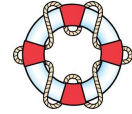


KEEPING YOUR COMMUNICATION COOL WHEN THE SITUATION GETS HOT

A One-page Conflict Resolution **EMERGENCY KIT** from www.NewConversations.net



By Dennis Rivers, MA, and Paloma Pavel, PhD – January 2011 Edition – *Give this page to everyone in the conflict!*

Many conflict situations could be resolved more successfully than we might think at first glance. One big problem is that conflict participants often lose control of themselves and retreat into self-reinforcing, and self-defeating, patterns of attack and counterattack. Once in that pattern, very little real negotiating or problem solving gets done. Here are ten suggestions, drawn from the literature of conflict resolution and psychotherapy, that can help you navigate your way through everyday collisions of needs, create more "win-win" solutions, and come out still liking yourself and still able to work/live with your "partners-in-conflict." (Special thanks to conflict resolution scholars Roger Fisher and William Ury for their inspiring books.)

When a conflict starts, try these suggestions...

1. **Calm yourself down** by breathing very slowly and deeply. While breathing, think of a moment or place of great happiness and peace in your life. Doing this will help you from feeling totally swallowed up by the current problem, which in most cases is not a life and death situation. (If it IS a life and death issue, all the more reason to calm down so that you can think clearly.)
2. **Think about what you really need**, rather than about punishing your opponent. What is best in the long run for your mind, your body, your spirit, your workplace, the world you live in, and your ongoing relationship with your partner-in-conflict? Stay focused on the big picture of your own most important goals and needs. Avoid getting distracted by what you may see as someone else's misdeeds or bad moves.
3. **Imagine your partner-in-conflict as a potential ally.** Imagine that you are marooned on a desert island with your partner-in-conflict, and that the long-term survival of both of you depends on the two of you cooperating in some sort of creative way that will meet more of both your needs.
4. **Begin by listening to the other person** and affirming everything you can agree with. Look carefully for areas where your interests and needs might overlap with the interests and needs of your partner-in-conflict. Write down what appear to be the other person's most important needs in the situation, and try to address them in any bargaining proposals you make. (The better we do this, the longer our agreements will last.)
5. **Summarize the other person's needs**, feelings and position, from their perspective, and do this first, before you present your own needs or requests. When people feel heard, they are more likely to listen. Summarize to let people know that you have understood them, not to argue with their view or to show them how they are wrong. Acknowledging another person's views, needs, requests, grievances, and/or demands does not have to mean that you agree with them. Acknowledging can transform an encounter from a contest of wills about who-will-not-listen-to-whom to a discussion about finding ways to meet the needs of the parties in conflict.
6. **Acknowledge and apologize for any mistakes** you may have made in the course of the conflict. Others may do the same if you get the ball rolling by practicing consistent personal fairness. Make an accepting space for your partners-in-conflict to start over. Letting go of defending past mistakes (and accusing others) can allow participants in a conflict to see their situation from fresh angles.
7. **Focus on positive goals for the present and the future**, no matter what you and/or your partner-in-conflict may have said or done in the past. Punishing or shaming someone for past actions will not put that person in a frame of mind to meet your needs in the present. The present and future are all you can change.
8. **Make requests for specific actions** that another person could actually do, rather than for overall feelings or attitudes. Explain in positive language how the requested actions will help you, so that the other person feels addressed as a problem-solver rather than criticized as a problem-maker.
9. **When positions collide, focus on principles and potential referees.** If deadlocked on specifics, look for decision rules that you both could agree are fair. If deadlocked on fair decision rules, look for a mutually trusted mediator or referee who could help you and your partner-in-conflict define a fair rule.
10. **Use this conflict as a motivational stimulus** to get yourself started studying more effective and compassionate ways of negotiating and resolving conflicts. Four good books to start with are: *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, Roger Fisher, William Ury and Bruce Patton (Penguin Books, 1991); *Getting Past No: Negotiating Your Way From Confrontation to Cooperation*, by William Ury (Bantam, 1991); *The Eight Essential Steps to Conflict Resolution* by Dudley Weeks (Tarcher, 1992); and *The Seven Challenges Workbook* (available free of charge in PDF format at www.newconversations.net).