

SUBJECT:

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IDEAS

POINTS TO REMEMBER

(From: “Conflict: The Rules Of Engagement” by Dr. Pat Heim)

1. Avoid Defensiveness: Avoid creating defensiveness in other people, do not attack them. If you’re being attacked, avoid becoming defensive. Your defensiveness inadvertently encourages the other person to attack you even more and sets up a vicious cycle.

- Defending feeds conflict
- Zip the lip and listen

2. Actively Listen: The person attacking you interprets your defensiveness as not listening. Instead of defending, “zip your lip” and listen closely to what the other person is saying. Seek to understand how the conflict situation looks from their perspective. This perception/reality is what you must manage in this difficult discussion. Once you understand how the situation looks and feels to them, you’re ready to paraphrase.

- Must get “behind his eyeballs” and see his perspective
- Once I understand how issue looks and feels to other person, then I can go to next step.

3. Paraphrase: Summarize the main points the other person has told you, paraphrasing it in your own words. Ask them if you have all the particulars correct. “Is this what happened, Bill?” This proves to the other person that you have listened to their issue. If you have the story straight, you are now in a position to legitimize it.

- Restate
- Tells person you heard them
- Proves we have listened

4. Legitimize: “You know, Bill, if I were in your shoes, I’d probably be angry too.” The combination of paraphrasing and legitimizing proves that you’ve heard the other person and understand the drama of the situation. Legitimizing the other person’s point of view is not an admission of wrongdoing on your part. It just says, “If the world looked that way to me, I would probably feel the same way you do.”

In summary, by avoiding defensiveness, actively listening, paraphrasing and legitimizing, the conflict you now have to manage is fundamentally different from the conflict the other person brought to you.

- If I were in your shoes, I would probably feel same way as you do.
- This is not saying you are right and I am wrong.

5. Describing vs. Evaluation: Describe a problem. Refrain from evaluating people. When we humans are evaluated by somebody else, (e.g., “you’re lazy”, “you don’t care”, “you don’t listen to me”) we don’t have a concrete picture of what we did wrong. Therefore, when we are

evaluated, we feel a natural human tendency to defend ourselves, especially if we feel the allegation is untrue.

On the flip side, when someone describes our behavior (“I thought we agreed that this was going to be done by 3 p.m. and now it’s 5 p.m. and I still don’t have it”) we do not defend in the same way, because the issue under consideration is objective and measurable. It is something that can be talked about and corrected.

Evaluating someone’s personal attributes by vague criteria (“you’re a lazy person”) does not give them a specific reference point in the real world they can change in the future. They don’t know where to begin changing to please you. If you get an evaluation, ask for a description of the problem to make it tangible and manageable.

- You are lazy – evaluating behavior
- We had agreed to meet at 9; I was there but you did not come. Describes behavior.
- Evaluation – brings on defensiveness.
- If other person evaluates, you can ask for a description.
- Important to always describe the behavior that’s the problem, not to evaluate the behavior that’s a problem.

6. Content vs. Relationship Conflict: A content conflict is about some fact in reality; a relationship conflict is based on what is going on in our relationship with the other person. One of the most common reasons conflicts don’t get resolved is because when it comes to content or relationship, each party to the conflict is operating from the opposite level. One person is on the relationship level in the dispute (“Get out of this house!”), while the other person is on the content level (“No way, I pay the rent!”)

The conflict repeats itself until we conduct the conflict on the appropriate level, or the relationship is destroyed. When both content and relationship conflicts are occurring at the same time, it’s better to take care of the relationship conflict first. The content issues will be easier to deal with as a result.

7. Focus On The Future: When the past is dead and gone, people get defensive when we bring it up and keep drumming on it. Utilize the basic conflict management strategies, then say to the other person, “Here’s what happened. In the future, here’s what I am committed to do should the problem arise again.” You can’t change the past, but you can change the future.

- People tend to get defensive over the past.

8. Direct vs. Indirect Communication: There is no problem in communication when we get together with people who are like us. Two direct communicators or two indirect communicators do just fine. Conflicts occur when someone direct and someone indirect get together. Unless you flex to the communication style of the other person, the other person will either miss what you’re saying or misinterpret it.

In terms of gender and communication style, when it comes to telling other people what to do, women tend to be more indirect. Men tend to be indirect when it comes to talking about problems, weaknesses, errors and emotions. Therefore, men and women are both direct and indirect, but we are direct and indirect at different times, and that creates even more conflict across the gender gap.