

BASICS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict, defined:

"A situation in which interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interests, and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals."
(Donohue and Kolt, 1992)

"Conflict arises when a difference between two (or more) people necessitates change in at least one person in order for their engagement to continue and develop. The differences cannot coexist without some adjustment."
(Jordan, 1990)

More Key Terms

Beliefs: What we think to be true about our position and potential outcomes.

Values: Our code—what is important to us. Deal breakers, end all be all.

Needs: Requirements for an individual's compliance with a solution.

Interests: Factors an individual would like in a final agreement.

Defenses: When our self esteem is threatened, how we respond

Position: An individual's proposed outcome.

Assessing you current state of conflict

What are some of the key sources of conflict in your workplace?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

*What bothers you about how **others** manage conflict?*

*What bothers you about how **you** manage conflict?*

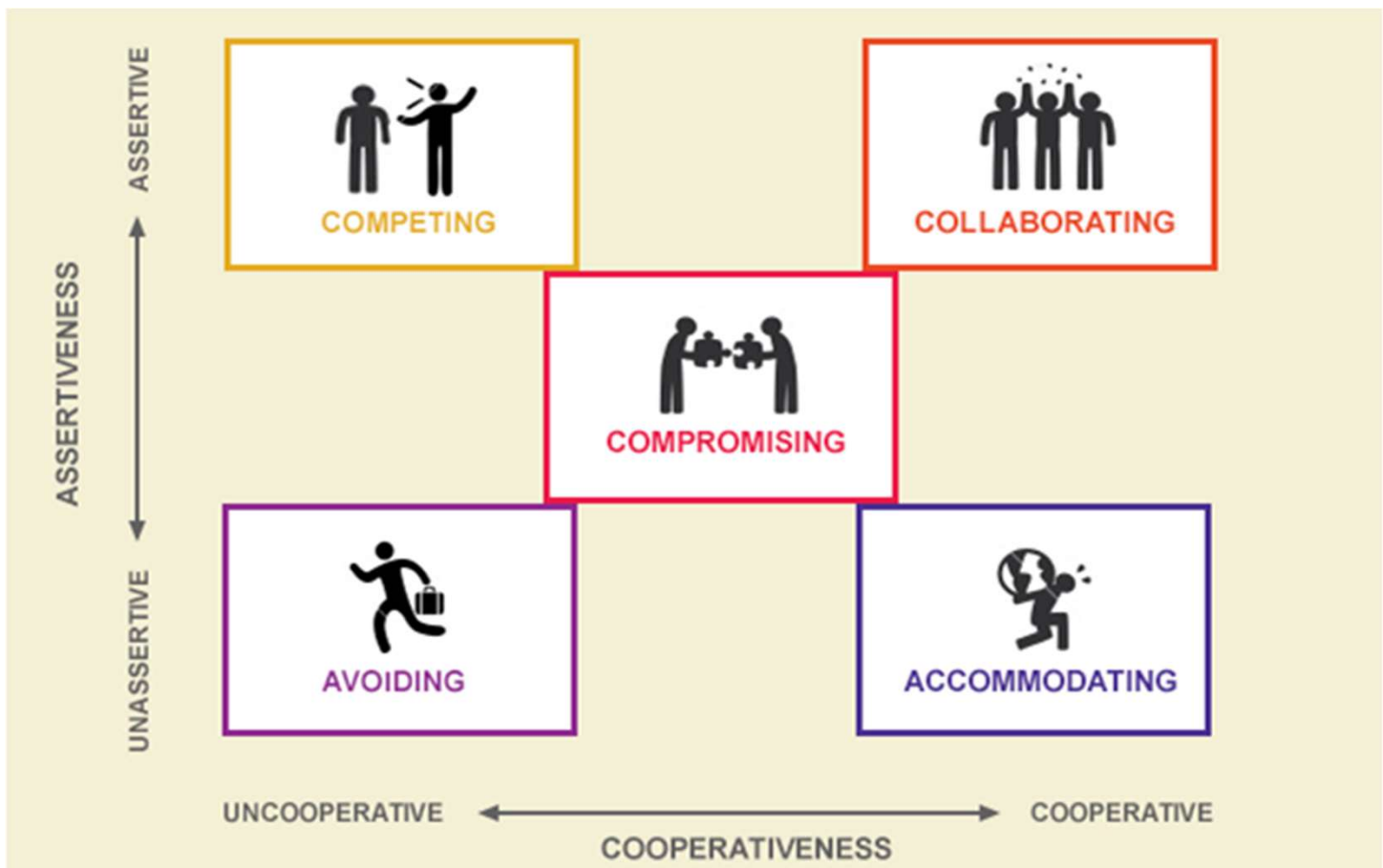
When you are at your best, what methods or tools do you use to manage conflict?

THOMAS-KILMANN CONFLICT MODE INSTRUMENT

Ken Thomas and Ralph Kilmann adapted the Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid (1964)—which plots management styles by concern for relationship and concern for task—to describe various ways individuals respond when faced with conflict. Further, their assessment improved on two that preceded it by minimizing the ‘social desirability bias,’ or the tendency of individuals to select responses they believe are preferable or correct.

This model defines respondents’ typical mode of behavior along two axes: concern for meeting one’s own objectives (Assertiveness) and concern for meeting other parties’ objectives (Cooperativeness).

None of the modes is superior to the others and all have risks of over-use or inappropriate use. The key is learning to take a pause and reflect when you find yourself in conflict in order to choose the best course of action.



My most used conflict mode is: _____


This helps me when: _____


Over-use leads to: _____

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Style Questionnaire

On the following pages are several pairs of statements describing possible behavioural responses to a conflict situation. For each pair, circle the "A" or "B" statement which is most characteristic of your own behaviour.

You may find that neither of the "A" or "B" statements is typical of your behaviour; and if this is so, please select the response which you would be more likely to use.

- 
- 1 A. There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving the problem.
B. Rather than negotiate the things on which we disagree, I try to stress those things upon which we both agree.
 - 2 A. I try to find a compromise solution.
B. I attempt to deal with all of his/her and my concerns.
 - 3 A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
B. I might try to soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.
 - 4 A. I try to find a compromise solution.
B. I sometimes sacrifice my own wishes for the wishes of the other person.
 - 5 A. I consistently seek the other's help in working out a solution.
B. I try to do what is necessary to avoid useless tensions.
 - 6 A. I try to avoid creating unpleasantness for myself.
B. I try to win my position.
 - 7 A. I try to postpone the issue until I have had some time to think it over.
B. I give up some points in exchange for others.
 - 8 A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
B. I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.
 - 9 A. I feel that differences are not always worth worrying about.
B. I make some effort to get my way.
 - 10 A. I am firm in pursuing my goals.
B. I try to find a compromise solution.
 - 11 A. I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.
B. I might try to soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.
 - 12 A. I sometimes avoid taking positions which would create controversy.
B. I will let the other person have some of his/her positions if he/she lets me have some of mine.
 - 13 A. I propose a middle ground.
B. I press to get my points made.
 - 14 A. I tell the other person my ideas and ask for his/hers.
B. I try to show the other person the logic and benefits of my position.
 - 15 A. I might try to soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.
B. I try to do what is necessary to avoid tensions.
 - 16 A. I try not to hurt the other's feelings.
B. I try to convince the other person of the merits of my position.
 - 17 A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
B. I try to do what is necessary to avoid useless tensions.
 - 18 A. If it makes other people happy, I might let them maintain their views.
B. I will let other people have some of their positions if they let me have some of mine.

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- 19 A. I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.
B. I try to postpone the issue until I have had some time to think it over.
- 20 A. I attempt to immediately work through our differences.
B. I try to find a fair combination of gains and losses for both of us.
- 21 A. In negotiations, I try to be considerate of the other person's wishes.
B. I always lean toward a direct discussion of the problem.
- 22 A. I try to find a position that is intermediate between his/hers and mine.
B. I assert my wishes.
- 23 A. I am very often concerned with satisfying all our wishes.
B. There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving the problem.
- 24 A. I try meet to meet the wishes of others when it's important to them.
B. I try to get the other person to settle for a compromise.
- 25 A. I try to show the other person the logic and benefits of my position.
B. In negotiations, I try to be considerate of the other person's wishes.
- 26 A. I propose a middle ground.
B. I am nearly always concerned with satisfying all our wishes.
- 27 A. I sometimes avoid taking positions that would create controversy.
B. If it makes other people happy, I might let them maintain their views.
- 28 A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
B. I usually seek the other's help in working out a solution.
- 29 A. I propose a middle ground.
B. I feel that differences are not always worth worrying about.
- 30 A. I try not to hurt the other's feelings.
B. I always share a problem with the other person so that we can work it out.

Scoring Your Thomas-Kilmann Responses

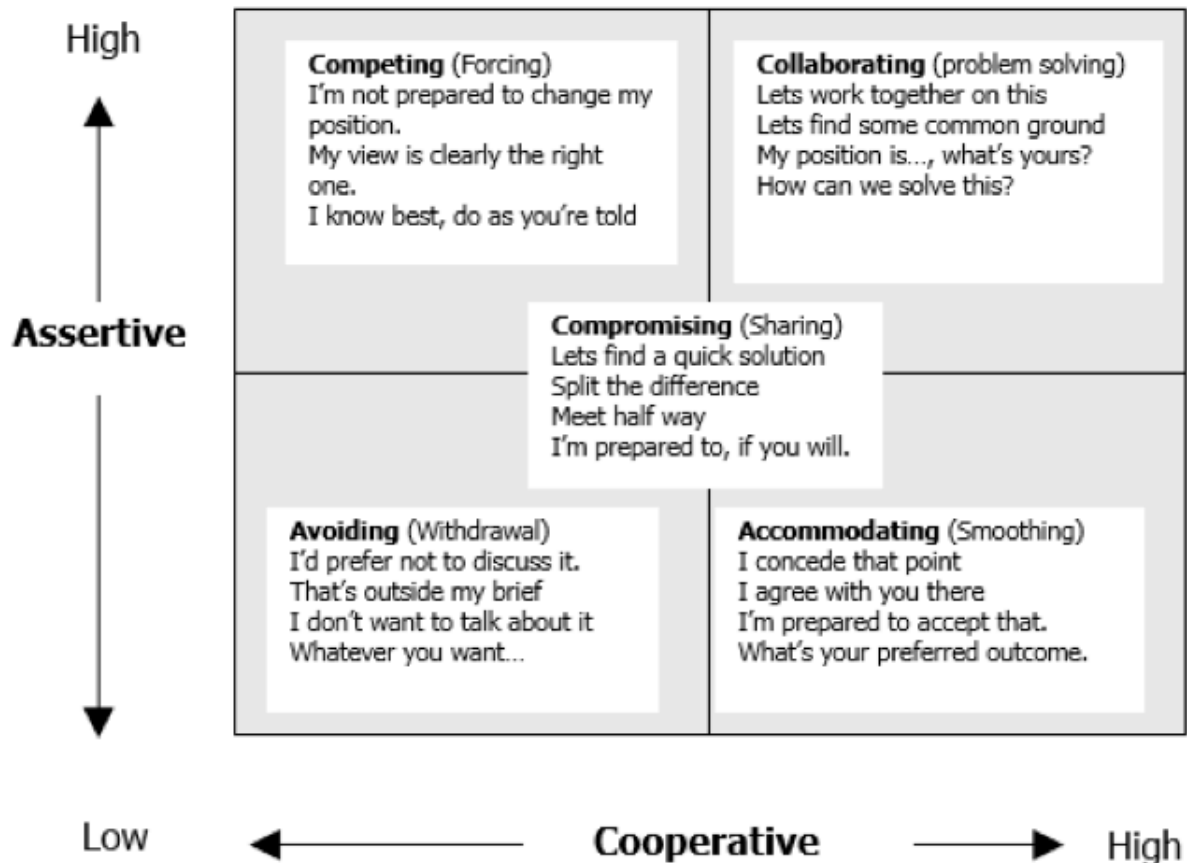
Circle the letters below which you circled on each item of the questionnaire and total the numbers in each column.

	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating
1				A	B
2		B	A		
3	A				B
4			A		B
5		A		B	
6	B			A	
7			B	A	
8	A	B			
9	B			A	
10	A		B		
11		A			B
12			B	A	
13	B		A		
14	B	A			
15				B	A
16	B				A
17	A			B	
18			B		A
19		A		B	
20		A	B		
21		B			A
22	B		A		
23		A		B	
24			B		A
25	A				B
26		B	A		
27				A	B
28	A	B			
29			A	B	
30		B			A
Tot					

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Style Background

Ref: From Thomas-Kilmann – Conflict Mode Instrument

The questionnaire is designed to assess your behaviour in conflict situations, where a situation arises and at least two people appear to be incompatible. In such situations, we can describe a person's behaviour along two basic dimensions: (1) Assertiveness, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his/her own concerns, and (2) Cooperativeness, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns. These two basic dimensions of behaviour can be used to define five specific methods of dealing with conflicts, as shown on the grid below:



You will have a numerical score for each of the five conflict mode styles, competing, avoiding, accommodating, collaborating and compromising. Your highest scoring column represents the conflict style mode that is your 'default or natural' mode.

Each of the five columns has a range of possible scores from 0 (for very low use) to 12 (for very high use). These have been averaged out on a distribution curve against other manager responses. Check your range of scores against the following key to identify how they compare in relation to other managers in your business sector.

Usage	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating
High	8 to 12	9 to 12	9 to 12	8 to 12	7 to 12
Average	4 to 7	6 to 8	5 to 8	5 to 7	3 to 6
Low	0 to 3	0 to 5	0 to 4	0 to 4	0 to 2



Five Conflict Mode Descriptions

Read the descriptions below for each of the five different conflict modes taking particular note of your highest conflict style.

COMPETING - Is assertive and uncooperative - an individual pursues their own concerns at the other person's expense. This is a power-oriented mode, in which one uses whatever power seems appropriate to win one's own position - one's ability to argue, one's rank, economic sanctions. Competing might mean "standing up for your rights," defending a position which you believe is correct, or simply trying to win.

ACCOMMODATING - Is unassertive and cooperative - the opposite of competing. When accommodating, an individual neglects their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person; there is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode. Accommodating might take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's order when one would prefer not to, or yielding to another's point of view.

AVOIDING - Is unassertive and uncooperative - the individual does not immediately pursue their own concerns of those of the other person. They do not address the conflict. Avoiding might take the form of diplomatically side-stepping an issue, postponing an issue until a better time, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.

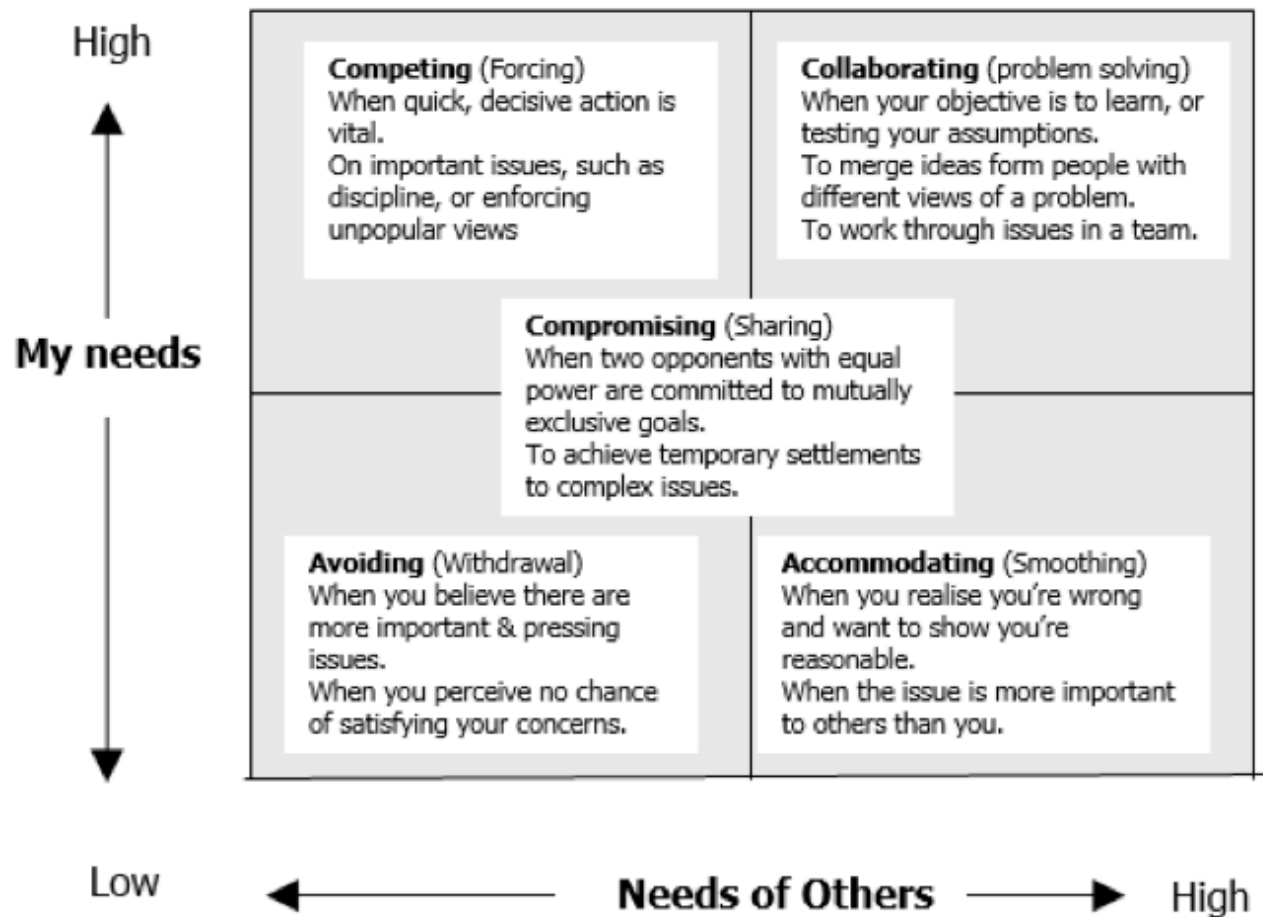
COLLABORATING - Is both assertive and cooperative - the opposite of avoiding. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with the other person to find some solution which fully satisfies the concerns of both persons. It means digging into an issue to identify the underlying concerns of the two individuals and to find an alternative which meets both sets of concerns. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights, concluding to resolve some condition which would otherwise have them competing for resources, or confronting and trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem.

COMPROMISING - Is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. The objective is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties. It falls on a middle ground between competing and accommodating. Compromising gives up more than competing but less than accommodating. Likewise, it addresses an issue more directly than avoiding, but does not explore it in as much depth as collaborating. Compromising might mean splitting the difference, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground position.

Appropriate Use of Conflict Modes

Each of the five conflict modes has its strengths and weaknesses, depending upon the conflict situation you are in. To maximise your ability to influence and manage conflict it is important to know how to adapt your style according to the situation you find yourself in.

The following chart depicts some examples of conflict situations, and suggests the most appropriate conflict mode to use for that situation.



Action

Think about the conflict situations you have experienced at work, and how you handled them. What worked well for you and what might you need to change or develop?

Interest based relational approach

This type of conflict resolution respects individual differences while helping people avoid becoming too entrenched in a fixed position. This approach comes from the famed negotiation book "Getting to Yes"

In resolving conflict using this approach, you follow these rules:

Make sure that good relationships are the first priority: As far as possible, make sure that you treat the other calmly and that you try to build mutual respect. Do your best to be courteous to one-another and remain constructive under pressure.

Keep people and problems separate: Recognize that in many cases the other person is not just "being difficult" – real and valid differences can lie behind conflictive positions. By separating the problem from the person, real issues can be debated without damaging working relationships.

Pay attention to the interests that are being presented: By listening carefully you'll most-likely understand why the person is adopting his or her position.

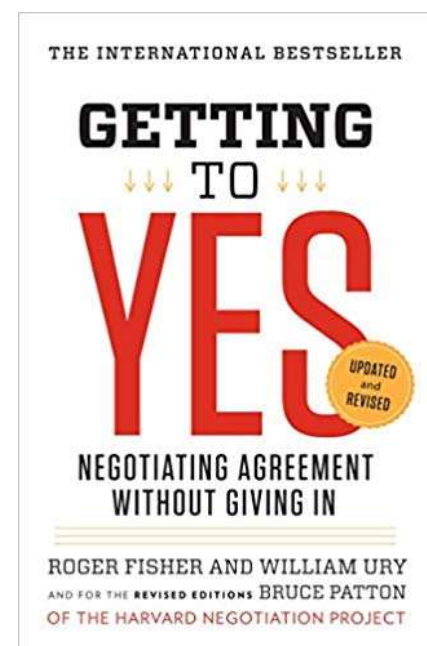
Listen first; talk second: To solve a problem effectively you have to understand where the other person is coming from before defending your own position.

Set out the "Facts": Agree and establish the objective, observable elements that will have an impact on the decision.

Explore options together: Be open to the idea that a third position may exist, and that you can get to this idea jointly.

By following these rules, you can often keep contentious discussions positive and constructive. This helps to prevent the antagonism and dislike which so-often causes conflict to spin out of control.

Fisher, R., Patton, B., & Ury, W. (2003). *Getting to yes: negotiating an agreement without giving in*. London: Random House Business Books.

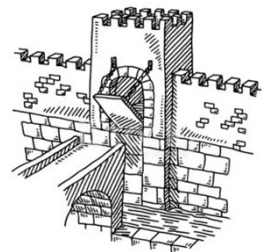
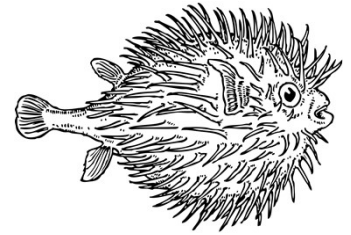


Managing Defensiveness

When we're faced with conflict, we can easily become defensive of our positions, our needs, and our own self-image. When we become defensive, our emotions can rise and it becomes difficult to articulate our needs or to understand what another person is saying. Therefore, it is important to recognize when you are becoming defensive, and know how to manage yourself.

How can you tell you're becoming defensive?

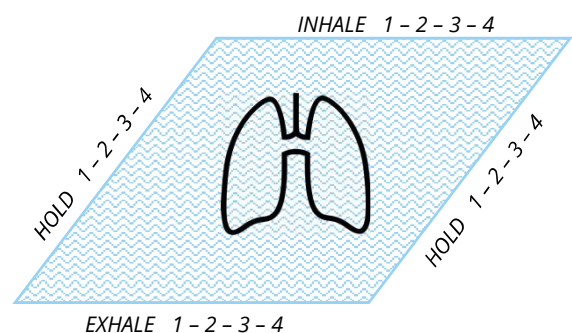
What do you need when you become defensive?



BOX / TACTICAL BREATHING

Used by yogis and Navy Seals alike, this breathing technique relieves stress and improves concentration.

Sit or stand in a neutral, well aligned posture and pay attention to your breathing. Breathe in for four seconds, hold the inhale for four seconds; exhale for four seconds, and hold the exhale. Repeat.



PREPARING YOURSELF FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

‘Have you talked to the other person yet?’ When we seek advice in interpersonal conflict, we often get this question first. We may know that in order to resolve an interpersonal conflict we’ll likely have to speak clearly and directly to the person with whom we have a conflict, but sitting face to face isn’t as easy as it sounds. In order to be the most successful in resolving your own interpersonal conflicts, it’s important to take the time to prepare yourself for the conversation



1. What is your purpose in having the conversation? What do you hope to accomplish? What would be the ideal outcome? _____

2. What assumptions are you making about the other person’s intentions? _____

3. What “buttons” are being pushed? What personal history is being triggered? _____

4. How is your attitude (about the other person, the issue, etc.) affecting your perception? _____

PREPARING YOURSELF FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS (Continued)

Begin to reframe the opponent as a partner.

5. What might the other person be thinking about this situation?

6. Are they aware of the problem? If so, how do you think they perceive it?

7. What are their needs and fears?

8. What solution do you think they would suggest?

9. What are your needs and fears? Are there any common concerns? Could there be?

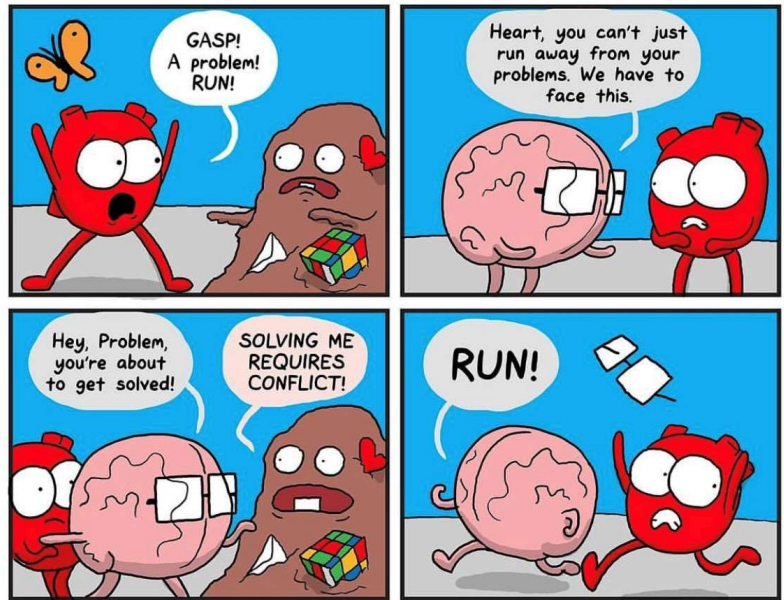
10. How have you contributed to the problem? How have they?

4 Steps to a Successful Outcome

A successful outcome will depend on two things: how you are and what you say. How you are (centered, supportive, curious, problem-solving) will greatly influence what you say.

1. INQUIRY: Cultivate an attitude of discovery and curiosity. Pretend you don't know anything (you really don't), and try to learn as much as possible about the other person and their point of view.

Let them talk until they're finished. Don't interrupt except to acknowledge. Whatever you hear, don't take it personally. It's not really about you. Try to learn as much as you can in this phase of the conversation. You'll get your turn, but don't rush it.



@theAwkwardYeti

2. ACKNOWLEDGMENT: Acknowledgment means showing that you hear and comprehend. Try to absorb what they say so well you can make their argument for them. Describe back to them what your understanding is that they're needing. Honor their position. Acknowledge whatever you can, including your own defensiveness if it comes up. Acknowledgment can be difficult if we associate it with agreement.

3. ADVOCACY: When you sense that they've fully expressed themselves, it's your turn. What can you see from your perspective that they've missed? Help clarify your position without minimizing theirs.

4. PROBLEM-SOLVING: Now you're ready to begin building solutions. Brainstorming is useful, also continued inquiry. Ask the other person what they think would work. Whatever they say, find something you can agree with and build on it. If the conversation becomes adversarial, go back to inquiry. Asking for the other's point of view usually creates safety, and they'll be more willing to engage.

If you've been successful in centering, adjusting your attitude, and in engaging with inquiry and useful purpose, building sustainable solutions will be more likely.

Examples of Conversation Openers:

"I have something I'd like to discuss with you that I think will help us work together more effectively.

"I'd like to talk about _____ with you, but first I'd like to get your point of view."

"I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes to talk?"

"I think we have different perceptions about _____. I'd like to hear your thinking on this."

"I'd like to talk about _____ I think we may have different ideas on how to address _____"

"I'd like to see if we might reach a better understanding about _____. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well."