

## Conflict Resolution

### **The Premise:**

As the title suggests, our goal is to address conflict with an intention to restore a solution. Re – Solution really means to solve . . . again. So, this is simply a problem – solving challenge, not a power struggle.

A power struggle requires that someone be “one-up,” and the other “one-down.” Secondly, a power struggle requires one person to be right and the other person to be wrong. And finally, a power struggle requires struggle – to over-power and then dominate the adversary. The struggle is directed toward effecting a change in someone else. This is an “either-or” dualistic thinking level of interaction. It requires the intellectual sophistication of about a 6 yr.- old.

In the problem-solving approach to conflict resolution, a different set of assumptions are at play. The assumptions are that we can begin and end as “equals.” There will be no victor or vanquished. A second assumption is that it is quite possible for two people to be opposite and “right” at the same time. What a novel idea! I’ll give you a few minutes to assimilate that one... And finally, the problem-solving approach to conflict resolution invites cooperative collaboration to arrive at solutions. The two parties are on the same team; they are not enemies. The goal is to – together – address the problem, not to attack the other person. If there is any “struggle” in this approach, it is merely the effort to summon personal patience and restraint to conduct oneself in a composed and kind way. There is no delusion about the need to “change” anyone else. This takes the emotional maturity of a grown-up. How differently might the conflict resolution process evolve if both parties took responsibility for themselves, and sought not so much to be understood, as to understand!

## **The Process:**

Throughout the process of resolving conflict, keep in mind that you will be attending to *two levels of need* at all times.

The obvious one is the externally stated problem situation. This is the “bone of contention,” the “rub,” the “issue.” We call this the “content” of the interaction. It involves the *facts of the situation*. It will be important for both parties to accurately understand the other’s “facts” as they see them. Of course, it’s always helpful if both people can be exquisitely articulate in conveying their facts, while the other person displays exquisite active listening skills.

The more subtle level of need is at the feeling level of each individual. We call this the “process” of the interaction. It involves the *feelings of the person*. Both parties need to be aware of their own – and the other’s – need to feel heard and respected. *Do not underestimate the power of this need!* Disregard of this need has led to many unnecessary lawsuits, losses of loved ones, even war. Without sensitivity to this need, the conflict resolution process is doomed to spiral into a power struggle, inevitably ending in a bitter stalemate. I will let you in on a secret about human nature. We have a core, basic, even cellular need to feel at least a minimal level of 1) emotional safety and 2) self-esteem. When either of these is threatened, the kindest, gentlest soul on the planet can revert to quite uncharacteristic ways of attacking and defending. We will violate our own value system if/when push comes to shove in protecting these two essential personal needs. So, conduct yourself in such a way that the other person will not feel the need to defend against you. No, you can’t control the other person’s perceptions and interpretations and reactions to you, but you can take reasonable steps to minimize the probability that they will feel that their self-esteem is threatened.

## **The Steps to Conflict Resolution**

### **1) Introduce the Concern**

- use “I” statements
- explain succinctly the facts
- include why this is important
- avoid accusations
- ask for what you need, if anything
- stay aware of your own feelings

### **2) Confirm and Clarify the Content**

- invite questions
- paraphrase the other’s comments
- establish accuracy
- stay aware of your own feelings

### **3) Negotiate**

- know for yourself what is negotiable and what is not negotiable
- if feelings escalate, slow down, breathe, listen, “I” statements are essential
- pay extra attention to validating the other person
- a “trial basis” is always a good option
- stay aware of your own feelings

### **4) Arrive at a Resolution**

- be flexible, use the other’s ideas as well as your own
- confirm that you both have the same reality about the solution/s

### **5) Summarize**

- review who will do what and when
- set a follow-up meeting to evaluate and give/receive feedback

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*“There is pain in change and there is pain in staying the same. Pick the one that moves you forward.”*

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