



Human Resources

Slash Your Clash Budget

Conflict is here to stay.

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. Modern Man has desperately cast about for an answer to the peril of open and hostile conflict. Now there is a movement to appreciate conflict and all that it has to offer. Scholars and conflict resolution practitioners have fueled the fires of research and dispute resolution to discover ways of reducing violence and managing conflict constructively.

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 be destroyed. Perhaps even worse, we fear our own 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 is 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 mediation with that of Fisher, Ury, and Patton's made famous in their book, *Getting to Yes*. I offer the six step SIMPLE approach to resolving conflicts. It works well for me and I believe you will find it useful and practical.

This view of a dispute resolution is deceptively uncomplicated and I have incorporated it into my mediation style with 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:

- I may disagree, but I will not be disagreeable.
- I will treat others, as I want them to treat me.
- 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 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 know 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 conflict 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.

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.

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.

People will work harder to preserve what they believe they might lose than to work at gaining something.

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 and vice versa. 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.

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