

Getting Along: The Wild, Wacky World of Human Relationship



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Eubios Ethics Institute

Christchurch

Tsukuba Science City

Bangkok

Cataloging-in-Publication data

Getting Along: The Wild, Wacky World of Human Relationship

/ Ramnarace, Laura.

Christchurch, N.Z. : Eubios Ethics Institute ©2017.

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<http://www.eubios.info/>

1 v. Five Chapters.

ISBN 978-0-908897-29-2

1. Peace. 2. Relationships. 3. Conflict Resolution. 4. Peace-making. 5. Counseling. 6. Social work. 7. Psychology. I. Ramnarace, Laura Renee, 1960. II. Eubios Ethics Institute. III. Title (Getting Along: The Wild, Wacky World of Human Relationship).

341.76757 (174.9574)

Key Words: Communication; Peace; Counseling; Psychology; Conflict Resolution;.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: People are Funny, Interesting and Sometimes Scary

“Do you know why people fight? Because they’re both right!” – Ashleigh Brilliant

When I was sixteen, one of my high school’s counselors started a peer counseling program. Curious, and being inclined to “help,” I signed up for the class that would, theoretically, transform me into a provider of skilled listening and support for my schoolmates. Among other things, my classmates and I learned about and practiced communication skills. Having a terrible relationship with my father at the time, I decided to try out the skill of paraphrasing on him. According to my teacher, paraphrasing helped people to “feel heard,” and that was supposed to be a good thing. Armed with this new technique, and viewing my father much like a lab rat, I listened carefully to what he was saying and paraphrased what he said regularly, as he spoke to me.

I was dumbfounded by the result.

Practically overnight, my father went from being angry and critical much of the time to behaving in a calm, considerate and respectful manner to me, at least when I practiced paraphrasing. This is when I discovered the power of constructive communication skills, a cornerstone in the field of conflict education. I was much too shy to be a good peer counselor, but I began using these skills in my home, at work and with friends, to good effect. Thus began my path as a conflict intervention specialist and educator, inadvertent and many years ago. Along the way I have learned much about the principles underlying such apparently magical transformations.

In the workshops I teach on conflict I do a little exercise where I write the word “conflict” in big letters in the center of a large piece of paper and draw twenty or so straight lines radiating out from it, making an image like a mutated spider. I ask the participants to tell me the images, words and thoughts that come to mind in response to the word “conflict.” I write the words the participants give

me, at the end of the radiating lines. A typical cluster will contain words like, “fight, angry, mean, war, misunderstanding, violence, hurt, sad, argument, pain, abuse, confusion, loneliness...” Nearly all the words people think of are negative, which is understandable. Of course we all have a lot of unhappy associations with conflict. Most of us would rather not think about conflict unless we absolutely have to, which usually is not until we find ourselves in the middle of it. So why on earth would anyone want to read a book on a subject so unpleasant? I can think of many reasons to learn about conflict but they all boil down to two main reason: 1) so that we can reduce the amount of conflict we experience in our lives, and, 2) so the conflicts we do have won’t be so bad.

Learning about conflict can help us to notice the many good things that can also come from conflict and allow us to have more of those good experiences. What are those good things? After the mutated spider exercise where people list their first responses to the word “conflict,” I ask them to name all the good things that come out of conflict too. These lists are also long and include things like, “understanding, closer relationships, empathy, compassion, avoid future conflicts, do things differently, harmony, self-understanding, more positive behaviors, better decision making, forgiveness...” Most of us would like to have more of these things in our lives. If you are among this group keep reading. You are not going to get away from conflict, even if you live as a hermit in a cave the rest of your life, because the way we treat others is often how we treat ourselves. By reading this book, and practicing what is in it, you will be able to get more of the good things out of your relationships, and even conflicts, and have to put up with fewer of the bad things.

How to Use This Book

I have designed this book so that you can use it many different way and still get a lot out of it. Of course you can read it in the usual way, one page at a time, start to finish. You can also choose just one chapter or section that seems to relate to a particular situation. You can flip through and read only the sidebars. You can just do the “Get Real” activities and get a lot of helpful insight into the wild, wacky, behavior of your fellow humans. Just reading the cartoons will help you understand conflict better and make smarter choices with friends, family members, co-workers and community members. Or you can use any combination of the above. Most important of all is that you look at the ideas and suggestions in this book as a starting point for your own, personal, exploration. We all live in very different community, family, and work situations so your own life may contain variations not addressed in this book. Experiment, use what fits, adapt what you can and do not worry about the rest. It is your book. Do what you like with it.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This book is designed for situations where the people involved are in reasonably healthy, balanced, relationships. This book is not intended for relationships where emotional or physical violence, mental illness, substance abuse, or significant power imbalances are involved. If you are in a situation where any of these are a factor, then you need to get the help of professionals who can work with you directly. See chapter eight for suggestions.

What is Conflict?

Conflict specialists give pretty similar definitions of conflict. The one I like best is given by William Wilmot and Joyce Hocker, who say, **“Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals.”** That is quite a mouthful and not that helpful at first glance. Let us see what happens if we break it down:

- **Conflict is an expressed struggle...** means that someone thinks there is a problem (struggle) and that it has been expressed somehow. Conflict may be expressed by someone who basically says, “I have a problem with you,” but it often shows up in other ways, such as when we stop talking to someone, or become grumpy with them. Sometimes people stop trying to cooperate with each



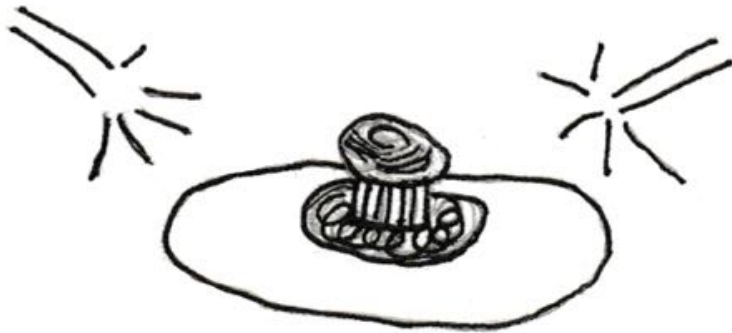
Conflict

“Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals.” (Hocker and Wilmot, 2007)

other, or even try to make things harder for someone else. Maybe we tell everyone but the person with whom we are having the problem. What if one person thinks there is a problem and the other person insists there is not? The experts say that it only takes one person to think there is a conflict for there to be a conflict. On the other hand, the experts also say that if the parties involved do not think there is a conflict but someone else outside the situation thinks there is a conflict, then there is no conflict. A conflict has to be

something that the people in the situation actually think is a problem.

- **“...between at least two interdependent parties...”** means that there have to be at least two people involved to have a conflict, and for our purposes of exploring conflict between individuals (interpersonal conflict) this makes sense. In order for there to be a conflict these parties, or people must be “interdependent,” which means that the people must rely on each other in some way. We depend on drivers around us to follow the traffic rules, or at least make an effort not to run into us. When they do not do this, or we do not, then we can end up in conflicts called “accidents.” Our children rely on us to feed, clothe, house and protect them. If we do not do this then there is a conflict that the state calls “neglect.” We also rely on our bosses to treat us with respect and pay us, on our co-workers to cooperate with us on work we share, and on our friends to do what they say they’re going to do when they say they’re going to do it. When these things do not happen there is conflict.



- **“...who perceive...”** According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary “perceive” means “to gain awareness: REALIZE.” The funny thing about what we perceive is that we can be very sure of something that is absolutely not true. We have all experienced optical illusions. We have all thought someone said one thing but everyone else heard him say something else. So, we can perceive something, such as someone being mad at us, or someone not caring about us, or is trying to do something bad to us, and we can be wrong. Think

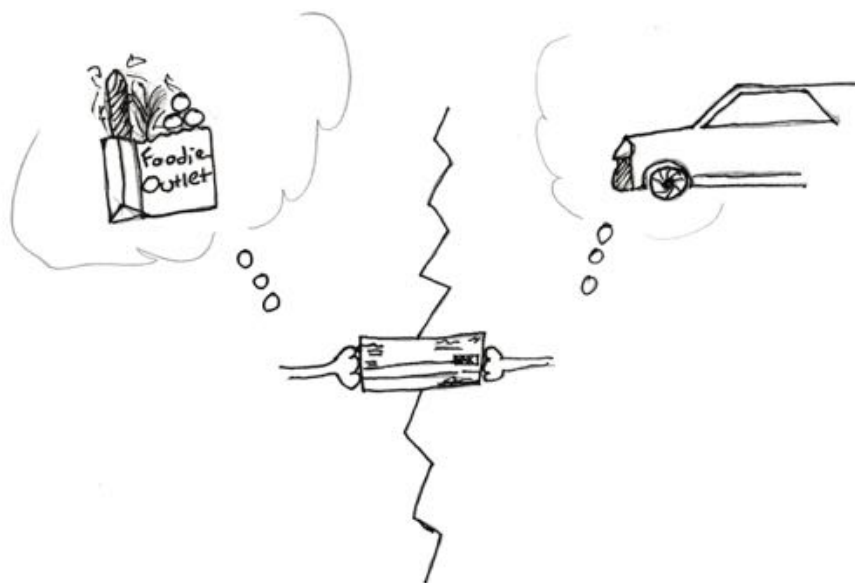


of the times when you have been wrongly accused of something. Or you have accused someone of something and found out later that you were wrong. The unreliability of what we, and others, perceive is very important to understanding conflict.

➤ **“...incompatible goals...”** –This is when two or more people want things that cannot both happen. If I want my daughter to wear a dress for her class picture and she wants to wear pants, then our goals are incompatible. If I want a promotion and you want a promotion to that same, single, position, our goals are incompatible.



➤ **“...scarce resources...”** This means that there is not enough (“scarce”) of something (“resources”) for everyone who wants it. If you want the last doughnut and I want the last doughnut then we have a problem of scarce resources – doughnuts. If we have a day to go do something fun together and you want to go hiking in the mountains and I want to go surfing on the beach,



and we cannot fit both into one day, then the scarce resource is time. Other common scarce resources are money, attention, space and energy. Everywhere we look, at work, in the news, at home and

in our communities, there is conflict over something that people “perceive”, or believe, there is not enough of to go around. Sometimes they are right, sometimes they are not.

- **“...and interference from others in achieving their goals.”** This means that we “perceive” (that slippery word again!) that someone is getting in the way of (interfering with) what we want to happen (our goals). So if I’m trying to get ready for work, and my teenage son is in the bathroom so long I cannot get my shower, then I will probably see him as interfering with my goal of getting to work clean, and on time. If I want a parking space close to the store and someone else slips in before I can, then that is interference in achieving my goal of getting a parking spot quickly.

Are humans just naturally competitive?

According to William Ury (2000), humans are naturally competitive, but we are also naturally cooperative. There are many ways we cooperate in order to get through our everyday life. We have to be able to agree on when we are going to be at work with our bosses and coworkers, in order to do our work together. Just driving to work each day, we have to assume that the other people are going to cooperate with us by following basic traffic laws. We have to cooperate because the consequences of not cooperating with others work against our *own* needs.

So why cannot we all just get along?

Communication, differing values and perspectives, identity, power, emotional issues, forces outside of us

Many things make it hard to get along sometimes. We have different ways of communicating and sometimes we just do not understand each other well. Or worse, we think we understand when we do not. We may have differences in the way we communicate, the things we think are important in life, and how we act or think others are supposed to act. We might have problems because we belong

to different groups – in school, work, towns or cities, and in the world. Differences in power of all kinds can cause friction in our homes, at our jobs and with our neighbors. Sometimes it is even our *similarities* that cause problems. Strong emotions, both positive and negative, can make a difference in how well we get along. We can also find ourselves in conflict with others because of things that do not have anything to do with us as individuals. We are sometimes rewarded for competing with others, like with grades in school, or promotions at work. We might be rewarded for cooperating with each other, like if a group of neighbors pool their money to build some playground equipment for their children together. Sometimes laws put us into conflict with each other, as when many law-abiding citizens could not vote in this country, or when people have different opinions about how we should treat our air or water, or how much utility companies can charge us for their services.

What can we do?

- **Learn:** We can learn about these aspects of conflict, how they work, how they affect each other, and most importantly, what we can do differently to improve how we handle conflict.

- **Practice:** Reading this book is not enough. We have to practice doing what we have learned in order for us to really understand it and for it to make a real difference in our lives. However, it is very important to understand that we do not go from reading something to being able to do it perfectly in our lives right away. Real learning takes time and it is important to cut ourselves some slack in our learning process. Educators have identified four stages of learning. These are:

GET REAL

For one day, notice all the ways you both compete and cooperate with others, and they with you.

4 Stages of learning

With some of the ideas presented in the book you may be at the fourth stage of learning - **Unconscious competence**, which means you already use them automatically. With other ideas you may be at the first stage, meaning you may be encountering these ideas for the first time. And so on.

Remember: practicing skills in real life improves those skills. Ask any athlete. Still, some of the skills in the book can be harder to use in highly emotional situations simply because we are not as in control of ourselves. So go easy on yourself, and those close to you. Nobody does any of this perfectly all the time, even people like me who teach it. We are all fallible human beings, no matter how much we wish otherwise. Whatever you do, do not start with the most difficult conflict in your life. You will see more progress in developing these skills if you start with easier situations. Practice reminding your kids to be on time before you tell your boss that you do not feel respected. Tell your coworker you won't be able to cover for her before you tell your mom that your child has a different father than she has always believed. Also, try to digest a little at a time. Practice one or two skills while reading about others. Do not expect to master it all at once.

4 STAGES OF LEARNING

Unconscious

incompetence: When you do not know what you do not know. When you are a baby, you do not notice that you do not know how to drive a car, so you do not care.

Conscious

incompetence: When you know what you do not know. When you are twelve years old, you know you do not know how to drive a car, and it kind of bugs you.

Conscious competence:

When you know but you have to think about what you know. When you have a learner's permit to drive, you have to think about shifting gears, how hard you are pressing on the accelerator, and steering correctly.

Unconscious

competence: When you do not think about what you know. When you have been driving for a

Chapter 2

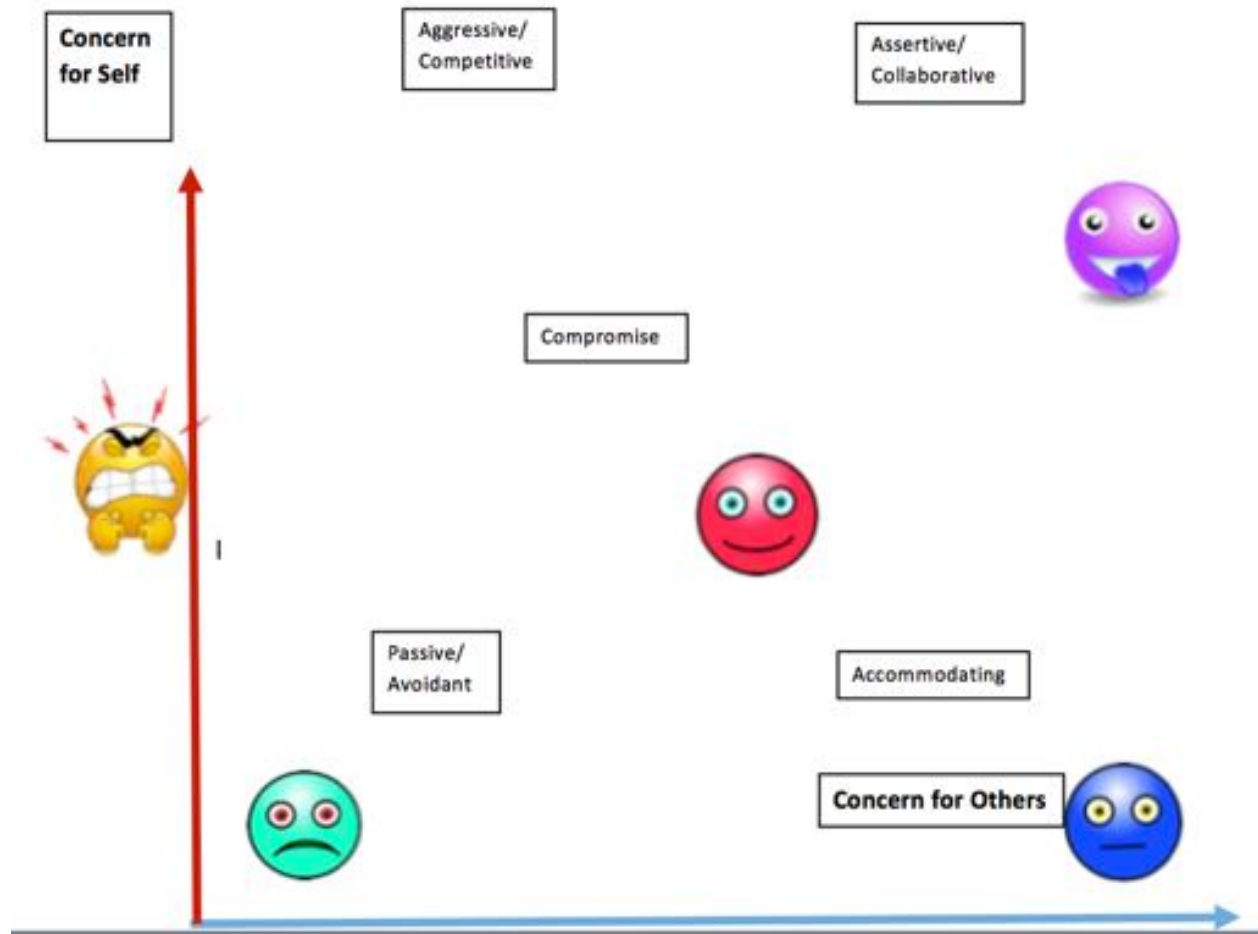
Conflict Styles

What is a conflict style?

Our conflict style is the way we usually behave in conflict. This can vary a lot depending on our mood, the situation, and the person or people with whom we are in conflict. With some people such as a boss or friend, we may be very accommodating, with others, such as a co-worker or sibling, we may be more aggressive or competitive. Maybe we are normally very collaborative but when stressed out we become more passive. Or, if someone is being aggressive with us, we will be aggressive with them, even if we normally might look for a way to compromise.

The Dual Concern Model

My favorite model for understanding the differences between conflict styles comes from authors Joyce Hocker and William Wilmot, called the Dual Concern Model. According to Hocker and Wilmot, there are five different conflict styles, which can be organized according to how much we show concern for others, and how much concern we show for ourselves. This distinction also aligns with how aggressive a person is being, or how passive they are being. Here are the five styles, described in terms of how assertive the person is being, how cooperative, how much concern is shown for one's self, and how much concern is shown for the other person.



The Dual Concern Model

1. **Aggressive/competitive:** High assertion, low cooperation, high concern for self, low concern for other
2. **Passive/Avoidant:** Low assertion, low cooperation, low concern for self, low concern for other
3. **Accommodation:** Low assertion, high cooperation, low concern for self, high concern for other
4. **Compromise:** Medium assertiveness, medium cooperation, medium concern for self, medium concern for other
5. **Collaborative/Problem solving/Assertive:** High assertion, high cooperation, high concern for self, high concern for other

Why should we care about conflict styles?

- So we can understand ourselves better. If we understand the way we handle conflict and the results of our behavior we can make choices that work better for us.
- So we can understand others better. If we understand why others behave the way they do we stand a better chance of being able to do things that help them solve the problem with us.

Conflict Styles

Aggressive/competitive

Definition: When someone is trying to get what they want without caring much about what the other person needs or wants, he is being competitive. The person using this style is often willing to use force, intimidation or manipulation to get what they want, at the expense of the other. According to the Dual Concern Model, this shows a high concern for ourselves and low concern for others. In other words, we are so busy trying to get what we want we do not even consider the other's feelings, thoughts or needs. We do not care if others get what they want. If this is your usual style then you are likely to have a lot more conflict in your life than is necessary. You will also tend to lose friends and to alienate family members and co-workers.

Pros: Can get things done quickly; can spur creativity when competition is rewarded; when one's goal is more important than the relationship; conveys commitment to others; can be good when it is clearly understood that competitiveness is expected by all.

Cons: This style may cause resentment with anyone on the other side. An aggressive style can harm our relationships with others causing them to resort to

AGGRESSIVE- COMPETITIVE

When we use this approach we are acting in a way that only seeks to get us what we want, at the expense of others. We show a high concern for ourselves and low concern for others. Relationships suffer under this style and the problem is not really solved in the long run. This means that the problem will probably come up again.

tactics to get around the power you have or avoid you altogether. This style tends to turn every situation into one where someone always wins and someone always loses, making for a stressful relationship.

Passive/Avoidant

Definition: The avoidant/passive style, sometimes called the “doormat” approach to conflict, is when we simply avoid dealing with the conflict.

We do not try to give the other person what they want and we do not try very much to get what we want either. Habitually using the avoidant/passive style a lot can mean a life that is unnecessarily hard.

Pros: Simply put, avoiding conflict generally shows that we do not care very much about a relationship, unless used as a temporary approach when it can buy us some time to think about what we want to say or do, or to give ourselves time to calm down. Sometimes a conflict just is not important enough for us to do much about it such as if someone has thrown away a newspaper we had not finished reading. We might avoid conflict if we think it will just make things worse to engage in it, such as if someone takes a parking space we wanted and we have to be at work very soon. In a situation of danger it may serve us better to avoid a conflict rather than trying to talk to the other party, such as encountering an angry drunk on a public sidewalk, or being mugged at gunpoint.

Cons: In closer relationships avoidance can cause problems, especially over time. Unless used as a temporary measure (as described in “pros” above) it can give another person the impression that you do not care enough about your relationship to talk about things and work them out. Also, instead of a problem “going away,” which is often what we hope for when avoiding, the problem will actually keep coming back, and maybe gets worse. Over time this can cause people to feel more and more resentful and feel less close to the other person, or cause them to “blow up” now and then. Avoidance can cause us to miss

PASSIVE-AVOIDANT

We simply avoid dealing with the conflict altogether. We show low concern for the other person and low concern for ourselves as well. We do not make any effort either way. This approach leaves the real problem unsolved and so the issue will very likely continue to again.

opportunities to find ways to do things that really work for everyone. It can also lead to habitual avoiders to feeling badly about themselves, as if they do not have any power in their lives.

Accommodation

Definition: Accommodation means that we go along with what the other person wants us to do even if it is not something we want to do.

Pros: The best reason for accommodating other people is when we realize that they are right! For instance, this could happen when we suddenly realize we had our directions mixed up when driving somewhere, or we realize we really do not have time to stop off at the grocery store before the movie. Another good reason to accommodate is if giving the other person what she wants is not going to cost us much. Or if going along with us might make big difference to her, such as if we are sharing an ice cream sundae and we like to have nuts but she has allergic to them. Accommodation might also be good if we are especially concerned about the others feelings such as if she has had a very bad day -- just as long as every day is not a bad day! We might consider accommodation a good idea when someone else has a lot of power over us, such as with a boss, or with the police. Telling the boss or a police officer how we feel about a certain task or the speeding ticket may not serve our desire to keep our job or end up with a relatively low fine for speeding!

Cons: By accommodating too often we can sacrifice our own needs and suffer many of the same consequences as with avoidance: damage to the relationship, bad feelings about ourselves, brewing resentment, flashes of anger and missed opportunities for solutions. Others can lose respect for us if we always accommodate them and make them think we are weak. Others may feel they cannot rely on us in ways we want them

ACCOMMODATION

We go along with what the other person wants us to do at the expense of what works better for us. This shows a high concern for the other, and low concern for ourselves. This approach leaves the basic problem unsolved so the issue is likely to come up again.

to, such as a boss giving us a challenging job, or a friend who needs help figuring out how to build a porch. By being too quick to agree with others we cut short a process that might generate creative solutions for everyone. Imagine you are driving with a friend along a highway and your car stops running. Your friend says, “Oh, I bet it is the alternator” and if you just agree with them instead of suggesting they check the battery connection, you may call for a tow truck instead of cleaning the battery posts. Leaping to someone else’s conclusion can mean leaping to an incorrect or inferior conclusion.

Compromise

Definition: Compromise basically means splitting the difference between what you want and what I want. It means that each of us gets some of what we want but not all of what we want. If we have one orange and we both want an orange then we will compromise by cutting the orange in half. If you want to take a walk that is one mile long and I want to walk two miles then we will walk one and half miles.

Pros: Usually people are willing to go along with a compromise because it seems fair to most people. Compromise allows us to move forward with whatever we are trying to do with another, without having to take the time to figure a solution to completely satisfy everyone. It shows us that each person is of equal value and has equal power in a situation. Compromise offers a good alternative when a decision must be made and no other solution will make everybody perfectly happy.

Cons: People are not as likely to follow through with agreements when they have to give up something that matters to them. We just do not work as hard on a plan that we do not feel 100%

COMPROMISE

This is when we split the difference between what we want and what the other person wants. This shows a fairly high concern for ourselves, and a fairly high concern for others. We get some of what we want, but not all, and the other person gets some of what they want, but not all. A compromise solution stands a pretty good chance of generating a lasting solution but not as much as a collaborative/assertive solution.

good about. There also may be some lingering resentment over what one has given up.

Collaboration/Problem solving/Assertive

Definition: Collaboration happens when people work together to solve their problems in a way that will satisfy everyone as much as possible. When we collaborate, we are not just trying to meet our needs or the others' needs but we are both trying to meet everyone's needs. In a collaborative process everyone can feel that their ideas and feelings are valued and respected in a practical way. Collaboration involves looking past the surface of problems to find solutions that address deeper causes, and are not just superficial fixes. When we collaborate we have to try to understand the problem from the others' perspective. This understanding leads to greater trust and greater strength of the relationship as a whole.

Pros: Collaboration shows that we care about ourselves and others. Collaboration creates a feeling that we are all in this together, that no one will be left to rely only upon themselves. If we agree to collaborate on making dinners at our house, then no one person has to feel like they have to take on the whole thing: shopping, preparation and clean up. With collaboration everyone works, everyone eats and no one feels like it all depends on them alone. Collaboration prevents the use of approaches that may not work as well or that damage relationships. When people make decisions through collaboration they are much more likely to follow through on their agreements because they helped form them and have had the opportunity to speak up about doubts before the agreement was finalized. Collaboration shows us that good results can come from facing conflict head on

COLLABORATIVE- ASSERTIVE

We work together to solve our disagreement and meet our needs while also trying to solve the other person's problem and meet their needs, in a way that satisfies both parties as much as possible. This shows a high concern for ourselves, and a high concern for others.

While this style requires more effort, and often more time, it is the most likely way to generate a solution that solves the problem for good.

but with a respectful attitude towards others. Because we have to understand another's perspective when collaborating it naturally leads to stronger, more trusting relationships. Because we have to stretch our thinking to understand others in collaborative problem solving, we also end up understanding ourselves better.

Cons: Collaboration takes more time than the other styles so it does not work as well when quick decisions have to be made. Collaboration can give unfair advantage to people who are better at arguing for their ideas or simply feel more comfortable speaking up. Some people can use collaborative language to give an impression of caring about others but still really only focus on their own needs and desires.

GET REAL

Notice your conflict style in different situations, with different people. Do you use just one style, or does it change depending on who you are dealing with, or the kind of conflict?

My Reaction to Disagreement and Conflict Worksheet

Following are several statements about personal reactions to disagreement and conflict. Circle the number that best describes you. The higher the number, the more you agree with the statement. When you finish, total the numbers you circled and write it in the space provided.

	Strong agreement					Mild agreement				
1. It doesn't bother me to question a price or seek a more favorable exchange than offered.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
2. I have nothing to lose in seeking a better deal if I do it in a reasonable way.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
3. Conflict is a fact of life and I work hard to resolve it.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
4. Conflict is positive because it makes me examine my ideas carefully.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
5. In resolving conflict, I try to consider the needs of the other person.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
6. Conflict often produces better solutions to problems.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
7. Conflict stimulates my thinking and sharpens my judgment.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
8. Working with conflict has taught me that compromise is not a sign of weakness.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
9. Satisfactorily resolved, conflict often strengthens a relationship.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
10. Conflict is a way to test one's own point of view.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

If you scored 80 or above you have a realistic attitude toward conflict, and seem willing to work to resolve it. If you scored between 50 and 79 you appear to be dealing fairly well with conflict, but need to work toward a more positive approach. If your score was below 50, you need to first understand why, and then work hard to learn techniques of conflict resolution. By the time you finish this course, you may wish to complete this exercise again.

Chapter 3

Who We Are to Each Other

According to Conflict Resolution educator Kathy Hale, relationship is formed by:

1. What I think of myself
2. What you think about me
3. What I think you think about me
4. What you think of yourself
5. What I think about you
6. What you think I think about you

Our relationships with others are not solid and unchanging like ice cubes in our freezer. They are dynamic and fluid like the water flowing in a river. Because our feelings about ourselves are affected by many factors, such as the car not starting in the morning, a compliment by the boss, or receiving a utility cut-off notice, that means our experience in a given relationship can change accordingly. Our perception of another can change for many reasons too. Maybe she has missed an appointment, someone else has spoken highly of her, or we have heard her speak harshly to a child. When we get into what we think someone else thinks of us, or what he thinks we think of him, then things get really complicated! In other words, all relationships, even relatively stable ones, are inclined towards constant change. The bad news is that we cannot count on our relationships to stay exactly the same. The good news is that most of our relationships can change for the better.

The Paradox

We all know what we are supposed to do what we are in conflict with another:

- Listen, try to understand
- Show the other person respect
- Be a collaborative problem-solver, not too passive or too aggressive

Simple, yes. Easy? Not so much.

These simple steps are especially hard to follow with people we are closest to. Why is it easier to use positive conflict resolution skills with casual friends or co-workers? Is not that backwards? Why is it sometimes so hard to listen, understand, show respect, and focus on finding constructive solutions with the people who are most important to us?

The paradox of using positive conflict skills is that the more we are invested in, and care about, a relationship, the easier it is for us to be triggered emotionally, and the harder it can be to do the things we need to solve a conflict together.

Have you ever been a passenger in a car with someone who is driving unsafely? How alarmed do you feel? What can you do about it? What about if you observe the same driving behavior in a stranger in another car along an Interstate highway? If you are observing a dangerous driver on the road while driving your own car, you can slow down, speed up or even exit the highway in order to keep safe from the other's dangerous driving. If you are a passenger you are in a lot more danger, and you feel it. You have a much greater need to affect the driver's behavior. There is more at stake. Our closest relationships often feel like we are in a car with someone else driving. And the people closest to us feel that way too, about us.

Three major factors contribute to the higher emotional stakes in close relationships:

- **Interdependence:** The closer we are to another, the more we are dependent upon them, practically and emotionally.
- **Trust:** Because we are dependent upon them, the more we need to trust that they will act in our best interest, consistently do what they say they

will do, and not do things they say they will not do. Trust broken threatens the foundation of our relationship.

- **Power:** We are more vulnerable, more easily harmed, by someone who has control over material resources we need to survive, especially that which we cannot provide for ourselves. We are also more vulnerable emotionally to those we depend on for care, comfort and love.

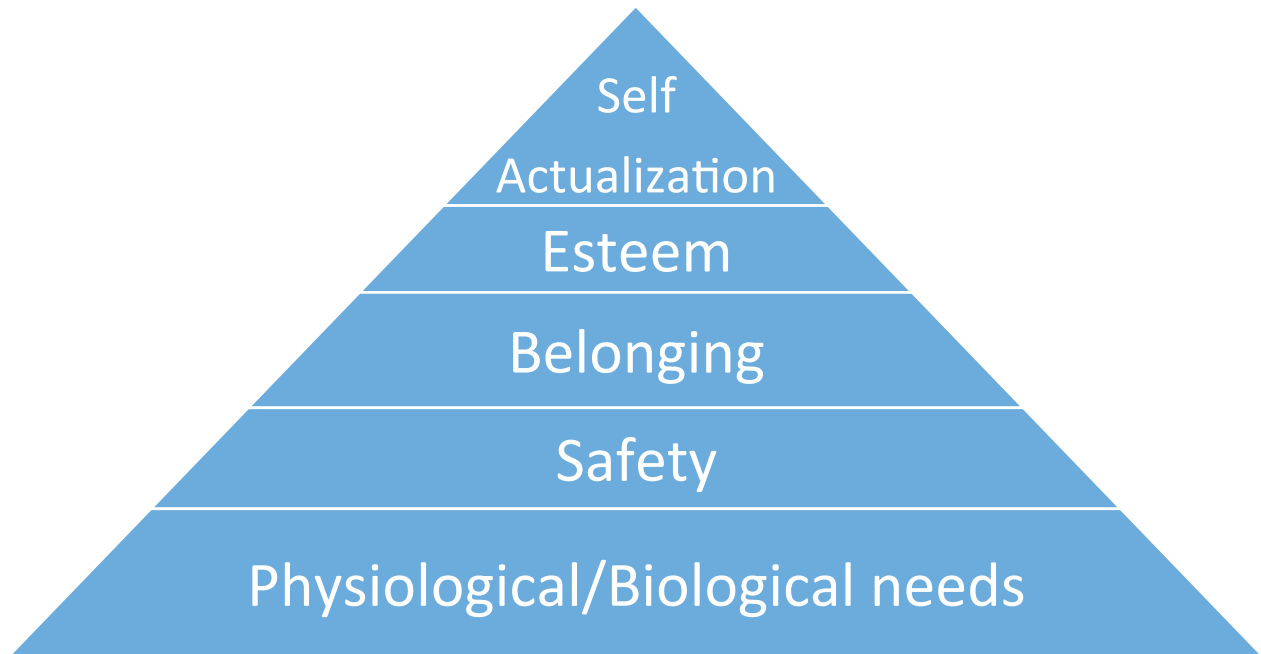
Most close relationships include mutual, often reciprocal, needs. I'll pay the bills and you maintain the house. I'll support you through school with the understanding that you'll support me through school after you graduate. I'll be faithful to you and you also will be faithful to me. I'll put up with your critical mother, if you put up with my cat. Much of this is unconscious and simply understood, not stated explicitly. Break one of these agreements and things can get very emotional very fast.

So when someone betrays our trust or misuses the power they have over us, this threatens our overall wellbeing and maybe even our survival. Our amygdala (located at the base of our brain) activate and we move into fight, flight or freeze mode. We move into a highly reactive mode and have difficulty thinking rationally about the very sensible things we could do to solve the problem. So what then? How do we move from this reactive state to a place where we can listen, show respect for the other, advocate for our needs and engage effective problem-solving?

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

A social scientist named Abraham Maslow developed a way to think about what makes people behave the way they do based on an idea that we all have needs in life. They start with basic survival necessities such as the need for food, water, shelter etc., and move through the needs for safety, connections to others and into greater self-expression. If we do not have our more basic needs met then we are not concerned with "higher" level needs such as those for self-expression or even love. So only as we get the "lower" level needs met can the other needs have much meaning for us. If I do not have a place to sleep I'm probably not going to talk a lot about the painting lessons I'd like to take.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



The illustration above shows these needs ranked in a pyramid. The ones lower down, at the base, are the crucial needs. If we do not have food to eat, water to drink or a place to sleep, we can only focus on trying to meet those needs, even if it sacrifices the next step up the hierarchy, safety. If we do have our physiological needs met, but we are in a situation that is dangerous, whether living with a violent person, or in a hazardous environment, then we will generally put our attention on gaining a greater sense of safety, but we will not be particularly concerned with whether or not our next door neighbor is not very friendly. Next comes belonging, the need to feel that we “belong” to others, family, friends, a profession, a religion, or even a gang. In fact, belonging is so important to us that we will sometimes do things that are bad for us, or against our values, in order to have it. This is especially true for teenagers, who are in the process of separating from their family to become fully fledged adults. Once we have our need to belong met, we tend to strive to excel in some way. Esteem needs may be met in many ways, through school, a profession, some value we hold ourselves to, or other knowledge, skill or ability that we feel proud of, and for which others give us positive recognition. Self-actualization is a state that

many never reach, the need to fulfill one's full potential as a person, regardless of other's view of this.

These needs are not entirely separate, and are often interrelated, but where we are in achieving these relative needs has a strong impact on conflict.

Let us look again at our definition of conflict: "Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive *incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals.*"

If you come home hungry and tired and I want you to help me paint the back porch so the neighbors do not think we are slobs, do you think we might have a conflict about that? Do we have some "incompatible goals"? Only if I insist that you paint the porch *before* you eat. Otherwise it might work out fine.

When we find ourselves in conflict it can be very helpful to find out what needs the other person is trying to meet, and identify our own needs as well. If I understand the hierarchy of needs, then I'll understand that your need to eat really is more important than my need to paint the porch. Of course many conflicts are not going to have such an obvious solution, especially if both parties have equally important needs, but at least if we understand the underlying needs, we can start on a constructive path towards a solution.

The Stories We Tell

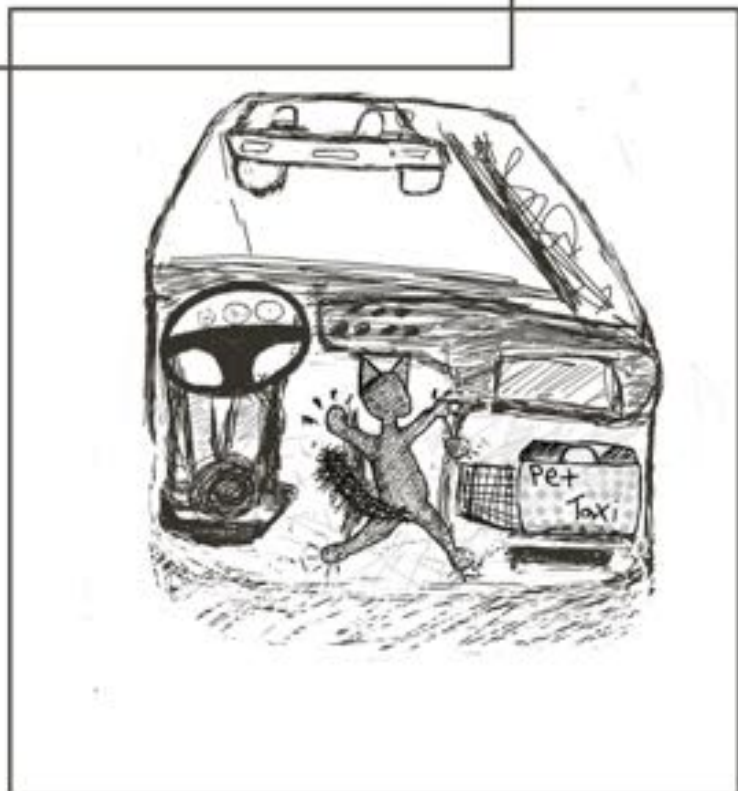
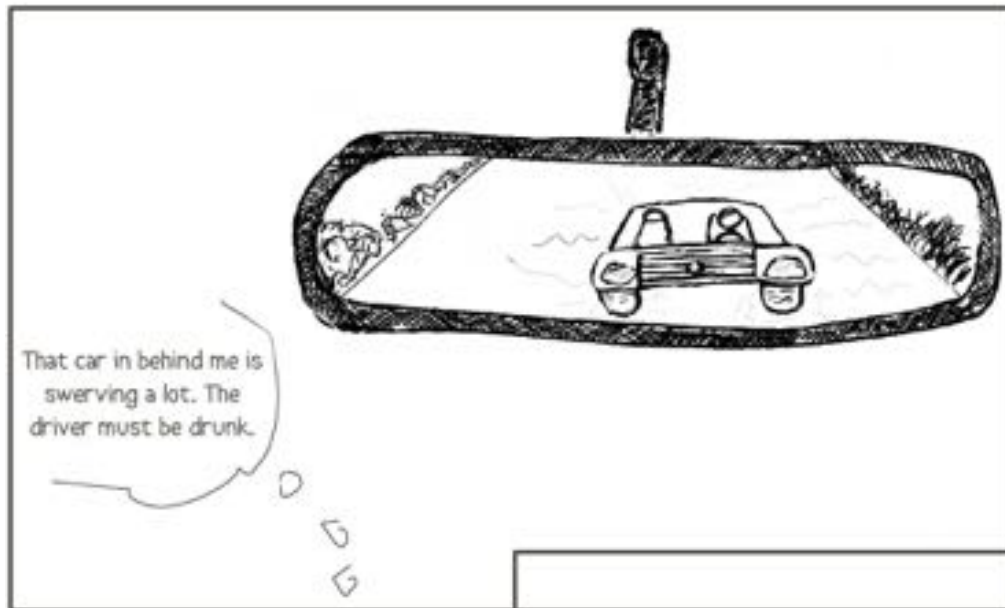
Is it our thumbs? Our tools? Our capacity for abstract thought? Compelling arguments have been made for each of these as to what makes humans different from other animals. Nevertheless, my favorite theory is that it is our storytelling that sets us apart.

As far back as we are able to determine, humans have made up, told, and listened to, stories. First they were told orally around the campfire, then the hearth. Once we developed writing we also wrote down, read from, and listened to, stories in that form. What culture does not have bedtime stories, told since earliest childhood? Today we have radio, television, movies in theaters, and we can find any story imaginable on the internet. It is not just made up stories either. Our news shows, documentaries, and interviews capture our attention as well. In the latest convolution, reality shows fictionalize real life. And we gobble it all up, ever hungry for more.

Humans are storytellers and always have been. Our survival depends on our being good at it.

Back in the days before settled villages, cities and states, our nomadic ancestors relied on the ability to tell a story about the past, based on clues in the present, in order to predict the future. The best storytellers, the ones whose stories intersected most accurately with objective reality, were simply the ones most likely to eat and not be eaten, to find shelter and not freeze in a winter storm. Deer scat, wolf tracks, the season and our current location, all provided clues that helped us to locate food, avoid danger, and to find shelter. The best storytellers lived to procreate. We are hardwired to tell stories.

What does it look like today?



"I think my boss is mad at me. What if he fires me?" (Her boss seemed more serious with her than usual that day.)

1. "That car in front of me is swerving a lot. The driver must be drunk. I'll just pull over, and go a different way..."

2. “Who is that girl talking to my boyfriend? She better not be hitting on him...” She who tells the best, most accurate, story is most likely to make choices that improve, or at least keep stable, her own conditions. We calculate relational and other trajectories all day long.

But what if we get it wrong? There is not a person alive who hasn’t gotten it wrong and made bad choices because of it. We have all had the experience of finding out that someone else has gotten it wrong about us too. We all base our stories on information available to us at the time, but the story we form can change dramatically based on additional information.

Attribution Error, Part 1

Attribution is when we see how someone is behaving and make up a story in our heads about why that person is behaving that way. For instance, if someone is late to pick you up for a movie, you might decide that person does not care about your feelings. Or you might think that he has had a car accident. Either could be true, but unless you are inside him you cannot be sure. Maybe you know that he drives carelessly because you have seen him drive. Maybe he has told you he does not care about your feelings. But short of that kind of clear confirmation ahead of time, you really cannot know for sure until he shows up. Or, maybe someone you work with seems a little quieter than usual. You could think she is angry at you. You could be worried that maybe she has sick, or that something bad has happened in her family. You won’t really know for sure unless you ask her. We make up stories like this in our heads about why someone is behaving the way they are, all the time. This is normal.

The problems come in when we are wrong, which unfortunately is most of the time. Why are we wrong most of the time? Because the guesses we make about others’ actions come mostly from what is happening inside of *us*. If we feel guilty about something we did to that person, or hurt because we expected something we did not get from the other. Or because we were chewed out by our boss earlier in the day, and we are more sensitive to the possibility that someone else does not respect us.

This, combined with things we know about the other person – maybe a little, maybe a lot – adds up in our minds and gives us an answer that makes sense according to a combination of what we know and what we are guessing. The problem is that we do not know what else is true for that person, and where we might be completely wrong. Not matter how many times that someone has been late because he does not plan his time realistically, you cannot actually know for sure that is what is happening this time.

How does that affect a conflict?

Most of us behave very differently towards someone if we think he does not care about us than if we think he has narrowly escaped death. Most of us will treat a coworker differently if we think she is mad at us, then if we think she may be fatally ill.

The bottom line?

The stories we form affect the way we feel about a person, and the way we feel affects how we treat that person. So let us get more information from that person, or we may *cause* a problem by *acting* like there is a problem.

GET REAL

Notice the stories that you and others make up as you go about your day. Imagine what information might generate a different story.

Attribution exercise

Write about a time when you've had strong feelings, positive or negative, because you made attributions about another's behavior that turned out not to be true. How did you feel about this once you found out what really happened? What happened as a result of this misunderstanding?

Write about a time when someone else has reacted strongly, either positively or negatively, to you because they made attributions about your behavior that weren't true. How did this feel to you? What happened as a result of this misunderstanding?

Closely related to the idea of attribution is the notion of judgment, feeling judged by another.

What does it mean to be judgmental and nonjudgmental?

2 definitions of judgment

“Judgment” #1: The New Oxford American Dictionary tells us that being judgmental means: “having or displaying an excessively critical point of view.”

Usually when someone talks about feeling “judged” or says that someone else is “judgmental” this is what they are referring to. To judge someone this way means that we are deciding that they are good or bad in some basic way, as if we were God looking down from above and deciding if that person should be sent to heaven or hell. So what is the problem with this? Simply put, it is impossible to have an open, mutually respectful, and therefore constructive, communication with another if either person feels judged, or if the other is coming to the communication with the attitude that he is in a position to sit in judgment of the other.

However, many people who understand this problem confuse this with the kind of judgement we need to make healthy decisions about our relationship to other people in our lives. Is it judgmental if we see that someone consistently fails to show up as planned and we decide we would rather find other friends than have the constant frustration of no-shows? Is it judgmental to stop dating someone who criticizes us a lot? Is it judgmental to tell a teenage son that we do

JUDGMENT

“Judgment” #1: The New Oxford American Dictionary tells us that being judgmental means: “having or displaying an excessively critical point of view.”

“Judgment” #2: Judgment as assessment: The New Oxford American Dictionary also tells us that “judgment” can also mean: “the ability to make considered decisions or come to sensible conclusions.”

not approve of his drinking? In each of these examples we are demonstrating a judgmental attitude only if we decide we are acting as if we are morally superior to the other.

“Judgment” #2: Judgment as assessment: The New Oxford American Dictionary also tells us that “judgment” can mean: “the ability to make considered decisions or come to sensible conclusions.”

Using sound judgment is a necessary life skill: assessing a situation and making decisions that are good for us and those we care for. If we are carefully considering a situation and making decisions based on that consideration, then we are not being morally judgmental. This kind of judgment means that we have evaluated a situation and reached a decision regarding it. We use this kind of judgment every day and we must use this judgment in order to make good choices in our lives.

Trust

What is trust?

Reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing; confidence. (www.dictionary.com)

According to Conflict Resolution authors Roy Lewicki and Carolyn Wiethoff (2000) trust is dependent upon three main factors:

- a person’s general tendency to trust others
- the situation itself
- the people’s history with each other

So whether we trust or distrust a particular person might be a combination of our own willingness to trust others to begin with, whether we are handing that person a grocery list or our lives, and what we have

TRUST

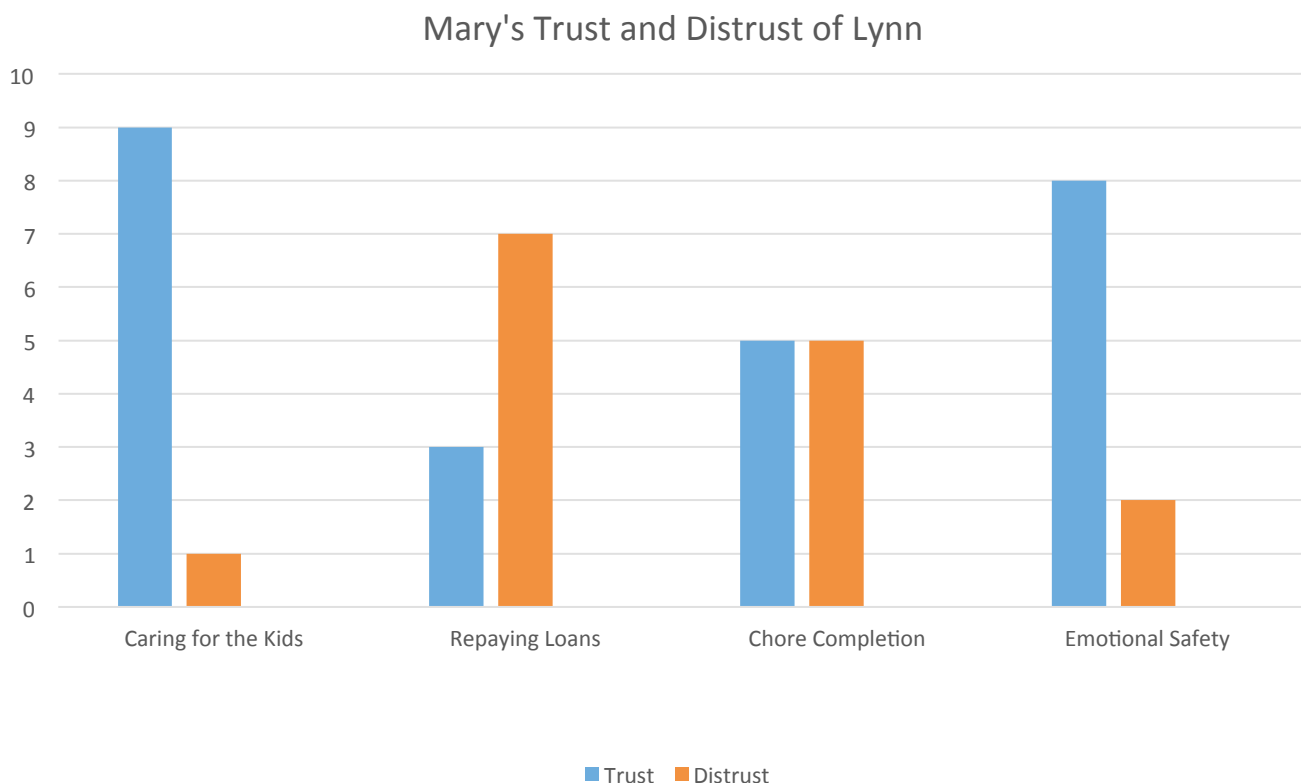
Reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing; confidence.
(www.dictionary.com)

experienced with that person in the past. Also, trust is not a black and white thing, where we either trust someone completely in all situations or we distrust them under all circumstances. In fact, every relationship is made up of a combination of trust and distrust. Think of someone you know well, and have for a long time. Would you trust that person to repay a loan? Would you trust them to child- or pet-sit for a week? Do you trust that they will always be on time? To behave calmly in an emergency? To keep a secret? Chances are that you answered “no” to at least one of these questions, even if that person is someone you love dearly and want in your life.

Trust and Distrust

Trust and distrust do not happen on one continuum, but rather we can trust one person very much for some things and very little for others. Our overall trust and distrust of another results from a combination of the varying degrees of trust and distrust we experience over numerous dimensions of our relationship.

Mary and Lynn are very good friends, and roommates. Mary has children and often Lynn babysits when Mary has to work late. They both have chores they have agreed upon. Once in a while Mary and Lynn borrow money from each other. Below shows levels of trust and distrust that Mary has for Lynn, after living together for a year:



If we do not trust someone to do what they say they will do, to take our well-being into account in their behavior, or to follow rules or laws that affect us, then we either have to find another way to get things done or feel uneasy while we risk them causing us problems. If we do not know if someone is going to give us a ride to work even though she said she would, then we might find ourselves fearing we will lose our job if she does not show. If we get a ride but do not trust that person to follow the traffic laws, or otherwise be concerned for our safety, then we will experience anxiety until we get safely to work.

Simply put, we gain trust in others when they behave in a trustworthy manner. The same goes for us. We need to be reliable and truthful, not only about facts but about our ability or strength in a given situation. Being trustworthy also means that we give people a reason to accept the truth of what we say without evidence or investigation.

How do trust and distrust affect our relationships?

Remember how we talked about all the ways we have to cooperate in the many things we do every day? If we do not trust someone to do what they say, to take our well-being into account in their behavior or to follow rules or laws that affect us, then we either have to find another way to get things done or feel uneasy while we risk someone else's behavior causing us problems. If we do not know if someone is going to give us a

REGAINING TRUST

Lewicki and Weithoff (2000) identify concrete steps we can take to repair trust:

- We talk openly about our untrustworthy behavior with those whose trust we have betrayed
- We must apologize and explain our behavior as best as possible
- We must tell the other exactly how we intend to behave in the future and commit to those changes
- We must agree to have our behavior checked somehow so that the other person can be sure that we are doing what we say we will
- We support the other in finding ways to decrease their need to depend on us, which decreases the risk to them if we do not follow through on our agreement to them

ride to work even though she said she would, then we find ourselves thinking about what will happen if she does not show. If we accept a ride but do not trust that person to either follow the traffic laws, or otherwise be concerned for our safety, then we will be in a state of anxiety until we get safely to work. That is a bad way to start a day and we are not likely to do that if we can get a ride from someone who we trust to drive us safely. This all goes for us too, of course. If we are unreliable, and do not consider how our behavior will affect others, then they are not as likely to want to be around us.

Should we try to be more trusting or more distrustful? Which is better?

Trust and distrust are neither inherently good nor bad. The important thing is to notice *why* we are trusting or distrusting someone. We may have good reason to trust someone in a particular situation. Or we may not. We may have good reason to distrust someone in a particular situation. Or we may not. Our distrust can protect us from getting into situations we may regret later. Our trust can enable us to work with others to achieve our goals, large and small.

Trust: How to gain it, how to lose it and how to get it back.

Simply put, we gain trust in others when they behave in a trustworthy manner. Going back to our definition of trust - "...firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something" and "acceptance of the truth of a statement without evidence or investigation," then it is pretty easy to see what we need to do to gain another's trust. We need to be reliable and truthful, not only about facts but about our ability or strength in a given situation. Being trustworthy also means that we give people a reason to accept the truth of what we say without evidence or investigation.

We lose trust and gain the distrust of others when we fail to do these things. Since everyone fails sometimes, for a variety of reasons, we have all had the experience of losing someone's trust. Setting aside the obvious reason of deliberate deceit, we may also lose or shake someone's trust in us through miscommunications or unforeseen circumstances. In a relationship with someone

we do not know well we can have different understandings of a communication. For instance, if someone says, "Would you like to have lunch together today?" and the other person says, "That sounds great" the first person might think it is a sure thing. The second person might think that lunch together is just in the idea stage, and that confirmation will come later, depending on how the morning progresses. If the first person comes to get the second person for lunch later and finds the second person says, "Oh I think I'll pass. I'm in the thick of things here and will just make do with some snacks instead of going to lunch. You go ahead without me," the first person could develop distrust.

In the case of unforeseen circumstances most of us understand that things just happen sometimes. A tire goes flat, an unexpected emergency arises, or we simply misjudge the length of time an errand will take. And everyone just plain forgets now and then. Still, if in ongoing relationships you find that people do not trust you to do what you say you are going to do and you are using the "miscommunication" or "unforeseen circumstances" reason a lot with people, you might want to look at exactly how unavoidable these things usually are.

So what do we do when we have lost someone's trust, whatever the reason? The bad news is that once trust has been weakened or broken it generally will not return exactly to its original state no matter what. It is a lot like a broken bone or a torn ligament: we can do much to heal and reverse the damage, but no matter what we do people tend to remember that you are *capable* of betraying their trust in that particular way. Obviously this is more of an issue in cases where financial dealings, marital infidelity or violence are concerned, than being on time or forgetting something at the grocery store.

The good news is that, also like a broken bone, things can be patched up nearly as good as new if we do everything just right. To know what "just right" is we again return to our original definition: "...firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something" and "acceptance of the truth of a statement without evidence or investigation." In order to regain trust we have to do the same things that lead to developing trust to begin with and we must do

them very, very consistently for a long time. Ideally we need to do these with no slip ups since every time we fail to be perfectly consistent in our trust-regaining behavior, we further erode the trust we are trying to repair. Lewicki and Weithoff (2000) identify concrete steps we can take to repair trust:

- We talk openly about our untrustworthy behavior with those whose trust we have betrayed
- We must apologize and explain our behavior as best as possible
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- We support the other in finding ways to decrease their need to depend on us, which decreases the risk to them if we do not follow through on our agreement to them

How hard should we work to regain our trust in another once they have significantly betrayed it? There is a common saying about trust that contains a lot of practical wisdom: “Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.” In other words, once we have seen that someone will not consistently behave in a trustworthy manner then it is our responsibility to find ways to protect ourselves from being vulnerable to them.

Of course there are situations where we cannot easily separate ourselves from our dependency on others such as in a marriage or at work, if we do not want to leave either altogether. Still, there are usually some steps we can take to protect

GET REAL

List two people you are very close to. Under each person's name write the reasons they have to trust you. Then write all the reasons they may have to distrust you. Can you be trusted to repay favors or money? Can others trust you to take their safety into account? Do you do *what* you say you are going to do *when* you say you are going to do it? Do you keep other's private information private? Are you calm and steady in a crisis? How has your trustworthiness positively affected your relationships, and your life? How has any untrustworthiness impacted your life?

ourselves that can make a big difference. We may insist that the money borrower give us some kind of collateral, we can have a plan in place just in case we need to separate from our spouse, and we can look at other job options or get additional work-related training. For smaller trust violations we can find alternative solutions too. We can find a ride to work with someone else, use public transportation or ride a bike. We can pay a friend to help us take a load to the dump instead of relying on a spouse or teenager. We can buy tickets to the next game ourselves.

If we also want to give the other “another chance” because there is a lot we value about the relationship, or the job, taking the above steps can give us a little breathing room while the other does his or her part to re-build trust with us. Either way, re-building trust takes a great deal of good old-fashioned time. Time is a central, unavoidable ingredient to trust repair because it is the consistency of the trustworthy behavior that repairs the trust, not isolated incidences of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4

It's an Emotional Thing

Thoughts are ideas, decisions and opinions. Thoughts can be about how things get done, how something works, why someone is doing something, memories, what is likely to happen in a certain situation, and notions about ourselves. Our thoughts can turn out to be right, as when we predict that something will happen, or we can be wrong, such as when we think we know why our car won't start, but it turns out to be something else. Thinking is good. It has many valuable uses. Thinking helps us to figure out what to cook for breakfast, where to look for work, and how to raise our children. Thinking helps us to design cars, to decide what to grow in our gardens, and to figure out how to replace a faucet. Anyone who gives thinking a bad rap just hasn't, well, *thought* about it enough!

Emotions, on the other hand, happen entirely inside of us, like lung congestion, a toothache, or the relaxation of our muscles during a massage. No one else except us is in a better position than us to say what is happening with us emotionally. That does not mean that we always know, or that someone else might not guess what is happening with us emotionally, but that we have the best access to, and therefore the final say on, our own feelings.

EMOTIONS

Fear: Shy, uneasy, tense, anxious, nervous, worried, concerned, timid, apprehensive, uptight, alarmed, scared, afraid, frightened, panicky, terrified, horrified, petrified.

Glad: Relieved, pleased, amused, playful, cheerful, optimistic, giddy, calm, relaxed, comfortable, confident, secure, happy, proud, excited, overjoyed, radiant, exhilarated, blissful.

Mad: Annoyed, bugged, irritated, hassled, resentful, mean, disgusted, ticked-off, angry, fed up, fuming, furious, incensed, infuriated, hateful, explosive, rage.

Sad: Bored, resigned, apathetic, numb, blah, blue, gloomy, unhappy drained, disappointed, bewildered, disheartened, hurt, regretful, ashamed, down, hopeless, miserable, crushed, helpless, humiliated, depressed, withdrawn, worthless.

We cannot make our feelings go away just by deciding that we “shouldn’t” be having them, or that they “won’t help anything.” We can have emotions of every kind without understanding exactly why we are having them. No one else can say for us what is happening. We also cannot say for someone else what they are experiencing emotionally with any surety, since it is either happening or not happening inside of *them*, not us. Only we can know if we really do not like squash, or if we are just being difficult. Only we know if we want a second date with a certain someone, or if we are just afraid of falling in love. Only we know, if anyone does at all, how we feel about our parents, or our children.

So, if you have the thought about someone you know, “I think you do not care about what happens to me,” you might be right that the person does not care, or you might be wrong. So that statement is not a good way to start out a conversation about your relationship. From that statement, the other person could just become defensive or frustrated, and begin telling you why you are wrong. If that happens, the problem of how you are feeling in the relationship is not being addressed, and may get worse. However, if you say, “I feel hurt that you won’t help me,” there is no way to argue about whether or not you feel hurt. It is your feeling so you get to decide. Now that does not mean the problem is solved. Maybe the reason the person is not helping you, say, rob a bank, is because he or she *does* care about you! But by saying how you feel, and stating way, the other person can zero in on what the problem is for you, and speak to that, rather than wasting time and energy defending themselves against the accusation that they do not care about you.

Emotions List

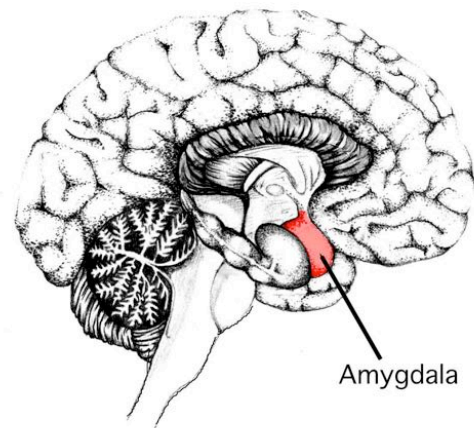
The main emotions we experience are fear, glad, mad and sad. All other emotions are essentially versions of these. However, learning to name emotions more clearly can help us hone in on the problem, if there is one, and find a solution that fits the situation best. It can help us to understand each other better too. This is only a partial list of the many emotions we can experience.

Fear: Shy, uneasy, tense, anxious, nervous, worried, concerned, timid, apprehensive, uptight, alarmed, scared, afraid, frightened, panicky, terrified, horrified, petrified.

Glad: Relieved, pleased, amused, playful, cheerful, optimistic, giddy, calm, relaxed, comfortable, confident, secure, happy, proud, excited, overjoyed, radiant, exhilarated, blissful.

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Managing Strong Emotions

Amygdala: Friend or Foe?

Amig, -what? The amygdala are two almond-shaped structures in the middle of the brain that help us react immediately to danger, even before we know what we are reacting to. It is like a natural alarm system. This helps us to jump out of the way of a car suddenly coming around a corner as we are crossing a street, or to know that someone is about to hit us even before we see their hand coming. That is what make our amygdala our friends. The amygdala do a great job of getting us out of sticky situations fast, but it is not so great at attending to the finer details in a conflict situation that is *not* life threatening. The problem with the amygdala is that it is such a quick judge that it sometimes makes us think something is happening that is not. This is not a problem if you jump at a firecracker you thought was a gunshot, but it might be a problem if an

angry tone of voice suddenly makes you so afraid that you hit the angry person, or end a conversation that might help solve the problem at hand. So what do we do about that?

First, we need to learn to recognize when we are becoming reactive. Our muscles tense, breathing quickens and we feel very threatened by the other person, though not necessarily physically. It helps to know we have amygdala because it reminds us that we can feel very sure that we are in some kind of danger without being in danger at all, either physically or emotionally. Later on we often realize that we “overreacted,” after the rest of brain has had a chance to engage again. By knowing about the amygdala, we can remember to take an extra few moments to calm down, and think about what is happening before we react.

For immediate relief, the easiest, fastest, most effective way to calm your amygdala is to take a full, deep breath through your nose. Better yet, take three deep breaths. When we inhale through the nose the air we take in stimulates certain cells located inside our sinuses that then release nitric oxide, which relaxes our blood vessels, allowing more oxygen into our systems. Try practicing taking a deep breath as you go through your day, during mildly stressful moments. If you get into the habit of doing this when you are mildly stressed, it will be easier to remember to take some deep breaths when you feel highly stressed. Taking these breaths has the effect of creating a little more, well, breathing room, in the situation at hand. The critical thinking portions of your brain have a chance to engage, and you can make clearer, more constructive choices about how to respond to the situation at hand.

GET REAL: 3 MINDFULNESS PRACTICES

1. Sit comfortably and pay attention to your breathing, following the rhythm of the inflow, outflow, and of the turning points between breaths.
2. Shut your eyes and pay attention to the sounds and sensations inside and outside of you without mentally “commenting” on them, just observing.
3. Stand under the shower and really feel the sensation of the water falling over you, from the top of your head to the bottoms of your feet.



Another thing you can do in the midst of an emotional conflict is to call “time out.” Agree to finish the discussion when both of you are calm. Make an agreement with those close to you that you will both respect the request for a time out – with the understanding that the problem will be revisited in a timely manner. For some people “a timely manner” may be in an hour, others may need a day or more to deal with the situation constructively.

A long term strategy towards making you feel calmer over time might include regular mindfulness practice, preferably daily. Even a couple times a week can make a big difference. These practices all share one characteristic: they help us to be more consciously present in the moment, and because of that we can be more deliberate and thoughtful about the choices we make. Some of the many ways to practice mindfulness include:

- Sit comfortably and pay attention to your breathing, following the rhythm of the inflow, outflow, and of the turning points between breaths
- Shut your eyes and pay attention to the sounds and sensations inside and outside of you without mentally “commenting” on them, just observing
- Stand under the shower and really feel the sensation of the water falling over you, from the top of your head to the bottoms of your feet

Practice one or more of these for 10 to 20 minutes a day, at least three times a week and watch your stress level drop, and your relationships improve.

So Now What Do We Do?

Many of us have learned so well to ignore or discount our feelings so well that we may not even know when we are feeling something strongly, let alone what emotion we are feeling or what we should do about it. Emotional awareness and skill develops in the following stages:

1. **Am I Feeling?** All of us are in some emotional state every moment, though not necessarily a particularly strong one. We can begin our emotional skill development by first noticing that we are in some emotional state even if we do not know what emotion we are experiencing.
2. **What Am I Feeling?** The next task is developing skill in identifying what we are feeling. Feelings are not opinions or external observations, but can be stated in one or two words that simply names your own emotion. Making statements about another person is not that same thing as naming your own feeling. For example, the statement, “I feel that woman should have been more respectful to me,” only tell us what the speaker thinks about the woman’s behavior, but not what the speaker feels. The speaker could say instead, “I feel humiliated by how that woman spoke to me.” This way the speaker identifies the emotions she is experiencing (humiliation), and then goes on to identify what triggered that emotion. It is not always easy to identify our emotion in a given moment, and sometimes we are feeling several emotions at once.
3. **Now What?** Once identified, our feelings can help us decide what, if anything we need to do. Our feelings can alert us to a situation we need to address. We may find ourselves feeling angry if someone is putting us down. That lets us know we may need to ask that person to stop. We may be feeling sad about a problem with someone at work, and so we may need to talk to that person or a supervisor. If we are continually frustrated with our teenage child over chores, we may want to figure out how to talk with him constructively rather than find ourselves blowing up all of a sudden. Oftentimes the best thing to do with a feeling is nothing but allow it to exist, and to move out of us on its own. If we are sad because our child has left home for the first time, we can let ourselves be sad until we get used to the change. The main thing is that we are making clear, conscious choices about how we deal with our feelings as much as possible.

Chapter 5

Communication

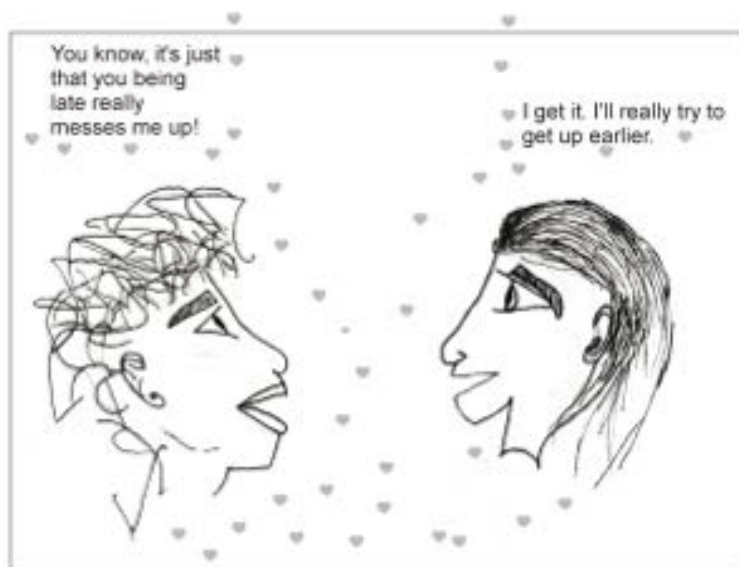
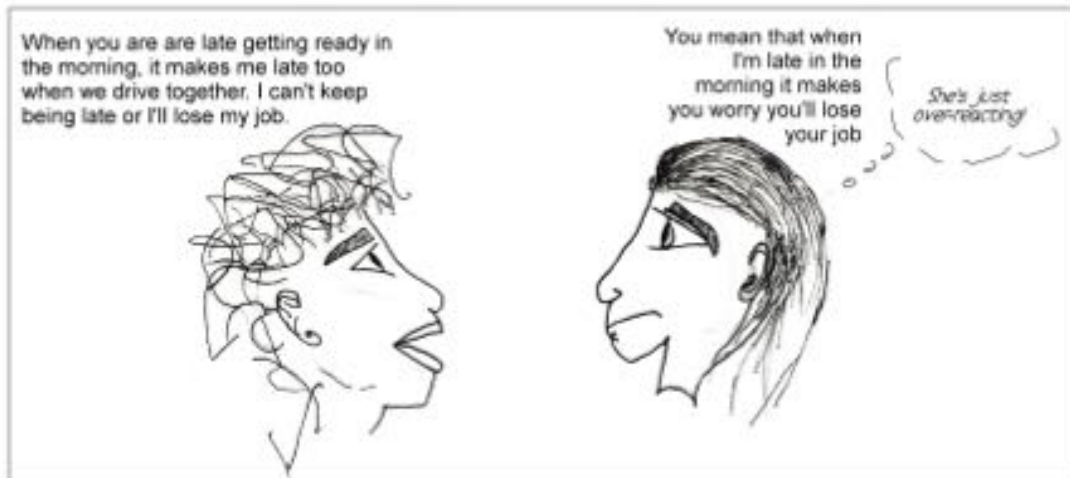
Attitude is number one

We all know the “rules” of good communication, even if we often do not always follow them: speak clearly, make “I” statements, and listen to the other person. These rules make sense but can be hard to remember in the midst of a difficult situation, no matter how hard we are trying. Everyone has found themselves wishing they had said something differently at one time or another. The good news is that the most important factor in communicating effectively, understanding and being understood, is that we are sincere in that desire. Conflict resolution educator Bernard Mayer says this: “If people put their full and focused energy into communicating, they can make lots of mistakes and still be effective. Conversely, no communication technique will substitute for a lack of commitment and a desire to hear or to be understood.” If you do not *really* want to understand someone, how they feel and what they think, it does not matter that you, or they, have spoken in a text-book perfect manner.

Even if we get the words just right, if our facial expression, body language or tone of voice convey contempt defensiveness, or unwillingness to talk, we may be doing more harm than good. There simply is not substitute for genuine caring and the willingness to have the sometimes difficult discussions necessary to work things out. And of course, that goes for the others involved in the conflict too; we cannot do it all ourselves.

MAYER’S BASICS OF COMMUNICATION

- We need to be open to hearing things we do not already know
- It takes a lot of energy to listen well, so we need to give communication our full attention when trying to straighten out a conflict
- Both listener and speaker have to make an effort in order for communication to work well
- Communication while trying to work out a conflict is not the same as trying to convince someone that we are right, or deciding what to do
- Good communication takes patience with others and ourselves
- Communication works best when people are being themselves





In a perfect world communication between two people would be as easy as tossing a softball back and forth, where one person throws something solid and clear, and the other person receives the same solid, clear object. Important communications can often be more like two people trying to throw a clump of wet rags back and forth between two boats sailing on choppy seas. Difficult, messy, and even downright dangerous. Communication is a process of encoding and decoding, and everyone has different ways of doing both. Almost no statement can be taken purely at face value. Understanding some of the variables that can smooth the seas can increase the odds of emerging from a tough conversation with the problem solved and our relationship intact.



Depending on the circumstances and the people involved even a simple statement like, “I like your earrings” could be hold a variety of meanings and could be understood a variety of ways. If an older sister has discovered her younger sister wearing her earrings without permission, that statement would mean one thing. If the compliment comes from a romantic interest, it will have an entirely different effect.

Body language, facial expression, tone of voice, and word emphasis also play a huge part in how someone understands what we say. Most of us have had the experience of finding ourselves hurt or angry about something another has said only to hear the defense, “I just said....” followed by the repetition of the perfectly innocent words - minus the sarcastic tone of voice, eye roll, or derisive laugh!

Snarky comments in sitcoms, by standup comedians and in movies can be really funny. They show people saying things to each other as we might say them in our own heads, and sometimes might say aloud. But in our real life relationships this kind of humor at another’s expense has a cost, and not just to the person on the receiving end.

Even when we say something using perfectly acceptable words, we can sabotage our relationship if our emotional tone shows contempt for the person we are talking to. We can also make it nearly impossible for the other person to

take in our main point if we add a “jab” to that information. How does that happen?

Imagine that each thing we say to someone else is like a sandwich made up of the thing we want him to understand, the filling, surrounded by “bread” of our emotional tone. When we include disrespect in the communication it is as if we are wrapping in poison something important we need the other to “get.” The other senses the poison, and he has to spit it out, refusing to “swallow” it even if he really want to understand us. We all have a powerful protective instinct to reject communication that comes wrapped in sarcasm, derision or insults. If we “take in” or “hear” what the other is saying, then we ingest the emotional poison along with the valid communication. That does not mean we cannot take in a painful truth someone has to offer but it is going to be easier to digest if we do not have to separate the valuable part of the communication from the poison. So, if we really want to be understood we need to learn how to say things, even hard things, without poison. And, if we really want to understand someone else we need to be able to let her know that we want to understand but that we can understand easier if she’ll leave out the poison.

For instance, let us say you and your roommate have an agreement about who does which chores and how often. There is a big difference between saying with an angry huff, “You didn’t take the garbage out to the curb this morning and now we’ll have to have it stinking up the garage for a whole other week!,” and saying, “I noticed you didn’t get the garbage out to the curb in time for the truck to take it. Do we need to re-think which chores each of us does?” Which do you think is more likely to get the other person to try to come on time?



If you are in the habit of including a jab of some kind when speaking to another you might want to ask yourself: which is more important to me, hurting someone I’m mad at? Or being understood by them so the situation can improve?

If we really want the problem solved we need to learn how to say things, even hard things, without poison.

Mayer also tells us to remember a few other basics of communication:

- We need to be open to hearing things we do not already know
- It takes a lot of energy to listen well, so we need to give communication our full attention when trying to straighten out a conflict
- Both listener and speaker have to make an effort in order for communication to work well
- Communication while trying to work out a conflict is not the same as trying to convince someone that we are right, or deciding what to do
- Good communication takes patience with others and ourselves
- Communication works best when people are being themselves

Em Griffin also has some helpful insights into communication:

One cannot not communicate

Any way we behave or speak communicates something, even if, maybe especially when, we are trying not to communicate anything. Most of us have had the experience of deciding not to discuss a problem with someone only to have that person say, "Is there something wrong?"

Content + relationship = communication

The same exact words said in one relationship could have entirely different meaning when said in another relationship. "You look great!" has a different meaning when said by a usually disapproving mother to a daughter, than when one friend is offering the compliment to another friend just before a special date. "You are acting like a real man" has a different meaning when said by a father to a son of whom the father is proud, than when said by a woman who has accused her boyfriend of being overly aggressive. When looking at our communication with others it is never enough to look only at the words.

Affirmation

Our sense of who and what we are – good or bad, smart or stupid, desirable or repulsive, is conveyed to us through others either directly or indirectly. People we know, television, books, movies, all reflect something back to us about ourselves as individuals or about the groups we belong to, and that contributes to our understanding of ourselves through a process called “social conditioning.” We are all like magic mirrors for each other, and like the evil stepmother in the children’s story “Snow White,” sometimes we like what we hear and sometimes we do not. Every one of us has had the experiences of feeling better because of something someone said, or of feeling bad because of something someone said. While, of course, no one is entirely responsible for how another feels about herself, there is not denying that we have some influence over each other.



The big question is: how do we want to use this influence, this power? Do we want to go through life feeling like we helped others to see the better parts in themselves, and therefore helped them to grow those aspects? Or do we want to

get to the end of our lives knowing that when we had the choice, that we reflected back to others only the bad things for them to see?

We can make the world a little better place every day, just by reflecting positively back to others when the opportunity arises.

So how does this apply to conflict situations? Does it mean we should tell people pretty lies so they do not feel bad about themselves? That would not be helpful at all, especially if we really need someone to change their behavior towards us. And, sometimes we need others to tell us how our behavior is affecting them badly or we may not know there is a problem. Honest communication is important in order to improve our relationships. How do we resolve our need for honest, sometimes painful, communication with the desire to have a positive effect on another's self-image? The key is in how we say what we have to say. There is a big difference between saying to someone, "I appreciate that you are trying to help me, but I really want to make my own decision on this" and saying, "Stop telling me what to do – I'm not stupid!" The first version reflects something positive back to the other person, that they are "trying to help" while at the same time letting him know that you do not want that help. The second version certainly lets him know you do not want the advice, but reflects back a negative image of a person who is bossy. It also contains an accusation that he thinks you are stupid, which serves no constructive purpose.

GET REAL

See if you can go a whole day without adding put-downs, (words, tone of voice, facial expression or body language) to any communication. To make it more fun, you can have a contest with friends or family members to see who can go the longest without using these behaviors.

"I" Statements

An "I" statement is an emotionally and factually honest way of talking to someone about something that is bothering you, without being attacking. The fact is that if the other person feels attacked or criticized, she will not be as able to understand what the problem is, even if she wants to. Why? As we discussed

earlier, in the section about the “poison sandwich,” she’ll be too busy protecting herself to think of how to cooperate with your needs.

For example, saying calmly, “I feel frustrated when you show up late. I do not like sitting around waiting for you when I could be doing something else” is probably going to get a very different response than saying angrily, “You do not care about how I feel!”

When making an “I” statement, we stick very close to our own feelings and needs without making moral judgments or assumptions about the other person. The basic format for an “I” statement is: “I feel (*name the emotion* →) frustrated when you (*name the behavior* →) are late because (*name reason* →) I cannot do other things and I would like (*name the behavior change you want* →) you to tell me a realistic time when you will come.” After we have made our “I” statement it is very important that we LISTEN to what the other person has to say. “I” statements are a great way to start a constructive conversation but the other person has a part to play in the discussion too. They may have needs and perspectives that need to be taken into account in order for you both to come up with a solution to the problem.

How to Do It

The most important thing about an “I” statement is that you focus your statements on what you are experiencing and on the concrete action you would like the other to take. When we tell the other person that there is something wrong with them, call them names, or pretend to know why they are doing what they are doing, that is a “you” statement. It is not so important that you follow the formula exactly as shown, but that you stay true to the intention behind it. For example, “Could you please try to be on time from now on? I need to know when you are really coming so I can plan around that,” is a perfectly good “I” statement. On the other hand you could say, “I feel angry when you are late because I sit around waiting for you when I could be doing other things. I’d really like it if you could be on time from now on.” This is a perfectly good “I” statement

when read on this page, but if it is said in a sarcastic or vicious tone of voice then the other person is still going to feel attacked and have a hard time responding positively to your needs. *How* we say something at least as important as the exact words we use. The spirit of the “I” statement matters more than the form.

Remember to LISTEN to the other person after you have made your “I” statement!

PARAPHRASING

Repeating the main points of what someone else has said, in your own words.

When to Do It

“I” statements are especially good for close personal relationships, such as family or close friends, or ongoing relationships, such as with a neighbor or co-worker. These are relationships where you both have some reason to stay on good terms. “I” statements do not work so well in relationships that are distant or temporary, such as with strangers or people you know but rarely encounter. If a stranger gets in front of you in the grocery store line they may not care how you feel or what you want.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is simply summarizing what someone else has said in our own words. A paraphrase can be a statement or put as a question. We do this all the time, to make sure we have correct directions, or understand an event that’s been described, for example. We paraphrase a lot in our day-to-day life without giving it any thought, and we can use it in more deliberately in other conversations as well, to good effect. There are several other good reasons to paraphrase.

1. When we are trying to cooperate on a task or project.
 - a. So we can double check what is expected of us, and what we can expect of others. Person A says, “How about if you do the veggies and the inside stuff while I’m outside at the grill?” Person B might paraphrase,

“So you are saying I can make the salad and set the table, and you’ll cook the meat on the grill?”

- b. To follow someone else’s reasoning so we can make good decisions together. If person A says, “We could share the car today” person B might ask, “Do you mean that I could drop you off at work, take the kids swimming and then pick you up later?”
2. When we are talking about something personal or emotional.
- a. To clarify our understanding of another’s experiences, intentions and perceptions, so we can respond in a way that actually makes sense. If person A says, “If he had just asked to use my tools I would’ve lent them to him. It just pisses me off that he just took them like that!” Person B might say, “It sounds like you wanted the consideration of being asked, not that you minded him using the tools.”
 - b. To show another person that we are trying to understand them, that we care about how they feel, which is especially useful in intensely emotional situations. If person A says, “Did you see how she just walked out like that? Like I do not matter at all!” person B could say, “You are really upset that she left.”

How to Do It

A good paraphrase can include facts, feelings and needs, depending on what that person is saying. For instance, your friend says, “Work was awful yesterday! My boss kept fiving me more and more work to do when I was already up to my ears in things I couldn’t finish from the day before!” You could say, “It was hard to have so much to do then have your boss give you even more. It sounds like maybe you need your boss to check with your current work load before giving you more work.” This statement shows that you understand the facts, that her boss kept giving her too much work, that you “get” the feelings, awful = hard; that from the facts and feelings you have an idea of what her need might be, to have her boss be more careful about assigning work.

Facts, Feelings and Needs

1. Name the most important facts the person you are listening to is saying.

- a. Name the feelings the person seems to be feeling.

- b. Name the needs this person might be expressing, or having.

2. Name the most important facts the person you are listening to is saying.

- a. Name the feelings the person seems to be feeling.

- b. Name the needs this person might be expressing, or having.

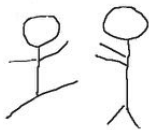
3. Name the most important facts the person you are listening to is saying.

- a. Name the feelings the person seems to be feeling.

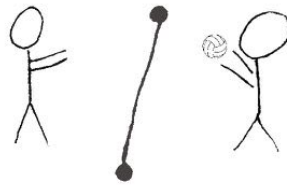
- b. Name the needs this person might be expressing, or having.

Metaphor

A metaphor is a comparison of one thing to another, as a way of describing more clearly what we are talking about. For instance, “Her eyes were sky blue.” That gives more information than just say, “Her eyes were blue.” The metaphors we use for conflict have a big effect on how we deal with conflict because it demonstrates our state of mind, and our state of mind has a big effect on how we engage a conflict, for better or worse. If we think of conflict as a “war” or “battle” we are oriented more competitively and we think there is a lot at stake – maybe life or death! When we talk about conflict as having “sides” and in terms of winning and losing, which are sports metaphors, it means we are thinking of the conflict as a game, less serious, but still competitive. If we think of conflict as a dance then we are seeing it as something we are doing in partnership, where we need to work together, which shows a collaborative orientation. Notice the metaphors you use when describing a conflict you are in with another person. These will give you important clues as to what conflict style you are using on the inside of yourself, which might be different than the style you think you are using, or mean to use. For instance, if you intend to be collaborative with your teenage daughter but find yourself telling a friend, “If I let her win this battle she’ll never listen to me” then maybe you are not being as collaborative as you mean to be.



DANCE



GAME



WAR

Chapter 6

Bias, Identity and Preferences

“Identity” refers to the different groups that we belong to and how important those are to us. Everyone belongs to many different groups, including many that we may never gave much thought to before. These groups include, but are not limited to:

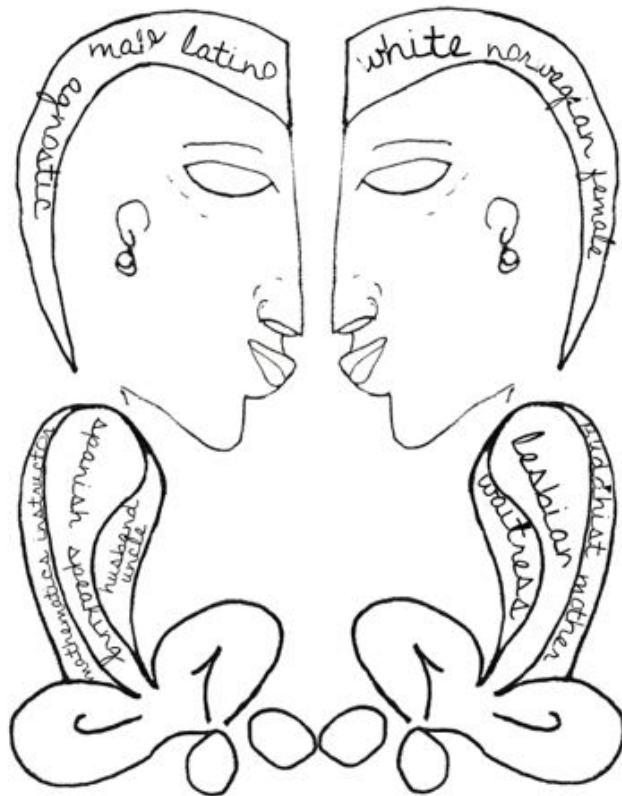
- Race
- Gender
- Socio-economic class
- Religion
- Culture
- Sexual orientation
- Nationality
- Educational attainment
- Language(s)
- Ability
- Physical appearance
- Region (of the world, country, city, or neighborhood)
- Occupation
- Family

GET REAL

For a few days, notice the language you and others use when describing a conflict, and how the metaphors used affect people’s perception of their reasonable options.

Our presence in some of these groups may be very important to us, some not as much. We may go to the same church as another person but when asked to describe yourself maybe you won't mention it, but another person would when answering the same question. For some people the work they do is who they "are." For others, the work they do is just how they earn money, but the ethnic group they belong to is how they first describe themselves. For some people, the place they lived as a child will always be "home" but for another, wherever they live right now is home. The relative importance of these identities can, and generally do, change over time. While I was raising children and waiting tables, I

saw myself as a mother and a waitress. Now that my children are grown and I work in the field of conflict resolution, I see myself as a conflict resolver and educator.



Group Membership Worksheet

List how you think of yourself according to different categories. Ex. "Race - Black. Class - upper middle class. Education - high school. After you have completed your list, go back and write the number "1" next to the ones that are a very important part of your identity, then write the number "2" next to the ones that are important but less important than the "1"s.

Category	Description	Rank
Race		
Ethnicity/Culture		
Gender		
Socio-economic class		
Religion		
Sexual orientation		
Nationality		
Education		
Language		
Mental/physical ability		
Physical Appearance		
Region (world, country etc.)		
Occupation		
Family role		
Age group		
Political group		
Other		

How We Decide Who is “Us” and Who is “Them”

Just as our sense of identity can change, so can our sense of who is one of “us” and who is “them” changes according to circumstances. For instance I do not think about the fact that I have Indian heritage unless I’m around other Indians, or someone points out that I look Indian, or asks me what I “am.” Since I worked as a waitress for so many years, when I go into a restaurant I sympathize with the staff if it is very busy and leave a bigger tip than I might have if I had not done that work myself. Even though I’m no longer a waitress I still think of restaurant servers as part of “my” group. People who have served in the military often identify with a particular branch of the military, or a particular war, long after they have ended their term of service.

If we think of ourselves as belonging to a particular group, then we and everyone else belonging to that group are “us,” and everyone who is not a part of that group is “them.” Does this mean that because your wife was not in the Marines and you were, that she has an outsider to you? No, she has just an outsider to that group. To you in particular she is an insider because another group you think of as “us” is family.

Sometimes one aspect of our identity that has drifted to the background will come back to the front of our sense of self. We may not think a lot about being an American most of the time unless there is something that brings our attention to that fact, such as being at war with another nation, or if we travel abroad. We may have teased a brother when we were kids, treating him like “them” but if someone on the playground tried to tease that brother, all of a sudden he was part of “us” again, and we went to his rescue. To understand what all this has to do with conflict we must look again at attribution error.

Attribution Error, Part 2

In an earlier section we looked at how the stories we make up in our heads to explain another’s behavior can contribute to conflict. How we make up stories is often influenced by whether we think of someone as being “them” instead of “us.” Attribution Theory addresses how we think about the inside motivations

people have and about the outside circumstance. Combined with identity it adds up this way:

- When we, or someone we like or identify as being a part of “our” group has something bad happen, we are likely to make up explanations that put responsibility outside the person - the weather, bad traffic, someone else’s actions etc.
- When someone we do not like or whom we have identified as being outside “our” group has something bad happen to them, we tend to make up explanations that place the responsibility inside that person - they are lazy, uncaring, immoral, stupid etc.
- When we, someone we like or whom we have identified as being part of “our” group has something good happen, we tend to make up explanations that place the responsibility inside that person - they are smart, fast, good etc.
- When someone we do not like or whom we have identified as being outside “our” group has something good happen to them, we tend to make up explanations that place the responsibility outside the person - luck, privilege, powerful friends etc.

GET REAL

Write about a time when you have had strong feelings, positive or negative, because you made attributions about another’s behavior that turned out not to be true. How did you feel about this once you found out what really happened? What happened as a result of this misunderstanding?

Remember, someone can become temporarily a “them” if we are simply unhappy with them at a given moment so we may treat someone who is usually part of “us” as “them” - maybe that is why they call it being on the “outs”!

Understanding these tendencies can help us to ask better questions of ourselves and the situations we find ourselves in.

Chapter 7

Ideas about Justice: What is “Fair”?

There are many ways to think about what is fair and what is not. Most of us think that how we decide what is fair in any particular situation just makes sense, that it is not something we really need to think about that hard. But what seems fair has a lot to do with what you stand to lose or gain in a situation. For instance, if two children pool their money to buy some candy together there are a few ways they might divide their candy.

1. They could split it according to who put in more or less money
2. They could split all the candy in half (half a pack of gum, half a candy bar etc.)
3. They could each take turn picking a candy (one picks the candy bar, the other picks the gum, the first on picks the sucker etc.)
4. They could decide that the child who did not have lunch should get more because she is hungrier
5. They could have another friend divide it up for them

All of these way of deciding what is fair come from what is called “distributive justice,” or who should get how much of something and why. There are three forms of distributive justice:

- Equity: whoever puts in the most gets the most out (number 1, above)
- Equality: everyone should get the same amount (numbers 2 and 3)
- Need: whoever needs something the most should get it, or more of it (number 4)

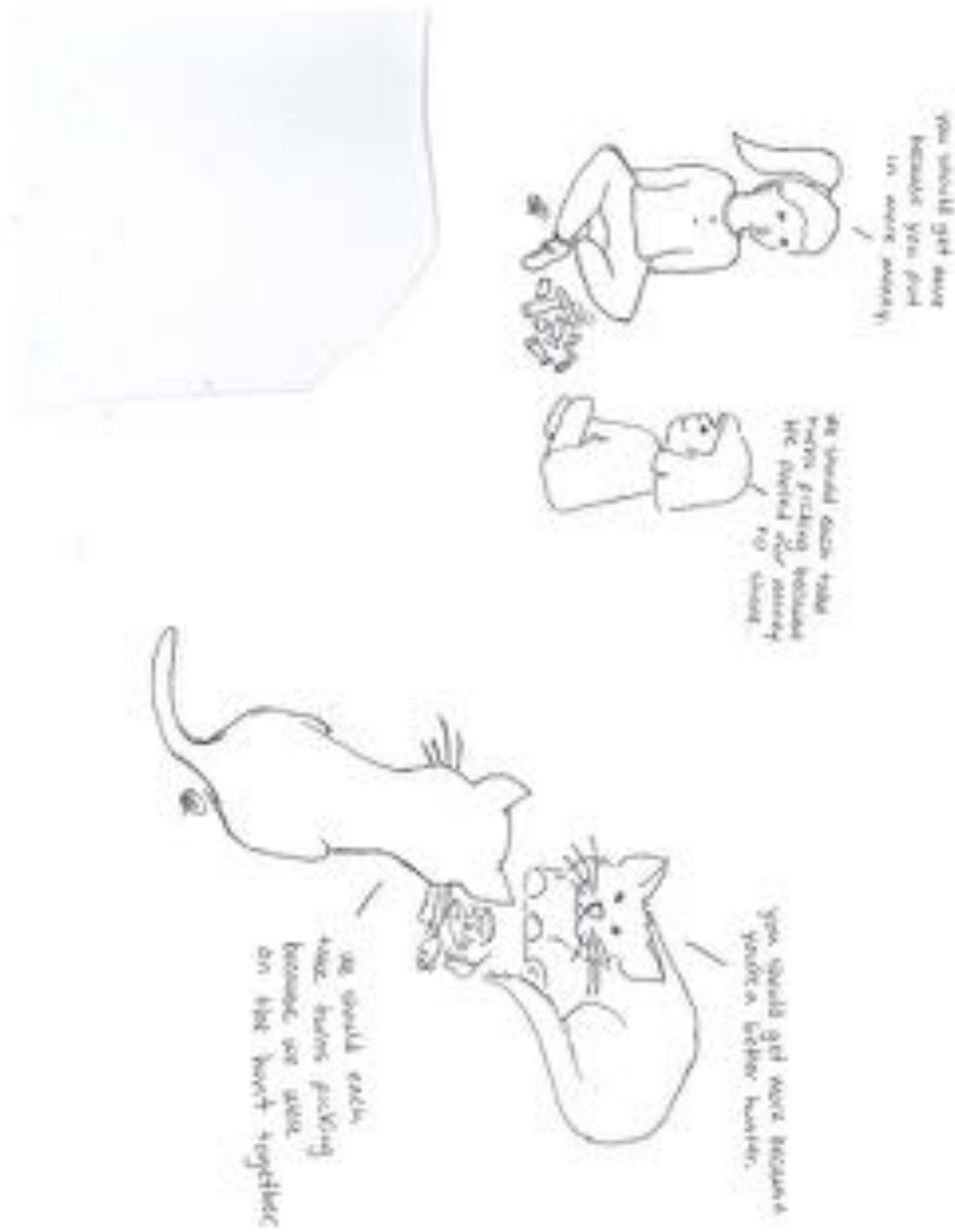
But then, how do the children in our example decide which form of distribution they should use? That brings us to something called “procedural justice” which is how we decide what is fair in a particular situation. Some examples of procedural justice:

- Random selection: a way of splitting things so that people have equal chance to choose what they want (number 3 above)
- Seniority: whoever is older or has been around longer (at work, in the community etc.) (If one child were older in our example above, he or she would get to decide on how to split up the candy)
- Arbitration: Someone else decides who gets what (number 5)
- Status: whoever is held in higher regard in the situation (parents vs children; boss vs employees etc.)

Differences on how to decide what is fair are at the root of a lot of conflict. If there is a section of a restaurant that gets more customers and better tips, then the wait staff working there might all want to be assigned that section. One waitperson might think she should get it because she has worked there the longest (seniority), another might think that he has a better wait skills and so he should get it (status). Still another might think she should get the best section because she heads a single parent household and needs the money more (need).

Do you think that the fact we want something has anything to do with what we think is fair, or how what is fair should be decided?

Hmmmm.....



Chapter 8

If These Things Do Not Work

Sometimes, no matter how much we have learned, how hard we try, we find ourselves in a conflict that we just cannot seem to find our way through. This might mean we need outside help to figure out what else we can do. We may need to understand what is happening inside ourselves better before we can handle our relationships with others better.

This might be the case if we find it difficult to do some of the things described in this book, such as “I” statement, or refraining from attribution error. If this is the case you might want to get counseling. **Counseling** involves talking with a trained therapist who gives us help in resolving personal, social, or psychological problems and difficulties. A counselor can help us to look at how we think, how we feel and how we behave from different angles so we can make our decisions about how to improve our own behavior, to the betterment of our lives. It might take some shopping around to find someone you feel comfortable with, so do not be discouraged if the first person you try is not a good match.

Another approach is **mediation**. In mediation, people who are having a conflict they cannot resolve consult with a professional called a “mediator.” A trained mediator can help all involved talk about their problem in a way that ensures that all sides are heard and understood. The mediator also makes sure that everyone feels emotionally and physically safe. The mediator does not make decisions for the people who come to mediation; the participants make their own decisions, together. And, an agreement does not go into effect unless each party agrees. A mediator helps the people in mediation have a conversation that stays on a constructive path together, which is sometimes very hard for people to do on their own, especially when things get very emotional. Even mediators get mediation sometimes! Some mediation is connected to the courts, such as with court-ordered divorce mediation, and sometimes it is something people just get on their own. As with any professional service, it is always good to ask about the mediator’s experience and training before deciding to work with him or her.

Many states have mediator's associations that you can locate through the phone book or through an internet search. These can be very helpful in locating a qualified mediator who can best meet your needs.

Arbitration is when someone outside the conflict, but who is knowledgeable in the area of conflict, has a discussion with the people involved and makes a decision about what should happen. This is a similar process to mediation, in that the parties involved each have a chance to talk about the situation, but the arbitrator decides what will happen, whereas a mediator will not. Arbitration is more common in business or legal situations than in personal relationships. There are two main kinds of arbitration: binding and non-binding. Binding arbitration is where the decision is legally binding and the people must abide by it. Non-binding arbitration means that the people themselves agree to abide by the decision, but there is no legal recourse if they do not.

Litigation uses the legal system as a way to solve your conflict. In litigation the parties take legal action by means of a lawsuit. It means hiring a lawyer to represent your case in court and where a judge decides on what should happen. Litigation typically gives the participants the least amount of control of how their problem is resolved.

Glossary

Accommodative conflict style: Low assertion, high cooperation, low concern for self, high concern for other.

Affirmation: The assertion of positive truths about another person.

Aggressive/competitive conflict style: High assertion, low cooperation, high concern for self, low concern for other

Amygdala: A ganglion of the limbic system adjoining the temporal lobe of the brain and involved in emotions of fear and aggression. (www.dictionary.com)

Arbitration: When someone outside the conflict, but who is knowledgeable in the area of conflict, has a discussion with the people involved and makes a decision about what should happen.

Attribution error: When we make up a story in our head about why someone is behaving the way they are, and we are wrong.

Bias: An inclination towards or against something or someone.

Collaborative/Problem solving/Assertive conflict style: High assertion, high cooperation, high concern for self, high concern for other.

Compromise conflict style: Medium assertiveness, medium cooperation, medium concern for self, medium concern for other.

Conflict: An expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals. (Hocker and Wilmot, 2007)

Counseling: Talking with a trained therapist who gives us help in resolving personal, social, or psychological problems.

Identity: The condition of being oneself, and not another. (www.dictionary.com)

Judgment #1: The New Oxford American Dictionary tells us that being judgmental means: “having or displaying an excessively critical point of view.”

Judgment #2: Judgment as assessment: The New Oxford American Dictionary also tells us that “judgment” can also mean: “the ability to make considered decisions or come to sensible conclusions.”

Litigation: A process that uses the legal system as a way to solve conflict.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: A social scientist named Abraham Maslow developed a way to think about what makes people behave the way they do based on an idea that we all have needs in life. They start with basic survival necessities such as the need for food, water, shelter etc., and move through the needs for safety, connections to others and into greater self-expression.

Mediation: A trained mediator can help conflicting parties to have a constructive conversation about their conflict, and to reach an agreement amenable to both parties.

Metaphor: A comparison of one thing to another, implying a resemblance.

Mindfulness: A technique in which one focuses one’s full attention only on the present, experiencing thoughts, feelings, and sensations but not judging them. (www.dictionary.com)

Passive/Avoidant conflict style: Low assertion, low cooperation, low concern for self, low concern for other.

Trust: Reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing; confidence. (www.dictionary.com)

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About the Author

Since 1999, Laura Ramnarace has provided training on conflict related topics and conflict intervention services to a wide variety of groups, including schools, businesses, non-profit organizations, and through the court system. She has also has provided decision making and strategic planning facilitation for ad hoc community groups, non-profit organizations, and other agencies. She is author of the assessment and planning workbook for non-profit and community organizations titled "Organizational Cultural Competency" as well as "Getting Along: The Wild, Wacky World of Human Relationships." She is also the founder of Nonviolent Action New Mexico.

About Nonviolent Action New Mexico

Nonviolent Action New Mexico (NVANM) envisions a New Mexico where needed societal and political change happens in a constructive, unifying, and effective manner. NVANM's mission is to provide training on strategic nonviolent action and to facilitate collaboration among organizations across New Mexico.

For more information on NVANM you may visit their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/nvactionnm/>, or visit their web site at nvactionnm.org

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