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Conflict is hard... Resolution is SIMPLE

By

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Conflict and communication are two facets of life that are simultaneously pervasive and fascinating. Human conflict continues to be a source of interest, concern, and research. All societies, communities, organizations, and relationships experience conflict at one time or another.

For centuries, humankind has tried to understand conflict and its causes. For many of us the experience of conflict is a source of fear and confusion. We fear conflict because we are afraid that we cannot manage it or we will be placed in a disadvantageous position and we will be destroyed. Perhaps even worse, we fear our reaction to conflict and what might happen to the people we hurt. Conflict can expose our weaknesses, undermine our self-esteem and self-concept, destroy relationships and create anxiety.

Just as possible is the promise that conflict can help create better decisions, assist in problem solving, open up possibilities, facilitate new ideas and solidify significant enduring relationships. It is the possibilities of the outcomes of conflict that are rewarding and fascinating. It is the mix of outcomes that attracted me and other scholars and practitioners from a diverse array of fields.

The SIMPLE Philosophy

Several years ago, I met Tom Fentiman, a fellow mediator who made conflict resolution look easy. He was a savvy, wise, and principled mediator, who solved disputes all over the world. His approach was so simple that he made mediation look effortless. He focused entirely on the process of conflict resolution. He and I combined this approach to conflict resolution and mediation into the SIMPLE approach. In this newsletter, I offer the six step SIMPLE approach to resolving conflicts excerpted from my *POWW!* Books on conflict resolution. It works well for me and I believe you will find it useful, practical and you can get terrific results. It is a method anyone can use to solve interpersonal, business, or other confounding conflicts.

The process is comprised of a three-part philosophy:

1. I may disagree, but I will not be disagreeable.
2. I will treat others, as I want them to treat me.
3. I will remain true to my convictions and beliefs.

Let's look a little deeper into each part of the fundamental philosophy supporting the SIMPLE approach:

I may disagree, but I will not be disagreeable.

In conflict, resolution people tend to complicate matters. People get lost in the situation and things become personalized. If we become disagreeable, the focus goes to the personal. If we focus on the personal then we can't solve the problem. If you get lost in the conflict, emotions take over.

To handle this, keep your head and don't use generalizations. Don't say things like, "You always," or "You never." Acknowledge the other person's concerns, without agreeing with them. You must be willing to accept the other person's point of view but you don't have to have the same opinion. Try saying to the other person, "I can see how you saw that and got upset."

I will treat others, as I want to be treated.

Treat people as you would like to be treated in the same situation and stay focused on the substance of the problem. Let the other person now you accept them as they are without your need to change them. Speak to the other person, not around them. Maintain eye contact and exhibit a tone of acceptance and tolerance. Keep this in mind no matter how bad it gets.

I will remain true to my convictions and beliefs.

You don't have to change your fundamental beliefs to solve the problem. You feel more comfortable doing what you are. Remember it is not about rearranging your chromosomes or theirs; it is about solving the issue at hand. Know where you are.

If you alter your convictions and beliefs, then the other side has you and they can move you around. Stay the course with acceptance and respect. The benefit is self-confidence and clarity about your goal of solving the conflict.

Six Steps to SIMPLE Resolution

S – Separate the people from the problem. Focusing on the person usually places guilt and the person feels blamed. When the focus is on the problem, we are open to be objective about our own responsibility.

I – Interests are our focus, not our positions or our "Point-of-View." Our interests motivate us. Our positions are what we have decided. Attempt to *understand* the other person first before being *understood*. It builds trust!

M – Must Do. We must choose a goal such as: What do we want to see happen? Or "What result do we want?"

P – Putting our interests and concerns in line with our goal is necessary to reach a desired result.

L – Let brainstorming for new ideas encourage you and the other party to examine options to find a solution. Inventing stimulates new ideas that help develop the leverage we need to find a solution.

E – Elect the best idea to resolve the problem. The solution must substantially meet the goals of all parties.

Recognize that people will work harder to preserve what they believe they might lose than to work at gaining something. That is why you must work to determine interests first. Seriously review what you want and then even more seriously look at what you really need. That is, your interests as well as theirs. If you start out complicated, it won't get easier.

Stay focused on the goal. People can get hung up on the problem not associated with the goal. Stay on track. You might ask questions like, "We are working on an agreement to benefit all parties. Am I correct in assuming that you do not want ...?"

Watch for patterns in communication. Shouting, avoiding, changing the subject, ultimatums are disruptive and can pull the focus off of the goal of solving the dispute. . Additionally, you can take the role of the other party. This will help you reframe the issue and you gain better perspective of the conflict. If you can communicate authentic concern for the other person, your process will be easier and agreements will be better.

It is important to remember that the three-part philosophy is necessary to implement the six step SIMPLE process. If you accept the philosophy and behave in accord with it, you can achieve better solutions to any confounding conflict.

Adapted from: *POWW! Stop Fighting & Start Talking for Managers* and *POWW! Mediation & Facilitation for HR Professionals*, available from Get To The Point Books for \$9.95 each.

Click here for Get To The Point Books: <http://www.gettothepointbooks.com/>

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Life's Path Book is Published

The *Life's Path* book is about finding ways to be in the world. It is about the value of a holistic perspective of looking at ourselves and our purpose. This book is meant to be a workbook for learning and taking steps toward achieving your success, happiness, and personal potential.

The process in this book will help you develop your capacity to develop your full potential, if you are willing.

From the back cover-

Life's Path Principles

- Make a choice that brings you happiness.
- Find the solution and live in the solution.
- Fear is not a problem – it is part of the solution.
- You are unique and you have gifts – use them.
- Successful people are self aware – self awareness leads to success.
- Be clear about what you want.
- Be prepared – take a risk.

The Life's Path book is available from Booklocker.com.

Click here to read an excerpt from Life's Path: <http://booklocker.com/books/4577.html>

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