, the solution was only partially satisfying to both.

Being Specific

When you have understood interests and found ways to loosen the stalemate, it is time to specify what you and the other are actually agreeing to. As indicated in Chapter 1, it is not enough to agree to "do better; show respect; communicate better; support the other's program; or share power." Those things are too general. You must now establish indicators of these broad agreements in terms of

- measurability and
- time.

How will you know when the other has shown respect? What would she have to say? When? Where? To Whom? How often? What do you feel as support? When the other shares budget? Tells the boss about your successful program? Connects you to resources helpful to your goals? Praises you?

Sometimes people feel uneasy being so specific. But without the specificity, the good feelings of confronting the issue and each other will erode when you or your department believes the other has broken an agreement that was never specified. After all, each of us has in mind what we think support, love, respect, good communication mean. And if those criteria are not met, we will likely go back to accusing the other of blocking our goals. If others resist being specific, remind them of the overall goal of building and keeping

trust, of wanting to come through for them in a satisfying way, etc.

Five Step Model

In everyday conflicts, a five-step process can help in reaching agreements.

1. *Recognize your common goal(s) with the other person.* You both may want to get a job done in a quality way; may value the same kind of organization; may be concerned about similar issues in the group or organization. You may have to draw the circle fairly large to encompass similarities in some cases.

2. *State your need (or the actual problem), not your position.* It is important that you understand what need you are trying to satisfy or problem you are trying to solve, rather than beginning the conflict with a solution (or position). If just one person in the negotiation understands his/her need, the conflict often is clarified.

3. *Ask the other what he/she needs, or what you can give him/her in return.* Here it is also important to identify the underlying interest or need rather than the position. You may or may not be in conflict with the person once needs are identified.

4. *Enter into problem-solving with the other, generating alternate ways of meeting the needs or solving the problems.* Here the important point is to be flexible about ways to solve problems. Flexibility will prevent the conflict from reaching a deadlock.

5. *Decide who has responsibility for follow-through on the action plan.* This is an important part of reaching agreements. What will happen next? Who will initiate? How will the person do that? How will you know if you have accomplished what you set out to do?

Chapter 5

Making Peace With Yourself

We began by saying that much of how we manage conflict is based on the meanings we make, how we view what is going on. And the meanings largely are based on how we manage conflict within ourselves. Have we made peace with ourselves? If we have, we automatically communicate differently with those around us: flexibly, congruently, with more compassion. And if we have not, what we do interpersonally is likely to have little effect since external battles are but a way for us to heal internal wars. If my hard side runs rough-shod over my soft side, for example, and does not allow for vulnerability, I likely will have little compassion for those who are dependent or who know that much can be accomplished through kindness. I may conflict with them too vehemently about how to influence others or coordinate a project, insisting that sheer force of will is the only way. Conversely, if my soft side is too dominant, I may judge others harshly for being direct and using their power even when they must to accomplish a task or administer justice. Further, I will not be able to use more forceful strategies in a conflict when those would be appropriate; and I may be more likely to express anger passive aggressively by being late, gossiping, or sabotaging. Both unmanaged internal conflicts are equally ineffective.

This chapter is about making peace with yourself to make interpersonal conflict more constructive. It describes internal conflicts we often experience, the consequences of ignoring such conflicts, and the steps to take to promote internal peace.

Conflict Within Yourself

Internal conflict is possible because we each are made up of a multitude of selves, a community within, composed of personalities of all ages, sizes, interests and appearances. Just as in interpersonal communities, to be healthy, all within must be listened to and must have a vote at the town forum. And because some have opposing needs, they will conflict. Your management of those conflicts is the gauge of your internal peace.

To become familiar with your internal community, it is helpful to name them and see how they blossom and use their special talents once accepted. One of my favorites is Gertrude. She is about 70 (always has been), energetic, nosey, ornery, and the biggest gossip the world has ever known. When I didn't recognize her because I thought I shouldn't have that part, she was malicious, spreading rumors, even making up gossip. Once I invited her to the town meeting to find out what she wanted and why she was causing such a ruckus, I understood she wants to be included, likes to know what's going on. When accepted, she is a great help in my consulting business. Clients tell her the *real* stuff, not just what's written in memos. She connects easily to others because she's so interested in them. And the interesting thing: she does not use her talents maliciously but constructively as is true of all the parts of you once accepted.

Internal conflict is a clash between these different aspects of ourselves. For example, one part of you may relish working with others, helping to direct change, while another part wants introspective, withdrawal time. When the parts are in conflict, you may feel unproductive at work and guilty when relaxing. Further, you may either judge or envy those who *do* take time for contemplation. And all of these external events are but a mirror of your own internal conflict.

Unproductive internal conflict often comes from seeing the world in incompatible opposites. For example, you may believe conflict and peace are opposites. If you see yourself as peaceful, you don't feel you can be in conflict with others. When conflict does emerge, psychologically you have to deny or distort it. This denial will eventually erupt in unproductive ways described throughout the first chapter.

There are some kinds of internal conflict that often affect us, one of which is between power and love. For many power is negative and in opposition to equality, democracy, collaboration, peace, trust and love, the values many hold dear. The irony is that when the human need for power is unsatisfied, it increases and goes underground, making it difficult to deal with issues and people in a just way. In practice, that may mean being nice but over controlling; and ignoring the political power in organizations. On the other hand, those who only see the hard, power side of self and others, do not understand or use the transforming power of caring and love. They ignore the human side in organizations and believe that the resolution of all conflicts is more information.

Other internal conflicts can be recognized by asking yourself "Who Am I?" and "Who Am I Not?" and listing characteristics under each question. There likely will be some natural opposites that appear: honest and devious, open and authoritarian, fun and serious, compassionate and judgmental. Negative qualities are often disowned, making it harder to contact the positive dimensions of each. For example, deviousness can be closely allied to strategizing. When you censor any hint of deviousness, you also give away a great deal of thoughtful planning. For example, it may feel devious to you to plan privately for an important meeting: asking others their opinion, lining up your votes, checking on possible resistance so you can include others' concerns in your proposal. And so you leave important matters to chance and feel betrayed by others you thought would support your plan. You have thrown out positive planning because you called it devious.

In the same vein, authoritarianism is one form of direct, straight-forward communication. Being direct (and having nonnegotiable demands at times) can be important when negotiating a contract, or coaching an employee who continuously denies any errors.

The point is that there are positive and negative ways of being strategic and direct. Deviousness and authoritarianism involve using those talents inappropriately, overdoing them. However, denying those manifestations of strategy and directness can often result in censoring the positive qualities also (as in throwing out the baby with the bath water.) In addition, when we deny certain parts of ourselves, they often gain influence rather than disappear. They "leak" into our communication, and our words and nonverbal behaviors don't match. You may be saying, for instance, "I respect your opinion," while interrupting the other; "I want to hear from participants," while continuing to talk.

Five Steps to Internal Peace

What, then, are the steps for creating internal harmony and thus using all our strengths?

1. *Awareness*—identifying the parts of you in conflict.

2. *Acceptance*—believing all parts of you can be used for good.

3. *Empowerment*—developing the parts of yourself that have been under-used.

4. *Integration*—making peace between the conflicting parts so they help each other.

5. *Synthesis*—communicating with others congruently, empathically, responsibly and flexibly.

These steps of internal peacemaking are meant to help you recognize, understand, legitimize and use parts of yourself that you do not now accept. As with interpersonal conflict, all parties must feel accepted and understood if the conflict is to be constructive.

Awareness

How do you gain awareness? First, notice your internal tension: do you feel like an internal tug of war? Are you confused? Numb? Are your interpersonal conflicts unproductive and repetitive? All can signal avoided internal conflict.

Second, notice the kinds of people you consider extremely objectionable. Not just those who are irritating, but those you instantly respond to in a strong negative way; those you want to set straight. This strong response usually means they embody traits you are denying. When you say "I can't stand that arrogant administrator; he won't listen to any idea other than his own," it may be that you also are stubborn and arrogant. That's why you're clashing so dramatically with him—both of you are dogmatic. You are aware of the flexible, open-minded part of you but cannot use it well because you are blind to your dogmatic side. Once you recognize your own obstinance, you may still be in conflict with the executive; but it will be marked by more understanding. You will be more likely to reach agreements, because you won't also be communicating (albeit nonverbally) your disgust with the other person.

You also can increase your awareness of internal conflict by noticing the emotions you find unacceptable. Can you accept anger within yourself. How about hate, sadness, joy, or humor? If you find an emotion unacceptable in yourself, you will usually find it so in others. The result: when they express your unacceptable emotion, you may try to talk them out of it ("You aren't really angry"); judge them for it ("They shouldn't be allowed to participate in this group"); or indicate that their emotion is inappropriate to the situation ("You shouldn't be making jokes about so many getting fired," when black humor is an important coping mechanism.)

Third, notice the kinds of individuals who surround you. Oftentimes, the people you choose as friends, co-workers, or mates may reflect what you have not dealt with inside yourself. For example, if you have not dealt with or accepted anger, you may keep selecting friends and co-workers who are consistently angry. In that way, you can have a peaceful image but stay in conflict with your angry co-workers. Unnecessary and confusing conflict is generated.

Finally, to increase awareness, pay attention to consistent feedback from others about your behavior. You may think you are always gentle with people but others tell you they feel the crunch of your heavy step. By acknowledging your power you can begin to use it more responsibly, rather than spending your energy denying it.

Acceptance

The second step of internal peacemaking goes beyond acknowledging a certain part of you to welcoming it, understanding its potentially positive side. For example, self-ishness, once accepted, becomes the need and right to take care of yourself. With this acceptance, you likely will be less over-extended and more effective in your work. Also, dominance, once accepted, becomes the direct and legitimate use of power. You realize you needn't control everything to satisfy the power aspect of yourself; you can gain satisfaction by gently guiding others on tasks which you have delegated to them.

Clearly, the assumption here is that embedded within every disowned part of you is a positive quality that is needed in some circumstances. The critical task of the empowerment phase is to recognize that positive quality and find new ways for that part of the self to express itself. To gain acceptance, imagine the disliked part of you as a small child that may have misbehaved. You then treat yourself firmly but with love, coaching that part of you to use other means to get a need met. Also hang around with others who can accept parts of you that you see as negative and perhaps overwhelming. Their acceptance is contagious.

Empowerment

The third step involves developing under-used parts of yourself. After identifying the positive quality behind a negative aspect of yourself, you are ready to develop its use. Do so by finding role models who demonstrate responsible use of power, for example. They can be colleagues, friends, public figures, or even media or historic personalities. Notice how they act, what choices they make, how they affect people over time.

Doing this will diminish your fears about using certain aspects of yourself.

Try new behaviors in low-risk situations to test their effectiveness. Get direct coaching from respected others on being powerful, yet compassionate. Set a time-share plan for different aspects of yourself. For example, determine that you are free to relax at certain times if you can work without interruption at other times. As more aspects of yourself are empowered, it feels natural to use the different parts, and to do so more responsibly.

Integration

The fourth step deals with actual conflict between parts of yourself. Since power is a central issue for most of us, the conflict between power and love is used as an example. As you manage your internal conflict, ask the two parts of yourself the following questions:

Q1: What does each part want and need?

The love side may need to be connected in cooperative ways with others, may enjoy the intimacy harmony brings, may long for interpersonal and global peace. The power side may need to have influence; may understand there are some hard-ball players out there who can't be soft-soaped by love; may recognize the need to push for certain solutions to problems.

Q2: What does each side have in common?

Both want to see more effective relationships, organizations, and a more peaceable world. They also may share the desire to be connected to other people.

Q3: What is in conflict? Where do they differ?

The love side believes anything can be accomplished with softness and enough nurturing. The power side believes it's a dog-eat-dog world where you better watch it or people will take advantage.

Q4: What would each side be without the other, and what can each contribute to the other?

The love side without the power side would be naive, tend toward sentimentality, assuming, for example, that everyone really has the interest of workers at heart. The power side without love would become manipulative and lacking in regard for others. When both sides are recognized and allowed to have their say, each contributes to the other and becomes modified in the process. The power side can become more flexible—knowing some people can and some can't be trusted; knowing soft as well as hard strategies work; knowing when to push and when to be silent. The result: power becomes more compassionate.

Likewise, the love side becomes wiser, learning love is not the only human motivation; understanding that sometimes love is best communicated by setting firm standards and guidelines. When truly integrated, the two sides become a third entity: power and love are present together. Gandhi is a good example: willing to push where the system could be moved and yet able to halt actions that might have been effective in the short run yet negative in the long run. For instance, he halted the civil disobedience in Bardoli when 22 British police were killed by Indians. He refused to carry out Indian work strikes when the British might be inconvenienced because of their own railway strike.

Q5: What will each side threaten to do if not given a voice?

It is often frightening to recognize internal conflict; especially when one part of you dominates at the expense of the other. It helps if part of your internal dialogue includes asking each side "What will you do to prevent the other side from reaching its goal if you are not able to reach yours?" In response, the power side may threaten to be unnecessarily harsh on people. The love side may threaten to be confused and inarticulate when the power side is trying to persuade a resistant manager. These threats help each party keep agreements.

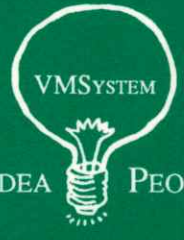
Synthesis

When the first 4 steps of internal peacemaking are achieved, synthesis, the final phase is automatic. Internal decision-making and interpersonal communication are transformed and become congruent, flexible and responsible. You are not "leaking" hidden messages and you are not fighting with others who represent unacknowledged parts of yourself.

Synthesis also affects the body. More integrated people have more energy and are more relaxed than those who are trying to deny their dark sides. And with that relaxation comes clearer and more accurate perception of self and other.

Conclusion

We don't usually view our internal processes like a community, where every part must be recognized, utilized, and kept in dialogue with each other. However, interpersonal, organizational, and international peace will come through people who have a different vision of how things can be. To me, that vision is limited to what you have allowed yourself to experience internally. When you are whole and understand how to recognize, appreciate, and integrate your internal differences, you have a special understanding of how to integrate differences among people around you. Your conflict has become constructive.



THE IDEA PEOPLE!