
Introduction to Conflict Management

The following information addresses effective and practical ways to manage conflict. To manage conflict effectively one needs a significant level of self-knowledge and self-awareness.

Any approach or practice related to managing conflict requires that each individual clearly and respectfully represent his or her point of view, and be willing to hear the other person's point of view. When those in conflict can achieve this level of understanding, then the potential for solution finding is most likely to occur. The key component is to hear and respect your own, and the other individuals *boundaries*. In the absence of this condition, conflict will not get resolved.

Leadership and Conflict Management: Emotional Intelligence

For leaders, emotional intelligence is almost 90% of what set stars apart from the mediocre. As Goleman documents, it's the essential ingredient for reaching and staying at the top in any field. Emotional Intelligence describes abilities distinct from, but complementary to, academic intelligence, the purely cognitive capacities measured by IQ.

"Emotional Intelligence" refers to the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.

- **Self-Awareness:** Knowing what we are feeling in the moment, and using those preferences to guide our decision making; having a realistic assessment of our own abilities and a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.
- **Self-Regulation:** Handling our emotions so that they facilitate rather than interfere with the task at hand; being conscientious and delaying gratification to pursue goals; recovering well from emotional distress.
- **Motivation:** Using our deepest preferences to move and guide us toward our goals, to help us take initiative and strive to improve, and to persevere in the face of setbacks and frustrations.
- **Empathy:** Sensing what people are feeling, being able to take their perspective, and cultivating rapport and attunement with a broad diversity of people.
- **Social Skills:** *but not taking pain on as own.* Handling emotions in relationships well and accurately reading social situations and networks; interacting smoothly; using these skills to persuade and lead, negotiate and settle disputes, for cooperation and teamwork.

Adapted from the work of Howard Gardner & Daniel Goleman & Peter Solovey, "Multiple Intelligence" and "Working with Emotional Intelligence."

Introduction to Conflict Management (cont.)

Conflict Management

Non-violent collaborative conflict management is about standing up for yourself and getting your needs met, while being respectful of others and making sure they get their needs met too. It's not about avoiding real problems and pretending they are not there. It's not about being a doormat and letting people walk on you. It's a challenging process and it's one that develops long-term solutions to conflicts while maintaining relationships. Below are a few strategies to help:

Check anger levels

- Are you too angry to have a rational conversation?
- Are other people involved too angry to have a rational conversation?
- Is this a good time to deal with the issue?
- Would another time be better?

Check yourself

- Why am I angry/upset? What *triggers* have occurred?
- What do I really want out of this situation?
- Who would be able to help me get that?
- What can I do to get that?

Check out the participants

- Who needs to be here to resolve this?
- Is everyone here?
- How can those people be contacted?

Create a safe space

- What guidelines do you and others need to be honest with each other?
- What guidelines do you and others need to be able to listen to each other?

Check out what the other people want

- Listen. Listen. Listen.
- Often if you listen first, other people will let you speak.
- Say back what you heard. Give others a chance to clarify.
- What do other people really want out of the situation?

Introduction to Conflict Management (cont.)

Say what is going on for you

- Be clear about what you need from the situation.
- Explain how you feel.
- Be respectful to yourself and others, and say what you need.

Make sure you understand what the conflict is really about

- Be clear about what issues you are discussing, e.g., communication, tasks, work quality, deadlines, expectations.
- Take time to discover what everyone wants out of the solutions, e.g., a project progress update, help meeting a deadline, more respect, etc.

Look for solutions together

- Work on one issue at a time.
- Make a list of *all* possible solutions. Be creative.
- Choose ones that work for everyone.

Check in later

- Within a reasonable amount of time agree to check in to see how it's going.
- Make adjustments as necessary.
- Acknowledge improvement.

Approaches to Conflict

The difference in outcomes to a conflict depends on the approach participants use. No one of these approaches is better than the other. Each has a time and a place. The key to effective conflict management is using the right approach at the right time. The five most basic approaches to conflict and how/when they may be useful include: Competing, Accommodating, Avoiding, Collaborating, and Compromising.

Competing Strengths

- Emergency situations when someone needs to act.
- When you know you are right; the other person's judgment is inadequate.
- When you need to show that you are not a pushover.

Competing Limitations

- You win and the other loses; potential for resentment.
- You may not get all the information you need because others feel intimidated.
- You may lose.

Accommodating Strengths

- When you realize you are wrong.
- When the issue is more important to the other person.
- Building up social credits.
- Cutting your losses; the time and energy spent trying to resolve the conflict to your benefit will only damage your long-term interests.
- Letting other people learn from their mistakes.

Accommodating Limitations

- You lose and the other wins; potential for resentment.
- Important issues go unaddressed.

Approaches to Conflict (cont.)

Avoiding/Postponing Strengths

- When the issue is trivial.
- When you haven't got a chance of getting satisfaction.
- Letting things cool off.
- Taking time to collect information.
- When others can resolve the conflict more effectively.

Avoiding/Postponing Limitations

- A conflict can go unmanaged and get out of hand.
- Everyone may end up losing and no one's interests are served.

Collaborating Strengths

- Learning all you can about the problem.
- Gaining a commitment from the other person.
- Maintaining relationships.

Collaborating Limitations

- You may take more time than the issue warrants.
- You may cause an issue to become more serious by belaboring it.

Compromising Strengths

- Reaching temporary solutions.
- Reaching fast solutions.
- Reaching solutions when your goals are in direct conflict.
- Cutting losses; you won't get all you want, but you will accept some.

Compromising Limitations

- You may be seen as being a "politician."
- You may pay more attention to reaching solutions than to preserving agreed upon principles or values.

Listening to Understand Effective Practices

Let the speaker finish. Do not interrupt.

Listen for understanding.

Use non-inflammatory language to check for understanding:

Examples:

“What I think I’m hearing you say is”

“Okay, let me make sure I got it right”

“What I am getting is Is that what you mean?”

“So is it?”

“Is that right? Did I get it all?”

Conflict Management Effective Practices

Talk *to* people, not *about* them.

Listen to what others have to say. Make sure you understand what is *important to them*.

Be clear about what you want from the situation. Say what you feel in a way that is respectful to you and the other person.

Ask questions and clarify the issues.

Separate people from the problem.

Look for solutions that work for everyone. When the positions appear to be incompatible, look at underlying needs.

Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood

Habit 5: The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.

The single most important principle to be learned in the field of interpersonal relations is this: seek first to understand, then to be understood. Most people listen not with the intent to understand, but with the intent to reply.

Where does understanding begin? Demanding to be understood is a way of saying, "You open up your mind for me." Wanting to understand the other person is a way of saying, "I'll open up my mind for you." The two are so different in tone and meaning that it's hard to do both at the same time. So we generally focus on one or the other. Most people want only to be understood.

We can be different, with tremendous benefit to the relationship, by seeking first to understand. When we seek to understand, we are applying the principle of empathy. Empathy is a Greek word. The em-part of empathy means "in." The -pathy part comes from *pathos*, which means "feeling" or "suffering." We have empathy, then, when we place ourselves within other people, so to speak, in order to experience their feelings as they experience them. This does not mean that we agree, simply that we understand the other point of view.

Once we understand, we can proceed with the second step of the interaction: seeking to be understood. Now it is much more likely that we will actually be understood, because the other person's drive to be understood has been satisfied. Then, when both parties fully understand both points of view, they can work from there to discover the third alternative.

To understand another person we must be willing to be influenced.

When we seek to understand, we show a willingness to be influenced by the other person's point of view. On the surface, being open to another person's ideas can seem like admitting we might be wrong. Since few people like to be wrong, few people are willing to be open, which is why we tend to enter a discussion with the immediate goal of defending our position, or being understood.

In interdependent situations, ideas of "right" and "wrong," or "winners" and "losers," don't really apply. Interdependent situations have third alternatives and shared victories—completely new positions that people create together. That is what we're looking for when we open ourselves to be influenced.

When we are open, we give people room to release their fixed positions and consider alternatives.

When we are truly interested in other people's point of view, our openness creates a climate that allows them to look at ideas—both theirs and ours—without feeling

Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood (cont.)

threatened. When they don't feel threatened, they are more likely to loosen their grip on their position and consider a new one that favors us as well as them.

Seeking first to understand lets us act from a position of knowledge.

Seeking first to understand is a universal principle of effectiveness. Doctors do it when they diagnose; attorneys do it when they take depositions; sales people do it when they assess their customer's needs. We apply the same principle in our interpersonal relationships when we seek to understand before we seek to be understood. It lets us act from knowledge rather than from ignorance.

By seeking to understand, we gain influence in the relationship.

When we take time to understand people, they are more likely to allow us to influence them. Being assaulted by someone else's fixed position is distressing, but being understood is pleasant. People tend to be flexible and willing to be influenced by those who they feel understand them, and resistant to those who don't.

Of course, if we then use our influence to impose our position, we will probably lose it. This connection between understanding and influence is delicate and holds only as long as our intentions are unquestionable and are backed by a win-win or no deal commitment.

Seeking to understand leads people to discover the third alternative.

When we seek to understand, we encourage the following process:

- People become less defensive about their position.
- They become more open to the question, "How can we both get what we want?"
- As they get their position out of the way, they begin to see their values more clearly so that they can use them as guidelines for creating and evaluating other options.
- By jointly considering other opinions, they develop a third alternative.