

MOVE FROM CONFLICT TOWARD LOVE

Few things influence the quality of our lives more than the quality of our relationships. People often forget this and fail to approach this part of their lives thoughtfully.

When relationships work, life often seems wonderful. When relationships *don't* work, life can feel like a meaningless grind. Frustration and resentment can lead to pointless arguments with friends and family members. We might feel trapped, angry, and lost about what to do.

Sometimes people even avoid resolving conflict. They maintain their upset with someone in an attempt to force that person to change. However, living with continual upset is a high price to pay and often inconsistent with telling the truth.

When conflict with other people moves you toward tears or shouting, you can use the following suggestions to move toward love.

Go for win-win

The word *conflict* is defined as “a fight, battle, or struggle.” In a battle, there is usually only one winner. Everyone else loses—the classic “win-lose” scenario. Going for “win-lose” is one way to deal with relationship conflict.

Another option is “win-win.” When we pursue this option, we lay down our weapons, stop doing battle, and focus solely on solving problems. Using peaceful and creative approaches, we can create solutions that work for everyone involved.

With win-win in mind, we can stop playing the game of “us” versus “them.” What’s left is “we”—a mind-set that allows everyone to define the problem at hand and offer solutions.

Permit conflict

When we allow people to vent their feelings and bare their frustrations, we might feel that the conflict is just getting worse.

Often we can benefit by staying with the conflict a little while longer. Reversing an old saying, we could be witnessing the storm before the calm. Once people express and release their anger and fear, they might see how much they really care for each other and want a mutually beneficial solution.

Share your opinion without attachment

We can share our opinions without becoming married to them. If we adopt a firm opinion and invest our well-being in it, then we’ve gone beyond merely holding a point of view. We’ve become so attached to an idea that any disagreement about it raises our hackles.

Using certain phrases signals that our opinion is just that—an opinion, not a revelation of eternal truth from on high. Those phrases include: “I claim ...,” “I assert that ...,” “From my point of view ...,” “It looks to me like....”

Other suggestions for sharing an opinion without attachment are:

- Be open to challenges to your point of view.
- State the supporting facts along with your opinion. Provide evidence for your point of view.
- Stay in a discussion with the goal of reaching agreement.
- Be willing to leave a conversation with a new opinion.

Consider interests, not positions

Usually there's only one way to satisfy a position. And often there are many ways to satisfy an interest.

For example, "This company needs to hire more people" is a position that can be satisfied only by hiring more people. "This company needs to improve overall productivity" is an interest that can be satisfied by exploring a wide variety of possible solutions.

When we broaden the discussion to include interests, we create more possibilities for resolving conflict.

Slow down

When you're listening to others express their opinions, let them lay all their cards on the table. Slow down the conversation and give people a chance to finish what they're saying before you respond. Ask, "Is there anything more you want to say?" Before you speak, allow a few moments of silence to digest what you've just heard.

Do it face to face

Conflict flourishes on third-party communication. Instead of talking directly *to* the people we disagree with, we find ourselves talking *about* them behind their backs.

Resolving conflict usually means doing just the opposite—going back to the key people involved and negotiating a solution that works for everyone.

Do it in writing

One way to prepare for negotiation is to put your thoughts in writing. Write a letter that sums up the points you want to make. Expressing your point of view in a series of complete sentences is a great way to clarify your thinking. You can enhance the power of this technique by summing up other points of view as well.

Look for diversity and find common ground

The meaning of a single word, phrase, or gesture can vary radically from one culture to another. Some Native Americans, for example, believe that looking people directly in the eye is disrespectful. When people avoid eye contact with us, we might interpret such behavior as a sign of apathy, dishonesty, or disrespect. The message we receive may be exactly the opposite of the one being sent. In all situations, we can stay open to diverse ways of interpreting any behavior.

We can also back up to common ground. Most human beings want similar things—happiness, health, love, and freedom from financial worry, to name a few. Even when we differ in our ways to get what we want, we can remind ourselves of our common desires.

