

“Resolving Conflict In Your Office”

(or anywhere else)

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Over the past 40 years I could not count the times I've been asked to help resolve a conflict somewhere in the 164 nations where I've lectured and coached leaders. From negotiating a peace coalition government in a large nation that where civil war had broken out, to the everyday conflicts between spouses, parents and kids, employees, and business competitors - I've dealt with it all. As humans, we're not very good at conflict resolution skills because almost no one has been taught them, or has seen these skills modeled effectively. So we limp along, from one conflict to the next.

Since every human being is completely unique, conflict with people you work with is inevitable—even with those you like. *Your* needs, interests, temperament, and background are different from mine so we shouldn't be surprised when we approach things differently. This is why I believe conflict resolution should be a **mandatory** course in every school. But since it isn't, most people never learn the most basic principles. Even worse, we learn the wrong ways of handling conflict from the poor models we grow up with.

Typically, there are five common responses to conflict:

“**MY WAY**” - I assert my will until you give in. My way is the *only* way. I'm *always* right and I must *always* win. Heard of any leaders like that?

“**NO WAY**” - I withdraw. I *avoid* conflict at all costs. I *ignore* the problem so nothing is ever resolved and we work in an unhealthy culture.

“**YOUR WAY**”- *I give in*. I roll over and play dead. I act passive and peaceful, but inside I'm incredibly frustrated and unhappy. This causes employee turnover.

“**HALF-WAY**”- We compromise. I win some and I lose some. Of course, compromise is better than the 3 previous approaches but it's still *not the best* or healthiest approach.

“**OUR WAY**” - In this response I care about our relationship and *both* of our needs. So we work toward both of our goals *at a higher level* than just a 50/50 compromise. This is WIN/WIN in every sense.

Most people are unaware that the Bible is filled with practical advice on resolving conflict - *and you don't have to be religious believer* to appreciate and apply the wisdom. I've found about two dozen principles that will help you avoid unnecessary pain, but let me just mention four, and give you a couple of verses from the Bible that illustrate the principles:

1. ANALYZE THE SOURCE(S) OF THE PROBLEM. "Take the log out of your own eye **first** and then you'll be able to see and take the sawdust speck out of your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:3). Before accusing someone else, ask yourself, "Is ANY part of this my fault?" Humbly work on your part first.

2. SCHEDULE A PEACE CONFERENCE. "If your brother has something against you...go at once to make peace with your brother..." (Matthew 5:23). Don't let conflict fester, but think through what is (1) the best time (*not when they are tired or rushed*) (2) the best place (*quiet privacy*) and (3) the best way to initiate the conversation (*with a conciliatory attitude*). If you are a spiritual person, pray and ask God to help you say just the right words. and to avoid saying inflammatory things. (When I'm really upset I pray "God, put a muzzle on my mouth!") "You will have to live with the consequences of everything you say." Proverbs 18:20

3. AGREE ON BASIC GROUND RULES: There are a dozen of these but here are a few of the important ones, especially in marriage:

- **No condemning:** "You always!.. You never!... It's all your fault!"
- **No commanding:** Power plays are for immature people.
- **No condescending:** Don't belittle or play psychologist. "I know why you did that!" The truth is that you don't even know your *own* motivations most of the time.
- **No confusing:** Don't bring up unrelated issues or create diversions when your case is weak. "Speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15)

4. STAY WITH IT UNTIL YOU RESOLVE IT.

Don't walk out! The reason my wife and I have been married almost 45 years is because we **finish our fights**. We don't let them turn into bitterness. Resolution is never easy. It takes courage to hang in there and work it out. **And realize that you can have RECONCILIATION without RESOLVING all the issues!** There are many things that my wife and I still disagree on, but we are more committed to the relationship than proving we are right!

And remember this: RESTORING A RELATIONSHIP IS ALWAYS MORE REWARDING THAN REPLACING IT. Why? Because it means you've BOTH had to grow. "We will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9)