Bounce™ Forward

Courageous Dialogue

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Building Resilient & Inspired Teams

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Production Credits:

Cover design by Dianna Bowes, Creative on the Move

www.creativeonthemove.com

Cover Photo: Tracy Grabowski Photograhpy

Printers: Friesens

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From my work in the correctional system as a mediator, and a trainer and speaker, I quickly discovered that the terms *conflict* and *conflict resolution* were not popular in the work place. In fact, many organizations and businesses deny that they have conflict. Often conflict is perceived as negative, bad or something to be avoided at all costs.

Some have said, "We don't have conflict in our workplace, we just have people who don't get along very well." Another wished to develop a *conflict-free workplace*.

"YIKES!" I said inside my head. A conflict-free workplace is not only difficult to achieve, but also dangerous to develop. Conflict is normal in relationships, so to expect that employees will never have conflict or disagreement will push the conflict underground and create an environment of distrust.

"When you say a conflict-free workplace, what do you mean?" I asked my corporate client during a consultation in the company's stylish boardroom.

"A workplace without conflict," stated the manager.

"How would employees manage their conflict or disagreement in this type of culture?" I asked.

Pausing, the manager said, "Well, they wouldn't have any."

I needed to pull out some different questions. Through a lengthy process of asking questions and listening carefully, I ascertained that it was not really a conflict-free workplace that the manager sought to establish, rather, it was to create an environment where unresolved and poorly managed conflict was not tolerated. This was a completely different context, but one I embraced a little easier.

"So you want to establish a culture whereby employees feel comfortable and safe in having disagreements, however, the expectation is that it is well managed and gets resolved," I summarized for the manager.

Nodding his head he said, "Yes! If we can do that, I believe our managers will not be spending their whole day dealing with people-issues."

"And how will this impact the business and the corporate culture?" I queried.

After a few seconds, my client smiled and said, "Conflict won't go underground, 10-year-old issues will finally be put to rest and productivity will likely increase because people are focused on the job instead of being dragged into issues that are not really any of their concern."

Sounds like some pretty impressive outcomes. The next week, we began providing courageous dialogue and conflict management training to managers and staff.

Because many businesses and organizations perceive conflict as negative, destructive and something that should be avoided at all costs, I began to approach it differently. I began to think about conflict and what it really meant in the work place. What was the impact of conflict (poorly managed, unresolved, and unaddressed conflict) on an organization and a team?

One of the discoveries was this: the more troubling and difficult a workplace situation is, the more difficult the conversations are. Difficult conversations really are different from person to person. What's difficult for me may not be difficult for you and vice versa.

In general, the conversations that people labeled as difficult are the conversations about performance or improvement…the constructive feedback conversations, the appreciative inquiry conversation. When these conversations were avoided, it often led to some sort of conflict.

So I came up with the term *Courageous Dialogue*. Courageous Dialogue is the conversations that are most important and mostly avoided. I wanted to help businesses and teams work through these conversations that required an important skill…courage.

I've often read that business is 80 per cent people. I have tested that theory in many of the workshops I have facilitated, the presentations I've conducted, and with the teams I have consulted with or trained, and they all agreed that business really is 80 per cent people. Even for those employees that don't have to work or connect with people to a large degree still agree with that percentage. That's one of the reasons why communication and being able to engage comfortably in courageous dialogue is so very important.

Communication is one of the biggest challenges in the workplace. It can zap people's time, drain their energy, and damage relationships. But when communication is respectful, integral, honest, and well thought out, it can actually enhance relationships and morale, and provide a greater sense of production within the organization.

We spend a lot of our time in communication, whether we're listening to other people, verbally communicating with others, or observing non-verbal communication and attempting to process and decipher what it means. Companies can really save themselves a lot of time, stress, employee turnover, money, and heartache when they communicate courageously and have the conversations that matter most, but are mostly avoided.

Difficult conversations are the ones that people often put off or ignore, or maybe try to sweep

under the carpet. Difficult conversations are also those dialogues that individuals rehearse over and over in their minds. In fact, in many cases, difficult conversations consume people's thoughts. We have all had this happen to us. Often this process of playing conversations over and over in your mind can make the situation appear worse than it really is, let alone increase your stress levels. Often we try to figure out what to say ahead of time, and when the conversation plays out differently than what we had prepared for in our heads, we become very flustered. Difficult conversations can also leave you confused or bewildered, thinking about what you should or could have said.

It's very helpful to think about your own workplace and consider these very powerful questions:

1. What is a difficult conversation for you? What's difficult for your colleague doesn't matter. What really matters at this point is what the difficult conversation is for you.

2. Who are these difficult conversations with?

3. What makes these conversations so difficult?

There are many examples of the difficult conversation. For some people, the difficult conversation is asking for help. For others, it's a performance issue discussion. For some people, it might be giving constructive feedback or discussing sensitive issues. Some people might find

it difficult talking about money, or perhaps asking for a raise.

For some, difficult conversations are conflict or disagreement type conversations. Who might these conversations be with? I've frequently heard that these conversations can be peer to peer, colleague to colleague, between supervisors or leaders, and employees. It can be between shareholders or board members, or within management teams. A difficult conversation at work can be with pretty much anyone. The same applies in our home life. It might be with our spouse, our children, our neighbours, people that we are in volunteer roles with. Again, the list is pretty endless.

One of my favourite questions is: What makes a difficult conversation a difficult conversation? I have heard so many answers through the years, but the ones that come up the most are:

- History – People bring up history or it feels like they are bringing an incredible amount of baggage or intensity into the conversation.

- Excuses – They get in the way of the conversation moving forward.

- Emotions – The higher the emotion, the more it gets in the way or the more it makes the conversation difficult.

- Blame – When blame comes into the conversation, it can really make the dialogue difficult for everyone involved.

Power or hierarchy in the relationship or organization, and unresolved conflict can also make these conversations really difficult to manage, let alone have the conversation successfully.

To help people work through the different conversations (whatever that might be for you or the other individual you're in dialogue with), I use a Ready*, Set, Grow* approach.

The "Ready" part of managing a difficult conversation, or having that Courageous Dialogue, is our mindset and belief system. Our mindset is absolutely essential. In fact, when I think back to my earlier days of working in corrections, especially with young offenders, I would see youth and staff enter a conversation, and it was very evident as an observer that the individuals had already decided that this dialogue was going to be a write-off. The youth may have decided that he didn't have a chance of expressing his viewpoint to the staff manager. The staff manager may have made some judgment about the young offender that was getting in the way of the dialogue.

As a leader and manager, I saw this as well. Team members would come into a staff meeting with a mindset of unwillingness to listen, or they came in with the mindset of being very positional - that

their answer was the only answer. You've probably experienced that a time or two, where you've gone into a conversation with somebody at work and what you're sensing is that their mindset is not about wanting to have a respectful, integral conversation.

Even now, team member mindsets are obvious to me when facilitating or training. On one occasion, when I was walking into the training room to meet with a team for the second time, I noticed that several people still had their coats on and arms were crossed in front of their chest. They only looked straight ahead and not at each other.

"Mmmm" I thought. To avoid jumping to an assumption, I asked an open question to check out the non-verbal communication I was noticing. "How is the temperature for everyone in here?"

People looked around and said that it was fine. The people with their coats on and arms crossed in front of their chests were silent. I wondered what their behaviour was telling me about their mindset.

"I noticed you have your coats on, how is the temperature for you?" I asked respectfully, carefully avoiding any tone of judgment or assumption in the question.

"It's not the temperature that's the problem," said Mary, looking sideways to Jim (who also had his coat on).

"I don't plan on staying at this meeting too long," said Jim. I now knew that I could rule out the physical air temperature of the room as an issue.

Looking at Jim, I said, "Tell me more about that, Jim."

Jim proceeded to explain that 10 minutes before the training session their supervisor had told them they could only stay for an hour, as he needed their help with a project. As he explained the situation, it was obvious that his mindset was that his training needs didn't matter. It was as though he was thinking and non verbally saying, "Since I am not allowed to be here, I will show everyone I am not allowed to be here."

The supervisor jumped in to defend his decision. Jim and his colleagues were able to voice their concerns pretty respectfully, and they negotiated an alternative plan to get the project needs addressed and allow Jim and his colleagues the opportunity to participate in the training. The supervisor hadn't realized just how important the training was to the staff. This was an example of what they referred to as a "difficult conversation" but they worked through it incredibly well. Minutes later, the jackets were off, the team was engaged and we began the training program.

On the drive home, I found myself wondering what I would have done 10 years ago. I realized that I would have probably avoided addressing the coat issue. The result would have modeled a

conflict avoidance approach, and would have impacted the entire team's ability to engage in the workshop. Sometimes it simply is better to ask the question rather than pretend the situation does not exist. If you can see it, so can others. I have learned that people are far more understanding and forgiving when you are interested and caring, even if the question does not come out how you want it to.

Many people have a predetermined mindset about "difficult conversations." My clients have defined difficult conversations as:

- stressful

- to be avoided

- full of conflict

- painful

And the list goes on. If you develop a mindset that a conversation is going to be difficult, that is probably how the conversation will go…it will be difficult. Likewise, if you decide the conversation is simply that…a conversation, it will be less difficult.

Let's change our thought process regarding these types of dialogues. I have been referring to them as a difficult conversation so that we can come from the same reference point about these types of dialogues. However, from this point on, I prefer not to use the term difficult conversation.

Here's why: I learned that a conversation is simply a conversation. If you put a promotion on it, if you give it a label, if you give it weight and call it a difficult conversation, those thought processes and belief systems create our outcome. When we decide in our minds that this conversation is going to be painful, awful, uncomfortable, maybe it will be stressful or negative or worse: it may turn into a full-blown battle. If that is our mindset, it is very likely that the questions that we ask and the non-verbal communication that we display will match our belief systems.

The same works on the other hand. If you enter this dialogue with hope, with a willingness to listen to the other party, with a desire to share your viewpoint and perceptions in a professional and collaborative way, it is likely that the conversation is going to go down that path. Now, you can not control the mindset of the other individual but, here is the great news: you can control your mindset and that's 50 per cent of the relationship, 50 per cent of the dialogue.

One very useful tip is to enter these conversations with the mindset that they are dialogues. Don't give them promotions; don't give them labels to the difficult conversation level. How we think about the conversation in our mind sets the stage for how we talk about the conversation, and how we deal with the conversation.

Let me give you an example. I was working with one team where a number of individuals on the

team were frustrated. They were overworked, there had been a lot of communication problems within the team, and there were many changes that they were dealing with…and not everybody on the team was embracing these changes with a great deal of excitement.

I was contracted to facilitate a team building process. It was very evident from the pre-team work that I did - and when the team arrived as a group - that there were quite a few individuals that were negative about the process and negative toward one another. That was their mindset. It was clear to me what their thought process was, simply by observing how these individuals entered the room, where they sat, how they took their seat, and how they communicated verbally within the first few minutes of opening the meeting.

Non-verbal communication tells us so much. One important element to note, however, is that there is a lot of room for assumption and mistake by putting too much weight on what a person's non-verbal communication means, or could mean. The mindset shapes the behaviour.

With this team, it took a lot of time and effort to bring them all to the point where we could reduce some of the negativity, and have a productive, meaningful, and valuable conversation as a group.

Isn't that a valuable strategy for when we are preparing to have a conversation that we perceive could be a challenge or uncomfortable?   It is

important to spend some time checking your mindset. What are your beliefs about the other individual? What are the mindsets or beliefs that you have about the situation at hand? You may also want to reflect for a few minutes about what the beliefs are that you think the other person may hold about you. There may be some preparation work that you can do to change your mindset, especially if it is negative. It is worth spending the valuable time changing your mindset from negative to neutral so that you can produce a better environment to have this conversation.

We are taking in information from people all the time. This is something that happens in courageous dialogue, or in conversations that require us to communicate and respond courageously. We do this through observation, through what we hear other people saying, and also through the process of deciphering information and processing it. What we experience often comes out in how we communicate.

Consider the case of a new team that was the product of two departments that had melded together – a common situation. In the group, there was a lot of discussion about people feeling overworked, busy, tired, and overwhelmed. This was an example of the words being used in the team. When I went in to do some training with this group, the words that they were using in their discussions matched their mindsets. We want to be very cognizant of the words that we think about

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because they impact how we then communicate with other people.

The second part of the *Ready, Set, Grow* approach is the *Skill Set*. There are a number of critical skills that we use in courageous dialogue. The first skill is the skill of listening. I often observe people really struggling with this skill. Listening can be difficult even though it is something that we do every day, often unconsciously. Listening is more than simply hearing what the other people are saying. Listening is the process of receiving a message from somebody. Perhaps it is a verbal communication you received that message from someone. While you are listening, you process that information and then communicate back. My colleague Shawne Duperon calls this the back and forth process of receiving and giving as the cycle of reciprocity in the dialogue: one person gives information and the other openly receives the information, processes it, and then responds in a way that is appropriate to the dialogue. This is where we need to be cautious as conversations often go off the tracks because listening can be difficult, especially when emotion, history, or blame come into the conversation.

What I often observed was as one individual was communicating or speaking, the other person seemed not to be listening or hearing what was being said. The person was hearing the words but using that time to plan his retort or what he would say back. That was not really listening.

The challenge is that when the other individual feels unheard, feels that they are not being listened to, or feels that you have somehow zoned out in the conversation, it will affect what comes next because that individual may react instead of respond. Listening is one of the most important skills.

There are a number of things that we can do to enhance our listening skills in the moment.

1. Free yourself from distractions. This could mean simply moving away from your desk so that your computer or your email is not in your view, causing distraction. Take a few minutes before the meeting to transition from what you were last doing to be fully prepared and engaged in the current conversation.

2. Enhancing your listening skills is to simply observe the person while he/she is communicating and when thoughts come into your mind you let yourself know that you can deal with that later. So, keeping eye contact with the individual is very important to the listening process.

3. Pay attention to the messages that your body is sending you. For example, sometimes if you feel highly irritated or agitated from something someone has said, you may have disengaged from the conversation. Move away from the emotion

and approach it with curiosity about why that individual is thinking, feeling, or saying what he or she did.

Feedback to Go Forward!

The next critical skill is the skill (and art) of giving feedback. I like to think of feedback as feedback to go forward. Feedback is a process of feeding back information to affect the next action.

During a training program, an employee said, "The result of feedback really depends on how it is delivered."

Another employee agreed and added, "It also depends on how you respond as the listener or the recipient of the feedback."

Both are true and also important. While we cannot control how someone delivers a feedback message to us, we can control how we hear the message and how we respond. This means that both parties in the conversation have some responsibility to ensure the message is both received and understood the way it was intended.

Here are some valuable tips that will help you when providing feedback to other individuals:

Create a positive intention. Again, you can see here the importance of mindset. Creating a positive intent actually includes a few steps. The first step is to mentally prepare for the conversation. You want to give some thought to elements like the timing of your conversation, when are you going to schedule the opportunity to meet with the individual for feedback? What time of day will you meet? Avoid telling the person on a Friday afternoon that you will meet on Monday. People get extremely stressed about this. In fact, they often think: "Why are you bringing me in on Friday at 3 o'clock in the afternoon to tell me that I have a meeting on Monday at 9 o'clock in the morning, without giving me any details?" The problem with this approach is simply that people will spend the whole weekend stewing about what the dialogue is going to be. If this person is distressed, there is good potential that he or she is going to spend the whole weekend building their camp or getting allies to support them.

When you set up the meeting, briefly point out what you would like to discuss during the meeting and perhaps demonstrate or outline a common goal. Some useful phrases are: *Could we talk about*….and then you fill in the blanks with a topic. Or how about, *Let's look at*…. Or, *I have some thoughts on*….and then fill in the blanks. *I wonder if we could discuss my concerns about…*

The second stage in effective feedback is specifically and accurately describing what you observed. This is really important. We are talking

about what has been observed not what has been assumed. Some of the biggest challenges in conversation are the assumptions that we make. People actually make assumptions very frequently. Unfortunately, most of our assumptions are not accurate or true. Imagine this: we have made an assumption about somebody and have acted on that assumption. But it is not true. Now we have another situation or difficulty to resolve or to deal with!

Be very specific about describing what you observed. Get to the point fairly quickly; this is the point where you focus on the behaviour and not the person. In workplaces especially, feedback quickly becomes a personal issue. Limit your feedback to one behaviour or action. Don't give people the whole menu or the whole list of what is not going well. Be clear, be focused, and be accurate.

When you are providing feedback, explain the impact that his or her behaviour has had on you or the other people. We don't want to speak on behalf of the others, but you do want to be objective and create a link (or describe a link) between their behaviour or action and some of the business needs or challenges so that there is a connection made. It is not just a matter of "I didn't like how you behaved." It is more than that. It might be more like, "I am concerned about how you behaved because this is what I saw happen."

If it is about you, discuss how it has impacted you personally. It is very important in these

conversations that the dialogue is not one-way. This type of dialogue involves the participation of the other individual; it is very useful to include that person or invite them to respond.

Some ways you can engage the other person is by asking questions like: What do you think of what I just said? What's your perspective? What's your take on this issue? How do you view the situation? Tell me your side, how do you see it? All the while you are being objective and listening openly to the response.

Once you have heard the individual describe his or her perspective, it can be very helpful to summarize a few of the key points. That does a couple of things. First of all, it assures that you have heard that person accurately. If, for some reason, your summary didn't capture what that individual thought he or she said, it gives them the opportunity to simply correct it, and that can be very helpful. Second, it ensures that you are both on the same track, so to speak.

Another important element of feedback is the conversation that you are having. It is a back and forth conversation, sharing a perspective. Hopefully what happens during this dialogue is that solutions are starting to surface. There's opportunity for you and the other individual to discuss what to do next. It is important to discuss your expectations and his or her expectations so

that they get managed. Emotions also need to be managed. Of course, you can't control how the other person responds or reacts; all you can do is your part. But doing your part will definitely impact the situation in a more positive or neutral way.

Sometimes in these conversations there is the opportunity to exchange ideas back and forth. Depending on your role or the relationship, there may be the opportunity to provide some pretty obvious or necessary suggestions for behavioural change. If there's uncertainty or a lack of clarity around expectations, this is a great opportunity to actually clarify those.

One of the question people often have is, "What if the individual I'm in conflict or conversation with doesn't even think there's a problem?" Here's the thing, not all problems require both people's agreement that there is actually an issue. You want to state very clearly what you observed and the impact of that behaviour. Be neutral, be calm and remain focused…you want to deal with one issue at a time.

When the problem isn't perceived by both parties, a common challenge occurs when one person pulls out other issues and examples to back up his or her point. The conversation becomes very convoluted and it becomes really difficult to know where to go next. Stay on one issue at a time.

There may be times when the individual says that he or she couldn't have done anything differently…that this was the only choice he or she had. At this point, there may be an opportunity to explore whether there is training or support that this individual may be able to access.

When people make a strong statement, this often creates an environment where people become positional or they become adversarial. Instead of taking that approach, respond with questions.

The six questions that are most critical are: who, what, where, when, why, and how. These are called open-ended questions, and they are very powerful in courageous dialogue. They encourage a couple of important movements. Questions hook the brain and keep the conversation moving. The other beauty of questions is that they help you find out the information that you need in order to resolve a situation.

But people sometimes become emotional. There may be an opportunity to allow a time-out or a cool-down break. It is important to show empathy and be supportive, and also manage your emotions at the time.

Observation is More Than Just Watching

In addition to listening and feedback, one of the other essential skills in courageous dialogue is the skill of observation. Observation is not only observing the other individual's non-verbal communication and actions, it is also observing yourself, paying close attention to how you are behaving, responding, and being impacted in the dialogue. In order for us to observe, we need to be fully present. This is one of the hardest things to do.

There are so many distractions in our work places and our personal lives that we sometimes go into conversations only half-present. The challenge is that we miss a lot of important information in the communication and sometimes we say things that are somewhat off topic, or even inappropriate. Being present helps you demonstrate the skill of observation; observing both non-verbal communication and what is happening to you.

One way to learn how you are being affected in a conversation is to pay attention to the physiological warning signs that our body gives us when we are experiencing distress, confusion or even anxiety. One of the common physiological cues is a change in body temperature. We have all experienced this at some point or another. Your face might go red or you all of a sudden feel that it is hotter in the room. Another physiological warning sign for many people is that their jaw gets tighter or their whole body starts to feel tense. A third is the feelings in

people's stomachs. Sometimes people get those feelings of butterflies or a weak stomach. Another physiological clue is when people get brain freeze. People feel like their brain has shut down…that they can't find the words that they know they need to say.

You may find that you have your own physiological warning signs. What's most important is to understand what your warning signs are and to pay attention to them as they happen. If you're not present, that is going to be very difficult to do.

We've all been involved in one of those conversations where the person we are talking to is getting really upset. Perhaps the other person is becoming agitated or teary and you say, "What's upsetting you?" or "Help me understand that," and their behaviour intensifies. The person may not be aware that he/she is being impacted by the conversation. The conversation can get derailed at this point because the words that are frequently used are *calm down, relax,* or *take a pill,* and none of those actually help to diffuse the situation. In fact, it does the opposite: it enflames it. When we can manage our own behaviour, when we can be self observant, it helps us change the pace and the feeling or environment in the conversation.

Another important skill in courageous dialogue is the skill of speaking. People often do not spend enough time thinking about how they are going to communicate a message in advance. One of the best sways you can prepare for a conversation is to write down the key points that you would like to cover in the dialogue, and then go and rehearse it. Here is the fun part: rehearse it in front of the bathroom mirror. Your family members might think that you are a bit strange for talking to yourself; just let them know that you are doing a little role play with yourself or practicing a conversation. The beauty of practicing in front of a mirror is that you get to observe what your behaviour looks like, how you sound, and what happens to you physiologically when you say certain words or when you get into the conversation. You will notice what the other person notices about you. It helps you to prepare on many levels.

The second part of preparing is to recognize that you do not want to script what the other person is going to say. Often we have this dialogue in our head, it goes like this: I will say this and the other person will respond with that. Here the conversation is being planned in your head and it is so disconcerting and challenging when you get into the conversation in real life with the other individual and what you thought they would say is

not what they actually do or say. That is a very difficult moment because it has thrown you off guard and all of a sudden you need to find words. The other beauty of rehearsing or practicing your part - and only your part - of the conversation is that the words become planted in your brain. If you become stressed or confused in the conversation, but you've rehearsed it over and over again, it's so much easier for your brain to simply pick up the words you need and continue on in the dialogue.

Another skill in courageous dialogue is managing assumptions. It can be useful to actually spend some time thinking in advance, before the conversation, about the assumptions that you have made about that other individual. Free yourself of those assumptions or think of some great questions you can ask to check the assumptions out.

The way we speak to one another is an important skill set in courageous dialogue. It is useful to pay attention to the tone and speed of your voice, and your pitch. One quality that I so appreciated learning about when I was mediating work place conflicts was how a seemingly simple strategy, like me slowing the pace of my own voice would change the environment in the room.

When people are distressed and frustrated or upset about an issue, they typically talk faster and louder. If you, in the dialogue, can simply slow down your speech, add in some pauses, and take your time it reduces the stress level in the environment. Often the individual that you are

talking to will actually mimic your responses, they will mirror how you are behaving. You will be well served to pay attention to how you annunciate words, or how you put emphasis on certain words. When we are frustrated, we often hear people say things like: *you never*, *you should have*, *you always*. What can be valuable is spending time listening to how they annunciate those words. When people are upset, they say *you* in a much more exaggerated fashion. So, pay attention to how you say your words as well as what you say.

One way of thinking about the essential skills for courageous dialogue is the VALUE method.

V- Validate emotions and experience

A- Ask questions (lots of questions)

L- Listen

U- Understand

E- Explore

The V in the value method stands for validating emotions and experiences. Often people in a conversation will repeat the same statement or similar versions of an example over and over again. There is one key reason why people repeat things frequently in conversations: they feel that they have not been heard. What one great tip will alleviate this problem in dialogue? Let the other person know that you have heard them. A couple of ways

to achieve this is to paraphrase, or repeat back in your own words, what you heard them say. Often people get really hung up on paraphrasing correctly. Here is the beautiful thing: if you paraphrase in a way that did not accurately describe what that person said, the good news is he or she is going to put it straight for you. The individual is going to tell you what she really meant. And isn't that what you wanted after all, accurate information? Paraphrasing is one way of validation.

Another way of validating a person's concerns and experiences is to simply do that, validate. There is a difference between validating and agreeing. I would caution you not to agree unless you do agree 100 per cent, though. Validation is such a powerful skill because it not only shows the person that you have listened to them, but that you really get it. Usually, what the person really wants is to know that you get it, not necessarily that you agree with them.

There are a couple of ways that validation works. Simply saying something like, *I can see that issue is a sensitive one for you.* Or, *Judging by what you're saying, it sounds like this topic is a tough one for you to talk about.* Or, *It appears that this is an issue you are quite concerned about*. What you have done is let the individual know that you have heard him and that you understand it is an important issue (for him).

One of the other reasons people repeat things is that there is a tendency to bring up the past. Often in dialogue, as you can imagine, it is difficult to be forward moving when people continue to bring up the past.

Acknowledge the past. Acknowledge what has happened or transpired for this person, and perhaps even for you, and then make a connection with the present or even the future. It might sound like this: "I respect that is how you saw the past or, I understand that this is what you have experienced in the past. How does this connect to what we are talking about now or, how does this connect to where we need to go now in this conversation?" What you are doing is simply providing that connection between the past and where you are in your current-day dialogue.

Now let's look at the next part of the value method. The A stands for asking questions and we have talked about asking the open ended questions. Open questions hook the brain and open up the dialogue. When people are stressed or rushing in a conversation, they tend to default to a close-ended question. Close-ended questions are ones that you answer simply with a yes or a no or request a very small piece of information. They are very powerful questions in confirming data or details, but are not very useful when you are trying to engage the other person in the conversation or trying to find out information that will help you move forward. There

is also a tendency for people to ask a great open-ended question, that starts with who, what, where, when, why, or how. But just before they give the person an opportunity to answer, they close the question off by asking a closed question. This is what that sounds like: "So tell me more about that. You have been talking about your concerns about staff meetings; how did that incident affect you? Did it really bother you?" See how there was an open question which was then followed by a leading and closed question?

Here's a tip: ask one question at a time and let the person answer the question before you move on to add another one. Really try to avoid leading questions. Let the person go where they think they need to go in the conversation, instead of you leading them to the answers you want to hear.

The L value in the value method is *listening*. We've talked a lot about that already, but another point is to pay close attention to how you listen. By this I mean asking yourself if you listen by being fully engaged, do you listen and wait for the person to breathe so you can jump in with your perspective, or do you listen simply to understand?

The U stands for *understanding*. This is one of the most important aspects of the conversation. It's when you take the listening and the speaking and start to make sense of it all. It's where you start to create the mutual understanding between yourself and the other person. One of the powerful skills of creating understanding is listening to the message

behind the message or, listening to what is not being said or shared. We can get hints through non-verbal communication, and the words people use in their dialogue. But as you begin to understand what is important to the individual, you can see opportunities for shared solutions.

The E stands for *explore*. Explore the underlying interests or priorities and concerns. It's like thinking about a dialogue as if it were an iceberg. Research shows that with a real iceberg, we only see about 15 per cent of it above the surface of the water. The bulk of the iceberg is in fact below the surface. The same thing happens in conversation. We only really know about 15 to 20 per cent of what is going on, and most of that is our part. That's what we really know. If we want to move into a deeper more meaningful conversation with this individual, it requires us to explore what is not know or what is not obvious. One of the best ways of doing that is exploring what is important to people.

These are called their interests. Interests are the motivators behind someone's positional statement. When a person puts out a firm statement of what he or she thinks the answer or the solution is, that's an example of a position. You may have been in that situation before, where someone is speaking with you and they have very strong opinions and it feels like they are not going to change their mind or back down. We want to explore the motivators behind that position. When you begin to discover what's important to that individual, you may be surprised.

You may find that some of what you value or are concerned about, or see as very important, is similar to that of the other person. When you find this common ground, it opens the door and paves the way for new solutions to unfold. When this happens, this is the perfect opportunity to capture what it is that you agree on or where there are similarities. You see, little agreements lead to bigger agreements in the conversation.

Conflict Management

About Conflict

Having a long history working in environments that are riddled with conflict, and later becoming a conflict and dispute resolution expert, I know one thing for sure: conflict can be resolved.

When conflict is resolved in a healthy, constructive, and effective manner, it can bring with it significant and positive benefits.

Being trained and skilled at dealing with conflict and courageous dialogue can help companies save a lot of time, a lot of frustration and aggravation,

and a lot of money. Conflict in the workplace is costly. Conflict takes people away from their jobs and tasks. Conflict can also damage relationships. Conflict can consume upward of 40 to 60 per cent of a supervisor's time (that is spent helping people or sorting through conflicts within their team).

People also acquire the skills they need so that they can be effective in resolving their own conflicts. When I was a mediator, my big wish was that someday I would work myself out of a job. I saw a lot of cases come before me where people had resolved the issue, but because they hadn't resolved everything else (the emotions, the relationship, the history, and how do they now work together), the conflict continued to surface and affect them in other ways. Sadly, there are not enough companies investing in helping their employees and leaders learn how to communicate courageously and resolve conflict effectively.

Let's start with the big question. What is conflict? When you hear the word conflict, there are probably words that come to mind for you. Perhaps situations reappear in your mind. There are so many different definitions. In fact, when I was completing my Masters Degree thesis, one of the questions I explored was the definition of conflict. I

found hundreds of definitions. There are also so many perspectives on conflict; people see conflict so differently.

My definition of conflict is derived from working in the correctional system for 15 years and then working as a mediator for about the same amount of time. I was exposed to thousands of conflicts. I now see conflict as the opposition of perspectives, needs, values, interests, and desires between individuals or groups. This can involve incongruence between people and occasions where people do not see things the same way. It is my belief that conflict is not good or bad, nor is it a competition.

People often think that conflict is negative and bad, and should be avoided at all costs. Here's the thing: conflict can actually be something that is very positive. It can help identify new creative

solutions and it can bring to the surface the issue or topics that really need to get explored or talked about. It is not conflict that is good or bad, it is the manner in which we deal with it that can be problematic.

Conflict can also be understood as a divergence of opinions, a difference or opposition in people's values their needs or their beliefs or even in their expectations of one another. Conflict can actually be a motivator for change and personal growth. Many people approach conflict as if it is a contest.

Let's look at this more closely. A contest has two main elements: there is a winner and there is a loser. I don't know about you, but in a contest, most people don't want to lose. I think a lot of people feel the same way in a conflict. It is very important that we do not think of conflict as a contest, because there is going to be a winner and a loser. When people come into a conflict with that mindset that they are going to work really hard to be the winner, that means the person on the other end is going to be doing the exact same thing because they don't want to be the loser. Conflict is a natural occurrence in the workplace. It is a natural occurrence in relationships whether they are relationships at home, between spouses, between parents and children, or between in-laws.

One of the first steps that you can take to effectively deal with conflict is to simply understand that conflict is natural, normal, and is going to happen. If you view conflict in this way,

it's not as big of a surprise when the conflict rears its ugly head and surprises you one day at work. You will likely find it a little easier to deal with and less likely to avoid the conversations that matter most and are mostly avoided.

Conflict Can Be Messy

When conflict is not well managed, it can have many impacts. For example, poorly managed conflict can damage working relationships. As a mediator, I witnessed this frequently. People found themselves in a conflict, avoided the conversations that they needed to have, the conflict grew, more people became involved, and at the end of the day, relationships were sometimes damaged. In some cases, people transferred out of a unit or left an organization because they simply could not get past what had happened and their relationships were not strong enough to support them in staying.

The second outcome of poorly managed conflict is that productivity can suffer and effectiveness declines. In workplace conflicts, there is often so much emphasis on the conflict itself that it takes people away from their jobs, and their daily functions can impact the organization's success.

Another challenge that results from poorly managed conflict is that safety concerns increase. For many years, I instructed a course called Workplace Violence Prevention and Intervention. This course dealt with many aspects of workplace violence. Not just those of a physical or aggressive nature, but those that involve issues like bullying, verbal abuse, and abusive communication.

When conflict is not being addressed, (or when it is being addressed but in an ineffective manner), attention to safety often declines. There are increased numbers of near-misses and safety infractions because people are too wrapped up in the emotion and the stress of the conflict, and are easily distracted instead of focusing on safety. There have been cases, sadly enough, where a conflict was not being well managed in a workplace and it became a physically aggressive situation.

Morale declines quickly when conflict is being avoided or poorly managed. In interpersonal conflicts between two people, often those involved build their army and their alliances. Colleagues and co-workers pick the side of the fence that they want to be on, his side or her side. What happens in this process of building camps is that morale declines and it ripples out well beyond the people that are directly involved in the conflict. In a workplace conflict that is really between two people, often the conflict grows to involve the others, if not the whole team in a short period of time,

There is good news! When conflict is well managed, and better yet, well-managed and dealt with early, there are some tremendous benefits. The first benefit is that relationships can be enhanced. In fact, relationships can also be repaired and even improved to a degree where trust has been restored between people.

Another benefit of well-managed conflict is the creativity that occurs. The positive energy that happens and the creative solutions that are put on the table can be amazing. It has been so interesting to watch two people - who in the past, that could barely look at each other let alone have a conversation - and through the process they became excited about the ideas and the possibilities that were in front of them. Creativity and synergy is another impact of a well-managed conflict.

One of the other benefits is that communication improves. Often in conflict, and you see this all the time in families, people get into these communication patterns. People often communicate in ways that do not necessarily serve them well but because it's become a habit people do it anyway.

When employees or employees and supervisors participate in a more formal or more structured conversation about a conflict or an area of concern,

they actually build and strengthen their communication skills.

Isn't that a great benefit for these two people in conflict? If they come up with another challenge or an issue in the future, they've not only built trust with each other, but have also built an expectation of how they each want to be communicated with by the other person.

The Many Faces of Workplace Conflict

To understand how to deal with conflict, we first need to understand the different types of conflicts or disputes that arise in the workplace. This list is certainly not an inclusive list but it gives you an idea of some of the conflicts that we can expect to happen at work.

The first type of conflict that is common in workplaces is *working-style differences*. There are different working-styles, according to Hal Stacks and other theorists. Some people have very much of a driver working-style. They are task and end result focused. They come in focused on the end result or outcome. Then there are people that have more of an analytical style. They are very process-oriented and systematic about their approach. They require detail and logic to make decisions, or to understand situations that are going on around them.

Then we have folks in the workplace that are more focused on the harmony and the peace, and the relationships. They are most concerned about their colleagues or their team members. We also have the real creators or visionaries in the workplace. You know who they are. They are the big picture thinkers, the ones that really get turned on by brainstorming. They are the visionaries, but not necessarily the doers, so they require support from someone to step in and help them, take the idea to an actual action.

These different working styles often clash and the differences create conflict. I had a job early in my career where the work environment was an open concept, with cubicles. Needless to say, I found it a difficult environment to work in. I was constantly observing how quickly the tension would build between working styles that were different. In fact, when people work in very close proximity to one another, the working styles often clash.

Many years ago, I worked with someone that was very structured and analytical in her approach to work. She was so organized; I remember being envious of how she approached her work. I tend to be a bit more creative and on the big-picture, visionary end of the spectrum. Quite frankly, I think I drove this person nuts because she was so logical and structured in her approach and I would come in with these great ideas that I wanted to move into action. Part of what we needed to do to work together more effectively was to find a way to

communicate and collaborate so that it didn't cause stress for either of us.

Another reason that people get into conflict is because of history. Every workplace has history. Every employee has history. Every leader has history. We each come to the job with a different set of values, a different belief system. We were raised differently where our families dealt with conflict differently. All of these experiences in life shape our perspective, the way we see the world and others. They also form our opinions, our assumptions and our perceptions.

Now, let's talk more about assumptions because they are a big part of conflict. Assumptions really get in the way of effective communication and conflict resolution. What we need to understand about assumptions is that the assumptions we make are mostly wrong. If we are acting on our assumptions, we are really just creating another conflict we have to deal with. When assumptions are not clarified, they can lead to conflict.

What about communication styles? Would you say that communication styles are another contributor to conflict? If you are nodding you head, I would absolutely agree with you. People communicate in different ways. Sometimes people need a long time to get their thoughts organized in a way that they can express them. There are people on the other end of the spectrum who are patiently waiting for someone to stop talking so they can jump in and put their perspective on the table.

There are also people that need to provide a number of examples to get their point across. Some people communicate in a way that is short and sweet and right to the point, maybe even direct.

The differences in the ways in which people communicate can often lead to conflict as well, just like our personality differences. What about professional backgrounds? Does our training, expertise, and the experiences we've had professionally impact conflict? I think it does! Where we come from shapes how we see the world and other people, and this often leads to disagreement.

Information and data is another contributor. The lack of information or the lack of data can also contribute to conflict. Cultural differences - not just ethnicity, but also organizational or workplace culture - can create disagreement or lead to conflict. Roles that we have in the organization can impact conflict. Role confusion is a common source of workplace conflict. When people are not clear about their own jobs and the roles that others perform in the workplace, it can create dissention between people, and sometimes even distrust.

What we want to know, without creating a huge list, are the many reasons that conflicts and disputes occur in the workplace. Often, they are a result of miscommunication between people, or where people are misunderstood and the opportunity to correct the situation is not pursued.

Understanding your own attitudes and the responses that you take toward conflict is critical. How people *think* about conflict is how they *do* conflict.

If someone thinks that conflict - and the conversation to resolve it - is stupid, a waste of time, or unnecessary, and just a game in a silly practice that isn't going to go anywhere, then that is typically how that person will talk about the conflict and resolve it.

I have seen this many times: a person comes in with a certain frame of mind. He or she is uncommitted to the conversation, and therefore, uncommitted to an outcome.

The person who sees conflict as an opportunity to have a respectful dialogue and to resolve some difficulties will most likely cope with the conflict in the same way. That person is more willing to listen to the other perspective, more comfortable sharing his or her own take on the situation, and likely a lot more committed to finding a solution that will work for both people. So, really understanding your own attitudes and your response toward conflict is absolutely the first step in addressing conflict.

Throughout life, especially as children, people have modeled different skills, attitudes, and approaches to dealing with conflict. As a youngster, you saw people on the playground who avoided conflict, people who ran and told the

teacher that something was going on, a student that automatically stepped in as the natural peace maker…a natural mediator. There were also people that were more assertive or even more aggressive, and then there were other people that so wanted to find the peace that they compromised.

Applying this concept to conflict management styles, we recognize that there are people who avoid conflict, there are people that address it head on as they are very driver-focused, there are people that want to conciliate and compromise, and there are other people who want to work together to collaborate to resolve the conflict. Sometimes there is a style, called accommodating, where we give in to get something back in return from that person.

How does the conflict cycle really begin? In my experience, there is a four-point cycle that usually occurs.

The first point is when someone has the "Ah Ha" moment, where it becomes apparent that a conflict has just occurred or they feel that they had been wronged by somebody. Typically when this happens, that individual - after identifying that there has been a wrongdoing or a conflict - tells the other person. Sometimes the way in which this communication occurs is not necessarily respectful. But the first part is knowing or identifying that something has gone on or that a conflict has occurred.

The second point in the cycle is the finger-pointing. The individuals assign blame to one another, or other people altogether. They will say something to the effect of, "You're wrong, I'm right." A back and forth type conversation focuses on blame instead of understanding what has transpired. The need for someone to either own-up and take responsibility or accept the blame increases. That's where the conversation halts instead of going deeper to try and figure out what really transpired, including how people saw the

conversation and the dispute so that they can move forward.

Read the following situation and give some thought to what type of conflict this is. What are the different styles of conflict management that you are noticing?

Jack is a 10 year employee with a manufacturing organization. This is a company that runs twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, so there is a day shift, afternoon shift, and night shift.

Jack is coming in for a night shift; he is not overly energized or excited about it. He arrives and scans the room. Jack immediately notices that his workplace has not been cleaned or organized and the shift inspection sheet was not completed. The safety and communication book has not been updated by the shift that he was going to be relieving, either. He rolls his eyes.

Here's where it all begins. Rather than Jack advising his colleague that there is an issue or a concern, he does something a little different. He approaches the colleague that he is going to be relieving and this is what he says: "I am sick of this! Why can't you people on dayshift just do your job? I'm tired of coming in and having to clean up after you guys and I'm tired of having to do your paperwork. Just do it, get it done!" He tossed the clipboard at his colleague as he storms off.

Jack has decided that Sandy is the problem. He has not had a conversation with her about this, but

he has just decided that it has to be Sandy because she often works before he does (possible assumption). He also blames the management for not having to work in the trenches and to see how thing really get done.

Now Sandy happens to be coming in for the night shift to cover for a colleague who was leaving early due to being sick. Jack spots Sandy and says to her, "You know, it'd be nice to come into work and have stuff cleaned up and get your job done. What do you guys do on afternoons? Just sit around, read the newspaper, drink coffee, and watch the soaps?"

As you can imagine, Sandy is not impressed with Jack's comments. So she reacts, she assigns blame, and mutters, "Jerk," under her breath. She walks away, and the anger intensifies in her. Sandy approaches Jack and starts to point fingers. She tells him all the things that he has ever forgotten to do in the number of years that they have worked together. It was as though it was all documented in her mind. The conversation happens in a way that Jack and Sandy are pushing each other's buttons and pointing fingers about everything that has ever gone wrong. The whole conversation becomes a battle of will, who's right and who's wrong. By the end of the conversation, Jack and Sandy do not even know what they were in conflict about. The root becomes lost in all of the other details.

Does this situation sound familiar to you? Maybe you were not talking about what did or did not get

done, or what people should or shouldn't do on their shift, but does this dynamic sound familiar? Something feels like a wrong-doing, fingers get pointed and blame gets assigned, and then this verbal argument builds.

Many situations begin by people not properly expressing their concern and why they are upset (to the person it involves). It becomes this type of verbal pushing match and who's right, who's wrong. The past gets dug up to support their position.

The Conflict Check Up

Sometimes the way that we look at the problem is really the problem. This statement reminds us of the importance of perceptions, belief systems and the attitudes that we bring into conflict situations and discussions that are related to conflict.

Let's take a short Conflict Check-Up. Do you believe that conflict can damage relationships? What about improving relationships? Do you believe that conflict can improve a relationship between people?

1. Do you believe that conflict should be avoided at all costs, or do you think that conflict is part of life and that you need to have the conversations around conflicts so that you can resolve them?

2. Do you believe that conflict is highly related to status and power or hierarchy? Or, do you see conflict as more related to differences in belief systems and differences in perceptions?

3. Do you belive that there is nothing to be gained from conflict and that discussion should be avoided at all costs? Or, do you see conflict as generating opportunities for growth and learning?

4. Do you see conflict being highly connected to blame and finger-pointing?

5. Do you see conflict as an opportunity for understanding and deepening the conversation so that you can come to some form of agreement?

6. Has your experience with conflict been one that feels like a contest, where there are winners and losers? Or has conflict been more related to conversations that have brought about good solutions?

In conflict, the attitude we take on is so important. One of the things that I observe is how people enter the room. The way people walk into a room often shapes how the conversations and even their outcomes work.

For example, I remember a case where two colleagues were in a dispute, and it had been quite a long time that they hadn't been talking to each other, even though they worked in the same office. Believe it or not, this is not all that uncommon. However, these two individuals entered the office displaying two very different mindsets.

One person had a mindset that this is a waste of time. The non-verbal language clearly communicated that to me and the other person. He thought that it was a waste of time and that it was useless… a conversation that shouldn't and didn't need to happen.

The other person had quite a different perspective. This individual had been quite stressed as a result of the conflict and really wanted to resolve the situation and get some relief from the stress that the situation was causing that person.

Two very different mindsets. What I noticed in the conversation was that very quickly their mindset shaped their behaviour. The individual that was not committed to the conversation wouldn't look at the individual in conversation, unless it was to point fingers or try to blame the individual. He shrugged his shoulders quite a bit, and did not commit to the outcome. The person that was largely committed to the process (the conversation), and to getting the

situation resolved, was fully engaged in the conversation.

We really need to develop an attitude of resolution. No matter how good the process is that you use to resolve the issue, or how strong your skills are, if you go into a conversation and your attitude is not one of resolution, then it is highly unlikely that you will are going resolve the situation.

Consider some of the warning signs that indicate that conflict might be happening in the workplace. Warning signs are often overlooked, but when you take notice, you can prevent the conflict from worsening.

One of the first warning signs we see is changes in relationships and performance. This can look different for different people, however, it might mean that people simply are not performing, or their performance standards are not up to their typical standard, and there has been a decline in their performance. Areas of an individual's work that were once strengths for him or her may have now become a challenge.

The second sign that conflict might exist in the workplace is that individuals and team members are disengaging. People may be avoiding one another, or not taking coffee breaks together anymore. People may leave the room when certain individuals arrive, or there

may be disengagement from tasks that have been previously enjoyable and rewarding. The energy may be different in the group or in the team, or perhaps people are nose-down and just focusing on the job. You might also see a decline in involvement in workplace events such as training or social events that happen. We can watch for disengagement in the workplace and also look for patterns.

A third area that we can use as a conflict check-up is people leaving their jobs. I recently read an intriguing Human Resources report about conflict and the role that it plays in people leaving their place of employment. Unresolved conflict was close to the top of the list, even above wages, salary, and other types of benefits that are important to people. For organizations and businesses that conduct exit interviews (interviews conducted when people leave or are considering leaving), continue doing so…that information is crucial! I commend the organizations and business that not only do exit interviews but actually follow up and take action on the feedback that they receive from people.

The fourth aspect of the conflict check up is increased sick times, increased stress leaves, and increased time away from the job. It is beneficial to look closely at what is going on and determine out why there is a difference in the pattern. Seek to understand why people are off more than they are at work.

Another area that we see is safety infractions or distraction from the job. This may be similar to performance issues, but when there is conflict in the workplace and it isn't being resolved or addressed appropriately, people are more apt to be careless in their work, they take bigger risks, and that jeopardizes the safety of the individual as well as the others that work with him or her.

Another section of the conflict check-up is the relationships between people. Are you seeing added stress between people? Perhaps their conversations have become a bit sharper or there's a tone of frustration in the way people communicate together. Watching for those changes can be a big warning sign that something needs to be addressed or communicated in the workplace.

How people are working together (or not working together) is another warning sign to pay close attention to. Are team members working cooperatively, is there a feeling of collaboration in the workplace, or is there a lack of cooperation and dissention building between individuals.

Negative gossip often happens in many workplaces and is certainly worth paying attention to. Another warning sign is when there is blatant exclusion of people. For example, when an individual is just not invited to a work social, or when they are excluded

from other events that are happening in the workplace.

An obvious alert to pay attention to is people's behavioural patterns. Are you noticing changes in how people are behaving with one another? Are you seeing changes in an individual's own behavioural patterns? For example, if you have a colleague or a team member that is always quite lively and positive and that person is now coming into work negative and edgy and really difficult to be around that is a change in their pattern, a change in their style. This is an important conversation to have with the other individual. It might just be a feedback conversation but we want to query the change. When there are changes in the workplace it is an opportunity to explore what is going on. The last warning sign to monitor is grievances or people are putting in formal complaints that are being initiated.

A few other warning signs that are important to add to your list are history and repetition. History is the degree to which employees are bringing up the past…are they doing it a lot more than usual? Has the past become like ammunition for a current situation? If so, that is a definite warning sign and something you want to address, perhaps even by providing feedback and inviting the conversation about why history is connected to the present day situation(s).

Finally, notice if people repeat the same comment or concern over and over again. When people are repeating something over and over and over again it is usually being repeated because they feel they haven't been heard. Taking time to acknowledge someone or actually hear them, to query their concern, can have a significant impact for that person. It might provide you with information that you require to better understand what is going on in the workplace, and the team.

Thinking back in your place of work, what are some of the warning signs you have seen that conflict is prevalent and requiring attention? It might be helpful at this point to jot a few down so that the content is really applicable to what you see in your workplace.

A Close Look Into Conflict

As we begin to explore the actual process to address and manage conflict, there are a few questions to consider:

- How much time am I spending involved in conflicts of my own (how much unproductive time, worrying time, lost time)?
- How are conflicts impacting my relationships with others (personal and work)?

- How much time are others at work spending in conflict?
- What is the usage of sick time, leaves, increased benefits, etc. as a result of conflict?
- How does our organization typically respond to conflict (e.g. avoid, ignore, deal with it as soon as possible)?
- How prepared is our organization in understanding conflict, responding to and effectively managing it?
- How well trained are we as an organization to effectively, respectively and collaboratively deal with conflict?
- Have we lost employees as a result of the workplace climate or unresolved/amount of conflicts?
- Have we had missed opportunities, stifled creativity or the feeling of being "stuck" as a result of conflicts remaining unresolved?

When it comes to managing the dance of conflict, there are a few terms that we need to fully understand. The first is "issue". An issue, simply put, is the topic of the conflict, or what needs to be resolved (the problem that needs to be solved).

The second term is "interest". An interest is an underlying motivator behind a person's position. A position is an individual's answer or solution to the problem.

Sounds simple, right? In theory: Yes. In practice: No.

"Some of the most common issues (problems to be solved) in workplaces are issues like finances, roles, schedules, deadlines, use of space, relationships, communication just to name a few," said Sally, a workshop participant. Sally did a great job of painting the picture of the sources of conflict. But this was just the surface of the large number of issues identified by teams I have worked with.

Interests are the motivators behind a person's strong position (their identified solution), and can involve concerns, hopes, expectations, fears, assumptions, values and beliefs, history and fears.

When in conversation during conflict, you can work to understand one another's interests, and the door opens up to workable solutions. What is most

powerful is that often during a respectful dialogue, the conversation identifies shared interests - interests that are important to both or all parties - which makes finding a mutually satisfactory solution much easier to confirm and agree upon.

Interest-based conflict management is a process of resolving conflicts by focusing on interests (concerns, needs, motivators, beliefs, and values) rather than rights and entitlements. It is a process of working collaboratively to resolve the issue by identifying individual and shared interests as well as common interests.

Example of Workplace Conflict

Subject of conflict (issue): *Creating an employee fitness and locker room.*

Positions (what both parties see as the solution):

Employer	Employees
We do not need fitness room!	We need a locker area and fitness area for staff.

Interests (motivators behind the position that surfaced during the conversation):

Employer	Employees
• I need my company	• We function better

to operate in most economical way (lounges cost money). • Staff needs to focus on jobs (belief). • If I give them a fitness room, they will want more from me (fear). • Employees need more, not less discipline (expectations). • I feel like I am being taken advantage of.	when we are rested, positive, healthy and feel management cares about our needs. • Comfortable places for relaxation will make us more productive. • If they can afford executive suites, they can afford a fitness area for us. • If management trusts us (and supports us) we'll be able to make more of a contribution to the company. • I feel unsupported and unacknowledged.
• Efficient working environment. • Responsible and productive employees. • Feel good about self as an employer. • Run a successful company.	• Peaceful and healthy working environment. • To be responsible, trusted and productive in my work (and perceived that way by management). • Feel good about self as an employee. • To grow personally and be a part of a successful company (contribute).

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Think of interests as being the motivators that are hidden to us. Some say that 15 per cent is what we see and observe and the remainder lies below the surface.

Skills for Conflict Resolution

Discussing conflict requires people to communicate courageously, as discussed in the earlier potion of this book. The essential skills for managing conflict effectively are:

- courageous dialogue
- listening
- paraphrasing
- questioning
- empathy

Want Better Answers? Ask Better Questions!

There is a knack to asking good questions. Most frequently in conflict related discussions, those in conflict ask questions that are closed, leading, or assuming or judgmental, all of which slow down the process of resolution and speeds up the frustration factor. Asking good questions is a skill and takes practice. Here are some tips for asking good questions…the way to get better answers.

- Create questions that are relevant, challenging, honest and integral.
- Avoid leading questions (that embeds your assumption, judgement or solution).
- Avoid questions that cause someone embarrassment or to lose face in front of others.
- Choose your words carefully (people will not remember the exact words you used but will remember how the words left them feeling).
- Give people time to reflect and answer.
- Read the "vibes" after you ask a question.

Applying the Communication Skills in Conflict

Paraphrasing:

This speaking skill helps you, the listener, show that you have understood the speaker's message and intent by repeating the content of what was heard, in your own words. Paraphrasing serves as a "check-in" to make sure that the message being conveyed is being not only heard, but understood without being rude, condescending or parroting. Here are some starters to use when paraphrasing in conversation:

"What you are saying is…"

"I am hearing you talk about…"

"Let me see if I got it. You are saying that…"

"So you mean that…"

"Let me make sure that I get it..."

Sometimes we capture feelings in our paraphrases:

"You are …" (angry, hurt, sad, frustrated, disappointed, etc.)

"You feel…"

"This has made you feel…"

Showing concern, interest and empathy:

It is effective to show that you understand (or are trying to understand) what it is like to be in his or her situation.

"So you feel_____ because_____."

"So this situation caused you to feel _____."

"It seems that you feel_____ because_____."

"When _____happened, you felt _____."

"You are _____ about _____."

Questions:

This is an important skill for understanding other people's perspectives, finding out more information, and getting a better handle on what is important to the speaker. The intent is to elicit more information and deeper understanding. These are open type questions.

"What happened when…?"

"How does that impact…?"

"What are the details on …?"

"What was the motivating factor when…?"

Summarizing the conversation:

Sometimes people give you a lot of information in a short time. Summarizing helps to clarify aspects of the discussion and details that have surfaced during the conversation, allows enhanced focus, points out what has been discussed so far, and allows for further processing. Summarizing is a good way to end the discussions about one topic before heading into another.

"Let's go over what we talked about so far…"

"Let's see if I understand everything up to now…"

"Let me summarize what I think I have heard so far…"

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"I'll just take a moment here to recap what has gone on to this point…"

"I just want to make sure I get this from your perspective. What I understand to this point is…."

"Let's make sure that I have it all straight from your perspective…"

"We've covered a lot of ground so far. Just to make sure I am on track, let me say it back..."

Reframing:

Reframing helps identify people's underlying interests (hopes, fears, values, concerns, beliefs, needs, etc.). Instead of casting everything in a negative light, John Haynes suggests that we have people tell us what they do want or need instead of what they don't.

"So you really believe in…"

"It is important to you that…"

"_____ is something that is very important to you."

"You seem to appreciate it when…happens."

The Five Step Process to Managing Conflict

Steps	Specific Tasks
1. Preparation	- Free yourself of assumptions, biases and preconceived solutions. - Think in advance about how to set the conversation up for success. - Think of the styles of conflict management and what approach may be most suitable.
2. Create a collaborative environment	- Create a comfortable environment that has privacy. - Decide where and when to meet. - Invite them to speak first. - Create statements of hope, and show interest in resolving the issues. - Using respectful communication styles
3. Define issues and common interest (find common ground)	- Determine what is to be discussed/resolved (agenda). - Discuss issues from each perspective. - Find out where you have needs/interests in common (where they dovetail).
4. Options, ideas and	- Once you and the other person understand each

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alternatives	other, your perspectives and the issue, as well as what you have in common on the issue, brainstorm some ideas that could meet the needs and resolve the issues.
5. Cooperate and come to an agreement.	- From the brainstormed list, agree upon a solution that will work in the situation and one that you can both live with.

In summary:

Step One: Preparation

- Dealing with emotions ahead of time enables you to be able to discuss issues calmly and respectfully. Anticipate challenges in advance. Consider how you will start the conversation. Think about what is important to you and the other person as it relates to the conflict. What questions could you ask the other person? How will you show understanding and empathy?

Step Two: Creating a collaborative environment

- This involves reviewing ground rules, clarifying commitment to resolve issue, and making sure the right parties are at the table. It also involves creating an atmosphere conducive to problem solving.

Step Three: Define the issue. Explore why they need what they want. Find out where differences dovetail.

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- Sometimes people in conflict want the same solution or outcome, but for different reasons. Individual differences in personality, purpose and interests create a divergence of needs, but you only find this out by exploring.

Step Four: Consider options/alternatives

- Sometimes win-win (mutually satisfactory) solutions are easy to find. However, there will be many occasions when this type of resolution takes a great deal of effort. Looking at why people want a certain outcome will assist in discovering the options to address the "whys".

Step Five: Co-operate to agreement

- After the options have been explored and the parties are treating one another as partners instead of opponents, agree on the best options that were identified and create a plan for action. Do you need to have a written agreement or commitment? Will you meet again to review how it is working for you? What if the individuals don't keep up their agreement, how will you handle this?

After giving great thought to how I wanted to conclude this book, it seemed appropriate that it would be with my most powerful life and business lessons. It is my hope that through my learnings, your team will be more resilient and inspired.

- Get rid of the notion of perfectionism, I strive for excellence. I am not perfect; in fact I now describe myself as a recovering perfectionist. The difficulty with perfection is that you miss opportunities to learn, grow and change.
- Life is too short to be unhappy at work. Focus on all that is good and influence what you can to change what is not. Your work environment will be much more positive.
- When you are working in your passion and purpose, life and work feels less effortless.
- Conflict is neither good nor bad, it simply is. An hour spent today having the courageous dialogue or the conversation that is mostly avoided but most important, will save you hours next week.
- Carefully choose your battles. Once words are spoken, you can never take them back. People remember how your words made them feel, even if they forget everything else.
- Sincerity and authenticity go a long way in building relationships and forgiveness after difficulty.
- Building a resilient and inspired team involves risks. If you never take the risk, you will never get passed the start line. You and the team will

miss opportunities to grow, build, change and connect.

- It is important to learn to be comfortable doing the ASK. If you don't take the risk, and ASK, the answer is always NO.

- We spend a lot of time at work…make the moments matter!

Wishing you well on your daily journey to bounce forward….and communicate courageously.

Charmaine

To order the complete Bounce Forward book, contact our office www.hammondgroup.biz
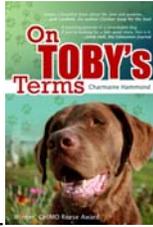
On Toby's Terms (published by Bettie Youngs Books) was released September 27, 2010 and has been signed to become a motion picture.

When Charmaine and her husband adopted Toby, a five-year-old Chesapeake Bay Retriever, they figured he might need some adjusting time, but they certainly didn't count on what he'd do in the meantime.

Soon after he entered their lives and home, Toby proved to be a holy terror that routinely opened and emptied the hall closet, turned on water taps, pulled and ate things from the bookshelves, sat for hours on end in the sink, and spent his days rampaging through the house.

Oddest of all was his penchant for locking himself in the bathroom, and then pushing the lid of the toilet off the tank, smashing it to pieces.

After a particularly disastrous encounter with the knife-block in the kitchen - and when the couple discovered Toby's bloody paw prints on the phone - they decided that Toby needed professional help. Little did they know what they would discover about this dog.

On Toby's Terms is an endearing story of a beguiling creature who teaches his owners that, despite their trying to teach him how to be the dog they want, he is the one to lay out the terms of being the dog he needs to be. This insight would change their lives forever.

Simply a beautiful book about life, love and purpose. ***—Jack Canfield, Co-author of Chicken Soup for the Soul***

A captivating, heartwarming story and we are very excited about bringing it to film. ***—Steve Hudis, Producer, IMPACT Motion Pictures***

Toby has been one of my all time favorite interviews, right next to Bob Barker and Gordie Howe! ***—Mindy Tweedle, Producer / Host***

Charmaine is writing a three part children's series based on the adventures of Toby, published by Bettie Youngs Books.

Charmaine and her colleague Debra Kasowski are co-authoring *GPS Your Best Life*, published by Bettie Youngs Books, scheduled for a 2012 release.

She is also co-authoring *In Other Words* with colleague Michele Luit, scheduled for a 2012 release.

About the Author

Charmaine Hammond is an international transformational speaker, trainer and facilitator, helping businesses to build inspired and resilient teams.

As the President of Hammond International Inc., Charmaine helps individuals, teams, businesses, government departments, and corporations improve resilience and inspired performance. An expert in team relations, resilience, communication, and conflict resolution, Charmaine helps identify and resolve what gets in the way of success and bouncing forward™!

An interesting career path would be one way of describing Charmaine's background. Her first careers were as a Correctional Officer and Mediator. Following her passion for conflict resolution, Charmaine received a Master's Degree in Conflict Analysis and Management, mediating family, community and corporate disputes. She has owned her business for fourteen years.

In addition to being author of *On Toby's Terms*, she is a contributing author to *Chicken Soup: What I Learned from the Dog* featuring her dog, Toby. Charmaine is conducting book signings throughout the US and Canada.

Charmaine is passionate about paying it forward. She volunteers at a local hospital with her dog, is active with many community projects and enjoys being full-on in service to others.

Resolving conflicts and building teams behind bars and in boardrooms as a former Correctional Officer and Mediator, Charmaine helps you overcome the three most challenging workplace issues: conflict, communication and team relationships.

Charmaine is a well sought-after speaker, these topics being the most popular:

- The Resilient Team: Igniting Resilience at Work
- Courageous Dialogue
- Teamwork by Design, Not by Default
- Turning Confrontation to Conversation
- Conflict Management for Supervisors/Leaders - Leading Through Conflict
- SUCCESSion Planning
- The ASK that Makes the Difference
- Bounce Forward™ in Business - The Resilient Business

Charmaine also co-presents a PAWsitive series with her dog Toby, the star of her new book, and soon to be made motion picture!

- Toby on a PAWsitive Attitude

- Toby on Working with Passion

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- The 4 PAWS Team - Toby Builds Healthy Teams

To book Charmaine to speak or train, contact her office by visiting www.hammondgroup.biz.

Sign up for her FREE e-newsletter! It is full of free information to boost your business and build your team.

Listen to Charmaine's Radio Shows:

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http://www.blogtalkradio.com/charmainehammond

PAWsitive Radio (all things Pets)
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Your Book As a Business
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978-0-9811466-3-8