

## No Batteries Required: 8 Conflict Resolution Tips

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There is an African proverb that says: “Don’t look where you fell, but where you slipped.” When we find ourselves on the conflict carousel, we often tend to lose sight of the root cause of the conflict. It may very well have originated with us, but, once the conflict with a colleague or superior is set in motion, we seem to suffer from temporary, corporate amnesia – the emotional nature of the conflict clouds our objectivity.

Learning to deal with emotions in negotiations or conflict situations helps us to be more effective, whether in our professional or personal life. In the book [\*Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as You Negotiate\*](#), Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro provides a powerful framework for dealing with emotions without being overwhelmed by them. The authors identify five concerns in our relationships with others which elicit, for better or for worse, many of the emotions that surface in negotiations and conflicts:

1. **Appreciation** - Do you feel heard, understood and valued for your point of view?
2. **Affiliation** - Are you treated as an adversary and kept at a distance, or are you treated as a colleague?
3. **Autonomy** – Do you have the freedom to make a decision without feeling that someone else is telling you what to do?
4. **Status** - Do you feel treated with respect, or do you feel diminished?
5. **Role** – Do you have a fulfilling or meaningful role in your conflict situations or negotiations?

When you find yourself in a conflict scenario, run these five core concerns in your mind and ask yourself, for example, how you might be failing in letting the other person feel appreciated throughout the interaction; or how you might, unwittingly or not, be diminishing their status, or placing them in a corner in terms of autonomy. Could you have broadened their role by asking for their advice or recommendations? Keeping the five concerns in the forefront when you find yourself in a conflict situation can help you manage the emotions in the room.

Here are some additional tips for enhancing your ability to manage conflict, whether on the job or at home:

**1 Become aware of your role in escalating or de-escalating the conflict.** Escalators cause a conflict to quickly intensify. These are words or phrases we use that have the unintended effect of fuelling rather than tempering a situation/ They often start with a “you” statement.

Examples include: “You are making a mountain out of a molehill;” “You are too sensitive;” “You are taking this personally.” Escalators are also non-verbal behaviors such as tone of voice, lowering of the eyebrows to indicate disapproval, exchanging a knowing look and smile with someone else in the room or condescendingly patting someone on the shoulder.

Make a list of de-escalators that you can use in difficult situations. Examples include pausing, genuinely making an effort to listen, letting the other person speak uninterrupted, not telling the other person that they are “wrong.” You can also take time out by calling for a coffee break or adjourning the meeting.

**2. Know your conflict resolution style.** Consider taking an assessment such as the [Myers-Briggs Conflict Style Report](#) which will provide you with invaluable information on the way you might approach conflict. For example, are you prone to adopt a martyr stance like, “After all I have done for this team, this is the response I get?” Do you get on the offensive in order to push others to adopt your own solution, or do you habitually stall the process by focusing too much on defining the problem rather than solving it? Another assessment that is helpful for determining your conflict resolution style is the [Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument](#). This instrument outlines five typical ways of handling conflict; it will show you which is your default mode and how you can develop the flexibility to use the other modes when more appropriate. For example, your natural preference might be an “avoiding” style (“Leave well enough alone”) when a compromising approach would yield more benefits (“Split the difference.”)

**3. Help people see the logic behind your argument.** Don’t just state what you want without taking the time to give people an explanation of the reasons behind your request. As Anthony Weston said in [A Rulebook for Arguments](#): “It’s not a mistake to have strong views, the mistake is to have nothing else.” Spending a little time upfront to paint the picture that helps others see your vision or your idea can be a smart, conflict prevention move.

**4. Don’t withhold a necessary apology.** In our litigious society, we have been inculcated against ever apologizing for anything. Many may consider apologizing as a sign of weakness when in fact, it is the mark of a statesman (or stateswoman.) It takes a big person to have the strength of character and confidence to apologize when the circumstances warrant it. It may often be one of the quickest ways to end a conflict.

**5. Let go of your need to always be right.** Think about your values. They may include achievement, status, recognition, power, wealth, family, health, adventure, risk taking, innovation and many others. Is peace of mind on your list? If not, make it a point to remind yourself periodically of its importance in enhancing the long-term quality of life. There are many ways to achieve peace of mind; one of them is to let go of the need to be right at all cost.

Joseph Chilton Pearce said it beautifully: “To live a creative life, we must lose our fear of being wrong.”

**6. Don't lose sight of the higher purpose.** As Ron Askhenas states in “[Why leaders Play Chicken](#),” we sometimes get locked into a staring down contest, waiting for the other party to blink first. When we do this, we may win in the short-term but it is a vacuous victory. If you find yourself in this contest of wills, stop and remind yourself not to lose sight of the higher purpose, the greater good.

**7. Don't lecture.** In our zeal to convince others during a conflict discussion, we forget the value of brevity. Watch that you don't unintentionally slip into lecture mode. Most people, including you, experience a lecture as patronizing which hinders resolution of the conflict. State your position succinctly and move on.

**8. Leave some things unsaid.** For many of us, this requires an enormous amount of self-control. In the midst of a conflict discussion, our words can be like an unguided missile, uncontrolled or unrestrained, doing collateral damage to the relationship, long after the conflict is settled. Have some strategies ahead of time that you can use. Consider, for example the power of a [90 second pause](#) to allow you time for self-censoring.

Another strategy in this regard, which comes from the teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba, is to ask yourself, before you respond, “It is kind, is it necessary, is it true, does it improve on the silence?” Try this sometimes. You will be surprised how effective it can be.

While we cannot control the amount of unbidden conflict that enters your lives, we can control how we manage it. Whether you are in the boardroom or the shop floor, a small business owner, teacher or parent, acquiring good conflict resolution skills is an investment that will pay recurring dividend to your entire life.