

The Conflict Resolution Process

as presented by Dudley Weeks

[*The Eight Essential Steps to Conflict Resolution*](#) by Dudley Weeks, Ph.D., Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc. 1992, as summarized by the Conflict Resolution class at Quinebaug Valley Community-Technical College, Danielson, CT.

Overview of the "Conflict Partnership Process"

summarized by Tyla Baff

Conflict Partnership is a process that empowers people to build mutually beneficial relationships and to resolve conflict effectively. Try following its **eight steps** :

1. Create an Effective [Atmosphere](#)
2. Clarify [Perceptions](#)
3. Focus on Individual and [Shared Needs](#)
4. Build [Shared Positive Power](#)
5. [Look to the Future](#), then Learn from the Past
6. Generate [Options](#)
7. Develop ["Doables"](#)
8. Make [Mutual Benefit Agreements](#)

The "partnership process" is based on the following five principles. Keep them in mind whenever you are involved in a conflict:

1. Think "**we**," rather than "**I versus you**" - working together helps solve conflicts.
2. Try to keep in mind the **long term** relationship.
3. Good conflict resolution will **improve** the relationship.
4. Good conflict resolution **benefits both parties**.
5. **Conflict resolution** and **relationship building** go hand in hand.

The Eight Steps

Step 1 - Create an Effective Atmosphere

summarized by Lisa Courtemanche

Creating an effective atmosphere is a very important step in the conflict resolution process. It is more likely for mutual agreements be reached when atmosphere is given careful consideration. When thinking about atmosphere, remember these ideas:

- **Personal preparation** -- doing all you can to ready yourself in positive ways to approach issues honestly and openly.

- **Timing** -- choosing a time that is best for all parties involved. A time in which no one is feeling pressed to move on or pressured in other ways.
- **Location** -- where you meet is as important as when you meet. It is best to pick a place where all parties can feel comfortable and at ease.
- **Opening statements** -- try to start out on a good note. Good openings are ones that let others know you are ready and willing to approach conflict with a team-like attitude that focuses on positive ends. They should also ensure the trust and confidentiality of the parties involved.

Step 2 - Clarify Perceptions

summarized by Michele Schlehofer

Clarify individual perceptions involved in the conflict. You can't solve a problem if you don't know what it is about.

1. **Sort the parts** of the conflict - ask what it is about.
2. **Avoid ghost conflicts** -- get to the heart of the matter and avoid side issues.
3. **Clarify** what, if any, values are involved.
4. Recognize that the parties involved **need each other** to be most effective.

Additionally, clarify your perceptions of the other party.

1. Avoid stereotyping.
2. Listen carefully.
3. Recognize the other's needs and values.
4. Empathize - ask why they feel the way they do.
5. Clear up misconceptions you may have of them.

Step 3 - Focus on Individual and Shared Needs

summarized by Tara Auger

Expand on shared needs. Realize that you need one another in order to successfully resolve conflicts. Be concerned about meeting others needs as well as your own. When you take the time to look, you will recognize that individuals often share needs in common.

Step 4 - Build Shared Positive Power

summarized by Ted Rupar

Power is made up of people's outlooks, ideas, convictions, and actions. A positive view of power enables people to be most effective. A negative outlook on power proves *disempowering*. Instead of "power with," it encourages "power over." **Positive power** promotes building together and strengthening partnerships. When parties in conflict have this outlook, they can encourage each other to use shared positive power. This gives an ultimate advantage to all involved because each person's positive energy is being drawn upon for a worthwhile solution.

Step 5 - Look to the Future, then Learn from the Past

summarized by Denise Dagle

Don't dwell on negative past conflicts, or you won't be able to deal positively in the present or the future. Try to

understand what happened in the past, and avoid repeating the same mistakes over. Don't get stuck in a rut; learn from past conflicts and be forgiving. Let others know "I'm not mad at you, I'm mad at what you did."

Step 6 - Generate Options

summarized by class

1. Beware of preconceived answers.
2. Look for common threads.
3. Make sure options are workable for all parties involved.
4. Set aside disagreements and focus on options that seem most workable.
5. Avoid spin-off conflicts by bypassing options that won't work for all involved.

In Generating Options:

1. Ask first for the conflict partner's options -- listen and learn.
2. Try free-flowing options:
 - make new suggestions
 - write them down
 - wait to discuss them till they're all out on the table
 - group similar options together
 - narrow down the list
 - predict possible outcomes
 - look at all ideas, no matter how silly they may seem
 - Imagine
3. Identify Key Options; these are ones that will:
 - meet one or more of the shared needs
 - meet individual needs and are compatible with other's needs
 - use mutual positive power
 - improve the relationship
 - be at least acceptable but preferably satisfying to all involved
4. When looking at options, don't let past experiences cloud present perceptions and decisions.

Step 7 - Develop "Doables" -- Stepping-Stones to Action

summarized by Rosita Gluck

Doables are specific actions that have a good chance at being successful. Doables are:

- the ideas that have the best chance at success
- steps that never promote unfair advantages on any sides
- found on shared input and information from all parties
- trust builders - they add confidence in working together
- actions that meet shared needs

Step 8 - Make Mutual Benefit Agreements

summarized by Deb Shuron

Mutual-Benefit Agreements should give you **lasting** solutions to specific conflicts.

1. Instead of demands, focus on **developing agreements** and find **shared goals** and needs.
2. Build on "Doable" things by working on the smaller **stepping-stone** solutions.
3. Pay attention to the **needs of the other person** in addition to your own interests.
4. Recognize the "**givens**" - basic things that **cannot** be altered or compromised.
5. Clarify **exactly** what is expected of you in the agreement - your individual responsibilities.
6. Keep the **conflict partnership** process going by using and sharing these skills with others.



Special topics

Handling Anger

It's alright to feel anger, but we should not allow it to rule. Instead, we should identify the source of our anger and then try to move past it. When this is done, we can focus on the positive steps of conflict resolution. In partnerships, the idea is not to break down - it is to **focus on building up**.

Dealing With People Who Only Want Things Their Way

summarized by Sharon Caron

Effective conflict resolution is not deciding who gets their way. Using conflict partnership skills can help you find a resolution that is "getting our way," even with people who seem locked in a pattern of "either your way or mine."

When the other party seems to be defining conflict resolution as an "I-versus-you" struggle:

- try extra hard to set a partnership atmosphere
- state clearly that you see conflict resolution as a process in which you need each other
- focus on shared needs and shared power
- generate specific options and doables that will improve the relationship for both of you

If the other party is focusing on power or control and thinking losing either will weaken them:

- focus on developing an "our" power attitude
- recall times that effective shared power has worked for the relationship in the past

When the other party focuses on controlling the situation rather than on the needs of the situation:

- encourage them to talk about what they think the needs of the situation really are
- try to come up with doables based on those needs

Dealing with Conflicts that Involve an Injustice

summarized by Sharon Caron

An injustice involves a violation of values or principles that are important to you.

1. Make sure that you understand the differences between behavior that is unjust and behavior you simply do not like.
2. If you're confident that a conflict does indeed involve an injustice, you need to tell the other party involved how see what has occurred.
3. Focus on the behavior, not on the person. In injustice situations, we often hear people saying, "You aren't fair!" This kind of statement could result in a reply such as "Well, if you think I'm an unfair person, then I guess we have nothing to talk about." A better way to handle this would be to start with a positive opening statement such as, "I feel what you did was unfair, and I want to understand why you did it. Were you aware I might feel unjustly treated? Would you feel unjustly treated if someone did that to you?" This is more likely to result in a positive response and some feedback.
4. Clearly state when you think an injustice has been done. Do it in a way that encourages positive behavior and successful resolution.

You could:

- Ask what alternate behavior could have been used.
- Ask them to put themselves in your shoes to understand how you were affected by their behavior.
- Focus on the positive by reminding them of past examples when their fair behavior resulted in good partnership resolution.



Please send your comments to:

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