

Resolving Conflict

Made this quick and easy!



by John Stoker

WHEN I WAS A BOY, MY brother and I would argue over some dumb thing. Rather than having us talk the issue out, our Dad would make us put on boxing gloves and *duke it out*. Since I was three years older, I won every argument.

This was an absurd way to resolve a conflict, but unfortunately, this is often how conflicts are *resolved*. The person with the bigger punch wins, or the person who wants to avoid the perception of being on the receiving end of the *bigger punch* gives in or goes along to avoid the consequences. Either way, nothing is resolved. There is no sharing of ideas, no contribution, collaboration, cooperation, or learning. There is only *contention, confrontation, competition, and compulsion*. Both parties lose something.

Conflict is often the byproduct of differences. We are all unique. We have different values, experiences, perceptions, likes, dislikes, tastes, and biases. Our differences present *opportunities to expand our perspective* and understanding. Unfortunately, we struggle to hear points of view that are not our own or are outside the realm of our experience. That's when conflict shows up. When you encounter conflict, the challenge is to *accelerate through it* to resolve it.

10 Helpful Strategies

Here are *10 strategies* that will help you navigate conflict.

1. Suspend your thinking. If you find yourself arguing with someone and feel like they are pushing their own agenda while you are struggling to get them to see things your way, realize that what *you* are doing is not working. Suspend your point of view and try to understand the other person's point. Verbally *pushing* on people creates *push-back*. Ironically, when people don't get their way, they try even harder to convince the opposition that they're right. This creates *more heat, but low understanding*.

2. Visualize them positively. Find something positive about the other person and hold that thought. Through the power of your imagination, you might picture that person behaving positively. People pick up on the energy you project toward them—they *feel* the energy

of your thoughts. If your thoughts are negative, they'll resist you and your ideas *before you even open your mouth*.

3. Remain calm and at ease. Matching the *energy and intensity* of a person's emotion creates more of the same. Escalating the emotional drama by becoming emotional yourself prevents you from understanding the thinking being masked by their emotion. When you remain calm, you can listen and think clearly. To keep your own emotions in check, you might ask yourself a few questions about their point and listen for them to answer. Focus on the other person, not on your emotions.

4. Listen past the emotion. Hot or negative emotion is indicative of a violated value. When a person feels threatened or embarrassed, they respond emotionally. This tells you that they are interpreting what you are *saying or doing* as an attack on something important to them. You need to discover the value that their emotion is hiding from you. *Sometimes the person just wants to be heard*. When you listen, you acknowledge them and affirm that their point of view is valid. *When a person feels heard, they can vent or release the emotion, which dissipates its intensity*.

5. Ask questions. Asking questions that require a person to think in order to respond will also help dissipate their emotion. When you ask, "What do you want?" or "What's most important and why?" you gain insight that will help you identify the value that they perceive has been violated. You might also ask questions about the facts or data that has led to their opinion or judgment. Once you've asked questions and listened to the responses, summarize or ask clarifying questions that demonstrate your understanding and help them clarify their understanding.

6. Ask for permission. After giving an individual your full attention, ask them if you might share your perspective. If you do so respectfully, you will focus their attention on what you are about to say. Asking permission to share your perspective respectfully is essentially asking the other person to

momentarily suspend their own thinking. Never "put down" anything they have shared; simply ask them to engage.

7. Invite an objective perspective. Ask them to objectively hear your point of view. Tell them that you will provide data for the opinions and judgments you will express and that you will ask them to comment on your perspective when you are finished sharing. This step requires that you previously think through what you will say and prepare to support your position with evidence.

8. Be in control. If the other person starts to interrupt or offer rebuttal to your point before you finish, tell them respectfully that you have not yet finished your point. Then finish your point and ask

them to respond. Only move to a different point after you have completely exchanged ideas on that one previous point. If you do not structure the conversation in this way, you may end up sharing a number of points—they may respond to some but not all of those points and then add new, previously unconsidered points. This haphazard conversation goes in different directions, which may lead nowhere.

9. Demonstrate your understanding. After they share their view and you then share yours, clarify both parties' points of agreement and disagreement. Avoid judgments. Phrases like, "That's stupid!" or "You don't know what you are talking about!" create resistance and cause people to mentally *unplug* from the conversation and resist all you have to say.

10. Collaborate to create a solution. Work together to identify how you might create a solution that will address as many values identified in the conversation as possible. If you are ultimately responsible or accountable for the issue at conflict, you may need to make a final decision—but explain your reasoning and rationale for the decision. Underline the fact that you will be responsible for the outcome, and solicit their support.

Resolving conflict is not about *being right* and *making others wrong*. Accelerate through the emotions by asking questions to identify *values* or *wants*. Then share views and identify what can be done to solve your issues. Investing the time and energy to resolve conflict will build effective solutions, create respect, and strengthen relationships. PE

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ACTION: Perform the service of resolving conflict.