

## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

### “ON THE SPOT”

Conflict sometimes shows itself in the most unexpected circumstances. Each of us has to face tough “on the spot” situations with an irritable spouse, a difficult co-worker or supervisor, a rigid neighbor, etc. Under stress, even kind, reasonable people turn into angry, intractable opponents. If you are able to remember these steps, and learn these skills, they will serve you well next time conflict shows itself unexpectedly.

#### 1. Don't React, Listen Actively

Controlling your initial emotions and reactions is your first goal. It is also the most difficult to achieve. We do not even realize we are reacting because we are too enmeshed in the situation. The best way to check our reaction is to learn, practice and use active listening skills.

Why is it important to learn these skills? First, because they help you control your reactions, and they lower the defensiveness of the other person, it encourages the flow of relevant information, and sets the stage for solving the problem. So instead of reacting, you can learn to:

#### Listen

Be focused in the moment. Do not interrupt the other. Focus on what people are saying and don't let yourself get stuck on any one point. Do not make suggestions or answer questions at this point. Avoid lecturing, moralizing, advising, judging, agreeing or disagreeing. Conquer your defensiveness.

#### Paraphrase

Keep the focus on the speaker. “Let me see if I understand...” Restate in your own words what the person is saying. Reflect both content and feeling, whenever possible and appropriate. Be brief, much more than the speaker.

#### Ask Neutral Questions

Ask neutral and open-ended questions. Avoid leading or judgmental questions that suggest blame or disapproval.

*Remember: you are doing something that the other party isn't expecting. They will be surprised and less defensive. If you keep using these skills a minimum of 5 minutes, you have changed the name of the game from one of expected confrontation to one of collaboration.*

## 2. Reframe the Problem

At this point, instead of rejecting the other's position, you need to direct his/her attention to the problem. You can do this by reframing the problem. Reframing means putting a problem-solving frame around the other's positional statements. Reframing focuses attention on the interests of each side, the options for satisfying them, and the standards of fairness for resolving differences.

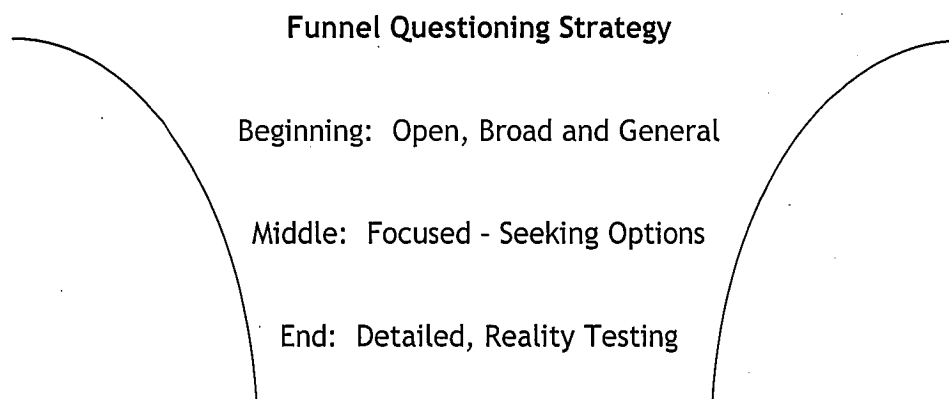
You can start reframing a problem by listing the issues that are affecting both of you as a common problem to be solved. It is possible that just listing the issues and options available bring a solution that is acceptable to everyone involved. Sometimes it is necessary that you continue problem-solving.

## 3. Assert your Interest and Goals Respectfully

Once you have listened actively to the other and reframed the problem, you can identify your interest in a clear, objective and respectful way. If the other person interrupts, stop for a moment and continue where you were. If there are more interruptions, remind the person that you listened carefully to him/her and that you'd like to have an opportunity to do the same.

## 4. Involve the other in Problem-Solving

Try to involve the other in identifying alternatives that would address his/her interest AND yours. Use the "funnel strategy" to ask questions and narrow it down. If necessary, act as an agent of reality.



## 5. Make it Easy to Say Yes, Difficult to Say No

Find the best alternative and then ask the person if s/he can commit to it. Ask questions like: "is this something you can live with?" Also use hypothetical questions such as: "if we find a way to address this issue, would you be willing to...?" etc. Highlight how the alternative found is better than the option of not getting an agreement.