



SECOND EDITION

Conflict Survival Kit

Tools for Resolving
Conflict at Work

DANIEL B. GRIFFITH
CLIFF GOODWIN

Conflict Survival Kit

Tools for Resolving Conflict at Work

Second Edition

Daniel B. Griffith, J.D., SPHR
Cliff Goodwin, Ed.D.

Purdue School of Engineering and Technology
Indiana University–Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN

PEARSON

Boston Columbus Indianapolis New York San Francisco Upper Saddle River
Amsterdam Cape Town Dubai London Madrid Milan Munich Paris Montreal Toronto
Delhi Mexico City São Paulo Sydney Hong Kong Seoul Singapore Taipei Tokyo

Editorial Director: Vernon R. Anthony
Executive Editor: Gary Bauer
Editorial Project Manager: Linda Cupp
Editorial Assistant: Tanika Henderson
Director of Marketing: David Gesell
Marketing Manager: Stacey Martinez
Senior Marketing Assistant: Les Roberts
Production Manager: Laura Messerly
Senior Art Director: Jayne Conte
Cover Designer: Suzanne Behnke
Cover Art: Thinkstock
Manager, Rights and Permissions: Karen Sanatar
Image Permission Coordinator: Mike Lackey
Full-Service Project Management: George Jacob
Composition: Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.
Printer/Binder: Edwards Brothers
Cover Printer: Lehigh-Phoenix Color
Text Font: 10/12, ITC Century Std

Credits and acknowledgments for materials borrowed from other sources and reproduced, with permission, in this textbook appear on the appropriate page within text.

Photo Credits: Introduction: Thinkstock; Part I: Joel Goodwin; Part II: Fotolia; Part III: Joel Goodwin; Part IV: Joel Goodwin; Conclusion: Joel Goodwin.

Copyright © 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 Pearson Education, Inc., publishing as Prentice Hall, One Lake Street, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458. All rights reserved. Manufactured in the United States of America. This publication is protected by Copyright, and permission should be obtained from the publisher prior to any prohibited reproduction, storage in a retrieval system, or transmission in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or likewise. To obtain permission(s) to use material from this work, please submit a written request to Pearson Education, Inc., Permissions Department, One Lake Street, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458.

Many of the designations by manufacturers and seller to distinguish their products are claimed as trademarks. Where those designations appear in this book, and the publisher was aware of a trademark claim, the designations have been printed in initial caps or all caps.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Griffith, Dan (Daniel B.)

Conflict survival kit : tools for resolving conflict at work / Daniel B. Griffith, Cliff Goodwin. — 2nd [ed.]

p. cm.

Prev. ed. entered under Cliff Goodwin.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-13-274105-7

ISBN-10: 0-13-274105-9

1. Conflict management. 2. Interorganizational relations. 3. Industrial relations. 4. Psychology, Industrial.

5. Conflict (Psychology) I. Goodwin, Cliff II. Goodwin, Cliff Conflict survival kit. III. Title.

HD42.G66 2013

658.3'145--dc23

2011035613

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PEARSON

ISBN 10: 0-13-274105-9

ISBN 13: 978-0-13-274105-7

Preface	xv
About the Authors	xix

INTRODUCTION

1

CHAPTER 1: THE NATURE OF CONFLICT

2

Performance Competencies	2
How Does Conflict Affect Us?	3
Is Conflict Bad?	5
A Deeper Look at Conflict	6
Two Approaches to Addressing Conflict	7
The Challenges, Imperatives, and Good News about Managing Conflict	9
Performance Checklist	10
Test Yourself	11
Multiple Choice	11
Discussion Questions	12
Case: Confrontation vs. Cooperation	13
Personal Growth Exercise	13
To Learn More	13
Notes	14

PART I: The Theory and Context for Managing Conflict in the Workplace

15

CHAPTER 2: PREVENTING CONFLICT

16

Performance Competencies	16
Creating and Maintaining an Environment of Reduced Conflict	16
Paying Attention to Evolving Conflicts	20

Look for Triggers ...	20
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	22
... Then, Respond Appropriately	22
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	25
Preventing Conflict at a Personal Level	26
Performance Checklist	27
Test Yourself	28
Multiple Choice	28
Discussion Questions	29
Case: Triggers	30
Personal Growth Exercise	31
To Learn More	31
Notes	32

CHAPTER 3: APPROACHES TO CONFLICT **33**

Performance Competencies	33
Power-Based Approaches	34
Rights-Based Approaches	35
Interest-Based Approaches	36
The Approach Parties Use Will Fluctuate	37
Distributive vs. Integrative Approaches to Addressing Conflict	37
Choosing the Approach That Works	41
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	41
Performance Checklist	42
Test Yourself	42
Multiple Choice	43
Discussion Questions	44
Case: Power, Rights, and Interests	44
Personal Growth Exercise	45
To Learn More	45
Note	45

**CHAPTER 4:
WORKING TOWARD COLLABORATION 46**

Performance Competencies	46
The Thomas-Kilman Model in Practice	46
Avoiding	48
Accommodating	50
Competing	51
Compromising	53
Collaborating	55
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	59
When You Are a Mediator	59
When You Are Negotiating a Conflict for Yourself	59
Performance Checklist	60
Test Yourself	60
Multiple Choice	61
Discussion Questions	62
Case: Choosing Your Approach to Resolving Conflict	62
Alternative Procedure for Online Learning Formats	64
Personal Growth Exercise	64
To Learn More	64
Note	65

PART II: Interpersonal Communication Skills for Resolving Conflict

67

**CHAPTER 5:
THE THREE CHANNELS
OF COMMUNICATION 68**

Performance Competencies	68
Channel I: The Nonverbal/Behavioral	69
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	74
When You Are a Mediator	74
When You Are Negotiating a Conflict for Yourself	74
Channel II: The Verbal	74
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	78
When You Are a Mediator	78

When You Are Negotiating a Conflict for Yourself	78
Channel III: The Para-Verbal	78
Tuning in on the Three Channels of Communication When Resolving Conflict	80
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	82
When You Are a Mediator	82
When You Are Negotiating a Conflict for Yourself	82
Performance Checklist	82
Test Yourself	83
Multiple Choice	83
Discussion Questions	84
Case: "Reading" Others	84
Alternative Procedure for Online Learning Formats	85
Personal Growth Exercise	86
To Learn More	86
Notes	86

**CHAPTER 6:
LISTENING TO RESOLVE CONFLICT
AND BUILD LASTING RELATIONSHIPS 87**

Performance Competencies	87
Four Levels of Communication	88
Level I Communication: Not Hearing and Not Listening	89
Level II Communication: Hearing Content	92
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	96
When You Are a Mediator	96
When You Are Negotiating a Conflict for Yourself	97
Level III Communication: Hearing Feelings	97
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	101
When You Are a Mediator	101
When You Are Negotiating a Conflict for Yourself	102
Level IV Communication: Therapy	102
Performance Checklist	103
Test Yourself	104
Multiple Choice	104

Discussion Questions	105
Case: Listening at Different Levels	105
Personal Growth Exercise	106
To Learn More	106
Note	106

CHAPTER 7: THE COMMUNICATION CONTINUA 107

Performance Competencies	107
Responding Interpersonally	107
The First Continuum: Solution Giving ↔ Problem Inquiry	108
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	110
The Second Continuum: Superiority ↔ Equality	110
The Third Continuum: Ignore Feelings ↔ Empathize (Acknowledge Feelings)	111
The Fourth Continuum: Absolute ↔ Conditional	112
The Fifth Continuum: Evaluative ↔ Descriptive	113
Tips to Remember about the Five Continua of Responses	114
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit: The Five Continua of Responses	115
Performance Checklist	116
Test Yourself	117
Multiple Choice	117
Discussion Questions	118
Case: The Right Response	118
Personal Growth Exercise	119
To Learn More	119
Note	119

PART III: Preparing to Resolve Conflicts

121

CHAPTER 8: ARE YOU CAPABLE? 122

Performance Competencies	122
Assessing Your Capability	122
The Conflict Capability Questionnaire in Action	125

Improving Your Capability	129
Ego Maturity	133
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	137
When You Are a Mediator	137
When You Are Negotiating a Conflict for Yourself	137
Performance Checklist	138
Test Yourself	138
Multiple Choice	139
Discussion Questions	140
Case: Assessing Conflict Capability	140
Alternative Procedure for Online Learning Formats	140
Personal Growth Exercise	141
To Learn More	141
Notes	141

**CHAPTER 9:
OPENING THE DOORS TO CONFLICT
RESOLUTION** 142

Performance Competencies	142
Conflict Resolution through Supportive Confrontation	142
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	152
When You Are a Mediator	152
When You Are Negotiating a Conflict for Yourself	153
Performance Checklist	153
Test Yourself	154
Multiple Choice	154
Discussion Questions	155
Case: Engaging in Supportive Confrontation	155
Alternative Procedure for Online Learning Formats	156
Personal Growth Exercise	156
To Learn More	156
Note	156

**CHAPTER 10:
THE BUILDING BLOCKS
OF COLLABORATION** 158

Performance Competencies	158
Analyze the Situation Requiring Collaboration	159
Invite the Other Party to Collaborate	160
Express Your Concerns	161
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	163
Listen and Seek to Understand	163
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	166
Define the Problem	167
Brainstorm and Explore Possible Solutions	168
Commit to a Solution	170
Implement and Monitor the Agreement	171
Foster the Relationship	172
Performance Checklist	172
Test Yourself	173
Multiple Choice	173
Discussion Questions	174
Case: Encouraging Collaboration	175
Alternative Procedure for Online Learning Formats	177
Personal Growth Exercise	177
To Learn More	177

**CHAPTER 11:
INTEGRATIVE NEGOTIATION:
NEGOTIATING AS PARTNERS** 178

Performance Competencies	178
The Limits of Traditional Negotiations	179
The Promise of Integrative Negotiation	179
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	180
Alternatives	180
Interests	183

Options	186
Legitimacy	189
Communication and Relationship	192
Commitment	197
Performance Checklist	200
Test Yourself	200
Multiple Choice	201
Discussion Questions	202
Case: Negotiations for Life	202
Alternative Procedure for Online Learning Formats	204
Personal Growth Exercise	204
To Learn More	205
Notes	205

CHAPTER 12: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO INTEGRATIVE NEGOTIATION 206

Performance Competencies	206
When the Parties Are at Impasse	207
When the Other Party Won't Play	212
When the Other Party Won't Play by the Same Rules	217
Performance Checklist	223
Test Yourself	224
Multiple Choice	224
Discussion Questions	225
Case: Overcoming Barriers	225
Alternative Procedure for Online Learning Formats	227
Personal Growth Exercise	227
To Learn More	228
Notes	228

CHAPTER 13: MEDIATING CONFLICTS BETWEEN PARTIES 229

Performance Competencies	229
The Context for Workplace Mediation vs. Other Contexts	230

When/When Not to Mediate Workplace Disputes	233
Setting the Stage for Mediation	234
The Mediation Environment	236
Beginning the Mediation and Ground Rules	237
The Mediation Process	239
Holding Separate Meetings	247
Performance Checklist	248
Test Yourself	248
Multiple Choice	249
Discussion Questions	250
Case: Mediating a Dispute	250
Alternative Procedure for Online Learning Formats	251
Personal Growth Exercise	252
To Learn More	252
Note	253

**CHAPTER 14:
DECISION-MAKING CHOICES
FOR THE MANAGER** 254

Performance Competencies	254
The Role of Participative Management in Addressing Conflict	254
Joint Decision Making	255
Achieving Consensus	257
Consultative Decision Making	264
Varying Levels of Participation and Input in Consultative Decisions	265
Directive Decision Making	267
Using Principles of Dialogue to Encourage Open Conversation	270
Performance Checklist	272
Test Yourself	272
Multiple Choice	273
Discussion Questions	274
Case: Deciding What to Do	274
Alternative Procedure for Online Learning Formats	276

Personal Growth Exercise	276
To Learn More	276
Notes	277

**CHAPTER 15:
HANDLING CONFLICTS REQUIRING
DIRECT CONFRONTATION 278**

Performance Competencies	278
Sending the Appropriate Message	278
The Basic Assertive Confrontation Model	280
Softening the Message	281
Putting It All Together	284
Addressing Performance and Conduct Issues	284
Standard Discipline Procedures	288
Conducting Investigations of Misconduct	290
The Assertive Confrontation Message and Performance Evaluation	292
Responding to Defensive and Angry Reactions	294
Remaining Calm and Focused	295
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	296
Performance Checklist	297
Test Yourself	298
Multiple Choice	298
Discussion Questions	299
Case: Confronting an Employee with a Conduct Issue	300
Alternative Procedure for Online Learning Formats	300
Personal Growth Exercise	301
To Learn More	301
Notes	302

**CHAPTER 16:
SPECIAL SITUATIONS: “OPPORTUNISTIC”
EMPLOYEES, WORKPLACE VIOLENCE,
TERMINATIONS, AND BULLYING 303**

Performance Competencies	303
What Is an “Opportunistic” Employee?	304

How Do I Manage the Opportunistic Employee?	304
Responding to Aggressive and Potentially Violent Behaviors	308
Ending the Relationship	315
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	317
Managing Workplace Bullying	318
Performance Checklist	321
Test Yourself	322
Multiple Choice	322
Discussion Questions	323
Case: Dealing with an Opportunistic Employee	324
Alternative Procedure for Online Learning Formats	325
Personal Growth Exercise	325
To Learn More	325
Notes	326

CONCLUSION

327

CHAPTER 17: ACHIEVING EFFECTIVENESS AS A CONFLICT MANAGER 328

Performance Competencies	328
Practice Doesn't Necessarily Make Perfect	329
Using the Experiential Learning Cycle for Guided Reflection	329
Behaviors, Traits, and Characteristics of an Effective Conflict Manager	333
Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit	338
Performance Checklist	341
Test Yourself	341
Multiple Choice	342
Discussion Questions	343
Case: Reflecting on Experiences with Managing Conflict	343

Alternative Procedure for Online Learning Formats	344
Personal Growth Exercise	344
To Learn More	345
Role Profiles for Cases	347
Index	355

Give us the tools and we will finish the job.

Winston Churchill

Unless you are a hermit, conflict is a reality in your life. If you are a leader or aspire to a leadership role, much of your success will depend on how well you respond to conflict among those you lead or serve. Whether you manage a staff of 2 or 200, you are expected to address and equitably resolve many conflict situations in the course of a month, a week, or even a day.

Are you prepared to manage these conflicts? Can you build rapport among battling parties and encourage their mutual cooperation? Do you have the finesse and problem-solving skill needed to achieve a workable resolution while preserving the parties' integrity and fragile relationship? Do you have the maturity and composure to persist with parties in conflict when they appear to have reached the limits of their willingness to bargain?

The ability to manage conflict is often viewed as more of an art than a skill, suggesting that you are best advised to leave the management of conflicts in the hands of "professionals." Yet while there is an art to a skillfully negotiated resolution, it is an art form that you can master with the right tools. Although some workplace conflicts may necessitate the involvement of a professional, such as a trained mediator or arbitrator, human resources representative, or labor relations specialist, many more conflicts depend on your intervention as a manager. To be successful, you need to build on your foundation of communication and leadership capacities and apply them to the kinds of conflict management strategies and methods this book provides.

This book is both a classroom text and an on-the-job guide for the individual who has received no formal preparation in managing conflict and needs "instant" skill building and practical methods for handling organizational and personal conflicts. It also offers insights for the aspiring professional who, though expert in the subject matter of his or her field and educated in conflict theory and negotiation strategy, needs grounding in basic interpersonal communication and management skills, such as rapport building, empathic listening, behavior modeling, reframing, problem solving, and decision making.

This text is divided into six sections. The Introduction (Chapter 1) discusses the Nature of Conflict. Part I (Chapters 2–4) examines the Theory and Context for Managing Conflict in the Workplace. Part II (Chapters 5–7) covers Interpersonal Communication Skills for Resolving Conflict. Part III (Chapters 8–9) addresses Preparing to Resolve Conflicts. Part IV (Chapters 10–16) provides Application and Practice. The book concludes with Achieving Effectiveness as a Conflict Manager (Chapter 17). Each chapter provides concrete information regarding the

various aspects of conflict management in the workplace with plenty of examples and illustrations to promote learning. In addition, each chapter includes the following features:

- Performance Competencies: A succinct statement of what will be covered in the chapter
- Tools to Add to Your Conflict Survival Kit: Specific advice, activities, thought starters, challenges, and pointers to help you apply what you learn to real-world contexts
- Performance Checklist: Key points summarizing the basic content of the chapter
- True/False and Multiple Choice: Ten questions to test your knowledge
- Discussion Questions: Two to four focused questions on issues relevant to the chapter to encourage in-class discussion and reinforce learning
- Personal Growth Exercises: Additional optional activities and reflection exercises to help you continue your learning and application of concepts and skills beyond the classroom
- To Learn More: References and resources for individuals interested in exploring the chapter topic in greater depth

In addition, at the end of each chapter, *Conflict Survival Kit* includes a case or role-play to provide learners hands-on practice with handling conflict situations. Cases involve scenarios for class discussion, written assignments, or self-instruction. Role-plays are intended for use in the classroom or seminar. Specific instructions are provided for each. Role-plays can also be used as traditional case studies. Cases and role-plays are built around a number of roles in a fictitious company that are profiled at the end of the book. To receive the full benefit of these cases, become acquainted with this company and the characters before reading the cases. For many of the chapters, the case includes a section entitled, “Alternative Procedure for Online Learning Formats.” Recognizing that many classes are taught either entirely or partially online, this section offers suggestions, when possible, for facilitating role-plays and case discussion through these alternative learning methods.

The second edition of *The Conflict Survival Kit* includes the following significant changes from the first edition:

- Additional discussion has been added to Chapter 1 (The Nature of Conflict) concerning the **imperative for managers and leaders to gain skills and competencies in managing conflict**.
- The discussion on preventing conflict at the organizational level in Chapter 2 (Preventing Conflict) has been expanded to include **insights on what managers and employees can do to prevent conflict at a personal level**.
- A section on **understanding cultural differences** in the interpersonal communication process has been added to Chapter 5 (The Three Channels of Communication).

- A section has been added to Chapter 13 (Mediating Conflicts between Parties) regarding the **distinctions between mediation of workplace conflicts and mediation of conflicts in more formal and legal settings**.
- **Principles of dialogue to encourage open communication** have been added to Chapter 14 (Decision-Making Choices for the Manager) to assist managers in facilitating collaborative and joint decision-making processes with employees.
- **Strategies for remaining calm and focused** have been added to Chapter 15 (Handling Conflicts Requiring Direct Confrontation) to assist managers in controlling their own emotions and tendencies to become reactive when confronting the negative and challenging behaviors of others.
- A section on **managing workplace bullying** has been added to Chapter 16 (Special Situations: “Opportunistic” Employees, Workplace Violence, Terminations, and Bullying).
- The section at the end of most chapters on “Alternate Procedures for Online Learning Formats,” as noted above, is also new to the second edition. Users of the first edition will also notice that some of the end-of-chapter materials were formerly included in a separate student *Conflict Study Guide*. These include the true/false questions and personal growth exercises. As a result of this change, the *Conflict Study Guide* has been discontinued, as there is no longer a need for students to purchase this separate text.

Course instructors can request a *Conflict Survival Kit Instructor’s Manual with Test Item File* by contacting their local Prentice Hall/Pearson representative or submitting a request on the Prentice Hall web site. PowerPoint slides outlining the key concepts and ideas from each chapter are also available.

Enjoy your journey as you learn about managing conflict in your organization and workplace. With knowledge and practice, you will develop mastery in managing conflict and do more than survive as a manager. You will thrive.

Special thanks to the reviewers, who provided helpful suggestions: Will Hodge, University of Alabama; Stacy Ball, Southwest Minnesota State University; Christina Wilson, T-Mobile USA, Issaquah, WA; and Mark A. Smedal, Smith & Helman, Philadelphia, PA.

This page intentionally left blank

DANIEL B. GRIFFITH, J.D., SPHR

Daniel Griffith is associate faculty within the Organizational Leadership and Supervision program at Purdue School of Engineering and Technology at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). In that role, he teaches courses in conflict management, leadership, and human resources. He is also manager of training and organization development at IUPUI. An attorney and mediator, he specializes in mediating employment, management, and higher education disputes and training lawyers, HR professionals, and managers in mediation, negotiation, and communication skills. He also facilitates workshops and provides consultation on conflict resolution and related topics for nonprofits, government agencies, colleges and universities, health institutions, HR professional associations, and other organizations. He previously worked for the state of Indiana as an attorney for the state’s civil rights agency and as an attorney and administrative law judge for the state’s transportation department.

Mr. Griffith holds a bachelor of arts degree in English from DePauw University and a doctorate of jurisprudence from Indiana University School of Law–Indianapolis.

CLIFF GOODWIN, ED.D.

Cliff Goodwin is on the faculty of the Purdue School of Engineering and Technology at Indiana University–Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI). He teaches in the Organizational Leadership and Supervision program. His primary teaching emphasis is in the area of leadership skill development, sustainable leadership practices, and organizational longevity. In addition to his university work, Professor Goodwin has acted as a consultant to numerous businesses throughout Indiana. Prior to his university appointment, he was in management in the automotive manufacturing industry.

Professor Goodwin holds degrees from Purdue University and Ball State University in management and industrial training. He earned his doctorate of education at Indiana University.

Professor Goodwin and Mr. Griffith are also co-authors of *Supervisor’s Survival Kit*, 11th ed., also published by Pearson Education, Inc.

This page intentionally left blank



To the man who only has a hammer in the toolkit, every problem looks like a nail.

Abraham Maslow

PERFORMANCE COMPETENCIES

After you have finished reading this chapter, you will be able to

- Describe the general nature of conflict
- Describe the costs of unresolved conflicts in organizations and among individuals
- Articulate a definition of conflict
- Differentiate between *positional* and *interest-based* approaches to addressing conflict

When you think of conflict, what comes to mind? Imagine that you had a long day at work and everyone you encountered decided to grumble at you about something. Or imagine that you had an argument with someone with whom you are close. Are you thinking good thoughts? Do you really embrace the conflicts in your life?

If you are honest with yourself, the thought of conflict makes you uncomfortable. If the conflict is bad enough, you may wonder whether you are in the right job or whether you want to continue your relationship. The conflict may be making you feel tense. The tensions are manageable; you are not going to do anything drastic, but you know you will have to face the conflict eventually. You do not look forward to it.

What is it about the nature of conflict that often leaves people feeling tense and worried? Is conflict bad, or is there a healthier way to look at conflict and, therefore, a more positive approach to take?

I never did say that you can't be a nice guy and win. I said that if I was playing third base and my mother rounded third with the winning run, I'd trip her up.

Leo Durocher

HOW DOES CONFLICT AFFECT US?

When thinking about conflict, we often envision two or more parties holding mutually exclusive, wholly incompatible positions. Conflict is a contest of wills involving winners and losers. This win/lose paradigm pervades our culture and is so ingrained that it influences how we interact with one another. Consider some examples.

When we think of conflict, we often think of winners and losers.

GLOBAL CONFLICT

Certain dates in history sear our national memory for their association with global conflict. December 7, 1941, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and triggered U.S. involvement in World War II, was aptly termed by President Franklin Roosevelt as “a date which will live in infamy.”¹ The phrase “9/11” is all Americans need to hear to recall the tragic events of September 11, 2001 and the resulting so-called “War on Terrorism.” Simple phrases capture our national conscience for their power in conveying sustained periods of global tension. For example, the phrase “Cold War,” representing the U.S./Soviet Union build-up of nuclear armaments, triggers thoughts of a Titan clash of worldviews. These words provide powerful images and metaphors for classic pitched battles between the forces of good and the forces of evil. While we may be convinced that we stand on the side of good, our enemies are equally convinced that they stand on the side of what is good, just, and true.

POLITICS

Issues in politics are posed as choices between Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, fiscal responsibility and social awareness, pro-choice and pro-life, gun control and gun ownership, and on and on. Political partisans perpetuate this “either/or” thinking through their language. A socially progressive politician accuses a fiscal conservative’s budget proposal as an “attack on the poor and middle class.” An advocate for industry deregulation is cast as an “enemy of the environment.” A pro-life advocate calls a pro-choice advocate “pro-abortion.”

VISUAL MEDIA

The phenomenon of reality TV is rife with examples of cutthroat competitors vying to win a job, a performance contract, or even a spouse. On the sports channel, we expect winners and losers but don’t always expect to see well-paid athletes behave like schoolyard bullies and brawl on the field of play. And in “sports” such as professional wrestling, spectators gleefully watch feigned brutality as one opponent bashes another. Children and adults play video games with which they can engage in virtual blood sport to defeat weaker opponents. Sadly, the thirst for visual imagery of violence doesn’t end in virtual conflicts; it is not uncommon to find viral videos on

the Web of actual school and street brawls that people have posted from their cell phones. Does it occur to them to try and stop the fight or call the police?

LAWSUITS

Lawyers advocate zealously for the interests of their clients against the interests of opposing parties. They use the fine art of persuasion and trial advocacy techniques to win their client's dispute at all costs. Even settlement negotiations can become contentious as lawyers posture and make arguments and counterarguments focused on winning as many concessions as possible from their opponent while conceding few.

NEIGHBORHOODS

If someone has been a little too noisy, has encroached on the property line, or owns a dog that barks late at night, a reasonable neighbor may call the police or animal control or, if things are not resolved, file a lawsuit. An angry neighbor may take more drastic measures. In our society today, many have become too busy to get to know their neighbors and deal directly with them to work through their disputes.

EMPLOYMENT

When managers lack the will to lead effectively and work collaboratively with the employees they manage, their solution to addressing employee conduct and performance concerns is to invoke discipline procedures, performance improvement plans, restrictive attendance policies, monitoring, and negative performance appraisals. Not surprisingly, employees counter with grievances, discrimination and harassment complaints, and lawsuits. The ensuing battle becomes costly, protracted, and inefficient and usually leaves both employer and employee dissatisfied.

DISCOURSE

Words become weapons. When discussing important issues, some are more intent on verbally attacking their opponent's positions than on engaging in thoughtful dialog. In the worst case, opponents become uncivil. They rant about whatever bothers them, stridently make their points, and vehemently discount their opponent's arguments. Openness and candor are risky. When feeling attacked, people become guarded and choose their words carefully lest their meaning be taken out of context and misconstrued.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Opportunity for dialogue is further put at risk when people engage in harmful personal attacks on others through social media. It is bad enough when

individuals identify themselves when writing blog posts, text messages, and comments to other's blogs and write vitriol concerning a person or an opinion that offends them. It is quite another when they do so anonymously and feel all the more emboldened to slander others with hurtful comments.

RELATIONSHIPS

Many people have not learned effective means for constructively communicating through their conflicts. While professing love, they know how to hurt each other with cruel words and thoughtless argument. Two headstrong individuals will beat each other up with accusations and finger pointing. The more "mature" will simply stop talking and engage in passive-aggressive behaviors. At best, relationships endure despite dysfunction. At worst, we see divorce, abuse, and domestic violence.

Many of us have not learned how to constructively communicate through our conflicts. While professing love, we know how to hurt each other with cruel words and thoughtless argument.

IS CONFLICT BAD?

When faced with conflict, we often respond in one of four ways that are not wholly constructive:

1. *Avoidance.* We avoid the conflict, either out of fear of confrontation or as a means of controlling the situation.
2. *Accommodation.* We concede arguments and issues to those with whom we are in conflict as a means of smoothing over our relationship, though often at the expense of satisfying our own needs and concerns.
3. *Competition.* We press to achieve our own goals in the conflict at the expense of having a positive relationship with the other party.
4. *Compromise.* Even when we face up to our conflicts, such as through negotiation, we often settle for compromise solutions. We give a little to get a little. Though this may be an appropriate strategy at times, it means that we end up only partly satisfied and, therefore, still somewhat dissatisfied.

While these responses can be appropriate under the right circumstances, they suggest our natural tendency to view conflict negatively. Yet, when viewed another way, the existence of conflict can serve as a positive indicator, signaling opportunities for change and growth.

A fifth and more constructive response to conflict is to *collaborate*. It is said that two heads are better than one, so when any two individuals engage in truly collaborative strategies, they are bound to realize improved communication and understanding, more creative solutions, increased productivity, and a healthier relationship. Through collaboration, individuals realize increased confidence in their ability to communicate, interact with others, and solve problems. By facing situations directly and maturely, rather than indirectly or not at all, their esteem grows. Teams encouraged to deal with conflict in this way experience improved morale and teamwork.

The existence of conflict can serve as a positive indicator, signaling opportunities for change and growth.

It is often our *perception* that conflicts are bad that leads to ineffective responses. The more we engage in these responses, the more likely our conflicts may remain unresolved, fueling our negative view.

Conflict, then, is neither good nor bad. In fact, it is often not the conflicts themselves or their root causes that bring so much consternation. Rather, it is the *perception* that conflicts are bad instead of opportunities for change and positive outcomes that leads to ineffective responses. And the more we engage in these responses, the more likely our conflicts may remain unsolved, further fueling our negative view.

Clearly, if we are to get a handle on our conflicts and realize positive resolutions, this view must change. Our conflicts will not go away, but our perceptions about them can change, and along with them, our responses.

Conflict involves competition between two or more individuals or groups who have incompatible interests and who are interdependent.

A DEEPER LOOK AT CONFLICT

At its heart, conflict involves *competition* between two or more individuals or groups who have *incompatible interests* and who are *interdependent*. Let us examine this definition further:

- **Interdependent parties:** Each party in a conflict has needs that only the other party can satisfy. For example, an employee and her boss are interdependent. She has needs for income, job satisfaction, and other considerations that can be met only through her relationship with her boss. Her boss needs her to do certain work, which only she is available and capable to do. Conflict arises through their attempts to have their needs met. Without this mutual need, no conflict exists. If the employee finds a job that better meets her needs or her boss finds someone who will do the work if she will not, their interdependence ceases.
- **Incompatible interests:** Interests are the parties' wants, needs, values, and goals, which represent the source of the disagreement or conflict. It is why the parties are fighting. Conflict results from the belief by one or both parties that their interests are not compatible. If there are no incompatible interests—that is, the needs and wants of both parties are being met—there is no conflict because there is nothing to fight about. Put another way, each party perceives that his interests cannot be met except by exclusion of the other party's interests—more for you means less for me.
- **Competition:** Conflict occurs when one or more parties perceive that a need is threatened or that resources are insufficient to meet the need. This is often referred to as a “fixed pie” gambit in which parties perceive that there are finite pieces of pie available or, in other words, only a finite number of options that will satisfy the need. Conflict is thus seen as a “fight” as the parties compete to gain as many pieces of pie, or resources, for themselves and leave as few as possible for the other party.

In considering this definition, note that the existence of conflict is often based on perception, for it is often the belief that our interests are incompatible, rather than the reality, that sets the stage for conflict. What often causes conflicts to continue and escalate is this gap between what

is *perceived* to be irreconcilable and what may be reconciled if the parties' perceptions about each other's interests can change. With the right approach, perhaps the parties can find common ground where their interests are not as irreconcilable as they first thought.

But what is the right approach? If parties have been in conflict for a long time over seemingly intractable issues, how will they come to realize they have many interests in common? How will a husband and wife, two neighbors, an employee and a supervisor, two coworkers, or two brothers realize they have less and less to fight about? The answer is both simple and complex: They must communicate.

A deeper look at any conflict usually reveals that the parties have legitimate underlying needs they want to express but have not found an effective means for doing so. If we dig deeper into why a husband and wife are not communicating and are on the verge of divorce, we uncover their underlying fears, hurts, and unfulfilled needs. If we can help each party understand the other's concerns—that is, take a proverbial walk in the other's shoes—we may see these concerns dissipate. As a manager, you may have to discipline an employee who lashes out in anger at you, but it may benefit you and the employee to first talk about what is driving such behavior. Is the employee suffering some personal loss or turmoil at home? Have you heard his cries of feeling overloaded and stressed? Does he feel threatened by recent organizational changes? As long as the employee is not intractable, asking the right questions and having the appropriate empathic response may save your relationship with the employee and begin the process of restoring him as a productive worker.

How will parties with seemingly intractable issues come to realize they have many interests in common? They must communicate.

TWO APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING CONFLICT

Individuals generally take one of two distinct approaches to addressing conflict, which are referred to as *positional* and *interest based*.

POSITIONAL

In the positional approach, the parties, to varying degrees, treat the conflict as a contest of wills. They enter a conflict discussion with clear ideas of what they want to achieve and hold firm to these positions. An employee wants a salary increase of a certain amount and will leave if she does not receive it. The manager will pay only up to a certain amount in salary to keep the employee and not a penny more. If these amounts are incompatible, the lines are drawn. The positional approach does not take into consideration the underlying concerns, needs, or wants of the parties, which generally forecloses any examination on how the parties' positions might be reconciled. Rather, the parties lock into their positions. If resolution occurs, it is because the parties have weighed what they have to win against what they have to lose by not resolving the dispute rather than considering how each might achieve more by working together.

When parties lock into positions, they do not consider each other's underlying concerns, needs, or wants, which generally forecloses any examination of how their positions might be reconciled.

The positional approach is the traditional model we have come to know and accept in our culture, which is not to say it is always the “wrong” approach. Indeed, accomplished lawyers, salespeople, and businesspeople have written eloquently on the subject. Look for titles such as *Negotiating to Win*, *Playing the Negotiation Game*, or *How to Negotiate What You Want in Life*, and you will learn from the experts on how to play the positional game to advantage. But it *is* game playing. You might take this approach if you are a customer wanting the best deal on a car or the salesperson wanting the best commission. In such circumstances, your relationship with the other party is superficial. However, do not expect positive outcomes if you use this strategy in your next argument with your spouse or coworker, where relationships matter greatly.

Meaningful conflict resolution must take into consideration the relationship between the parties with the view of preserving it, and perhaps even improving it.

INTEREST BASED

The interest-based approach takes into consideration the underlying needs, wants, values, and goals of the parties. The seminal work on the interest-based model, also called *principle-centered negotiation*, is *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* by Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton.² The authors discuss the limits of the positional model and make the case that any meaningful conflict resolution must take into consideration the relationship between the parties with the view of preserving it, and perhaps even improving it. They set forth clear principles on which a negotiation should be judged. In addition to preserving or improving the relationship, any agreement should meet the legitimate interests of the parties, resolve conflicting interests fairly, be durable, and take the interests of others who may be affected by the agreement into account.³ Fisher, Ury, and Patton argue that the interest-based approach is more efficient than the traditional positional model because it eliminates the associated game playing, time, and costs.

When relationships matter, focusing on interests rather than locking into positions makes sense. We value our relationships and, therefore, must consider both the short-term and long-term impacts of our agreements. We will not settle for agreements that may benefit our selfish interests in the short run if there are long-term consequences we would not like. Even our salesperson from the previous example may have a few things to learn using this approach. Does he badger, cajole, and manipulate the customer for the best price if it creates ill will in the process? Where will the customer purchase her next car? Will the customer return for service? While the savvy car dealer wants a sale, he values more a long-term relationship and the chance to sell the customer six cars over a lifetime, not just one. Even when positional bargaining appears to make sense, the positional bargainer often has an incentive for engaging in the interest-based approach.

The best methods for resolving conflict are generally those that focus on collaborative problem solving and meeting the interests and needs of all parties. Interest-based approaches hold the promise of resolving conflicts through less contentious, more amicable, and mutually satisfying means than positional approaches.

This text provides theories, tools, and strategies to help managers and other professionals become proficient in managing workplace conflict as part of their regular, everyday activities. Yet, not all organizations look to their managers to address conflicts.

Some organizations rely more on “professional” conflict management specialists operating within formal channels. In such organizations, many conflicts do not receive serious attention until some official action has been taken, such as the filing of a grievance, the initiation of a formal investigation of wrongdoing in violation of policy, or the filing of a complaint or lawsuit with a government agency or in court. Such matters are generally handled by human resources or labor relations specialists or by corporate counsel. Organizations operating in this mode tend to be reactive in their response to conflict and ignore or underutilize less formal mechanisms to resolve conflicts early on before they escalate. Such organizations would benefit from employing managers who are equipped to recognize conflict situations as they arise within their teams and empowered to resolve them.

Another reason some organizations do not fully recognize the need for managers who can effectively manage everyday conflict is their sluggishness in adopting new management practices for today’s workforce. Management practice has experienced a significant paradigm shift through the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Earlier management models supported “command and control” practices whereby managers were expected simply to direct employees to behave in certain ways to achieve performance and production goals. Conflict resolution practices under this paradigm generally involve nothing more than ordering employees to “get along” and do not address the deeper emotional, social, or status needs of employees. Current management models contemplate these deeper needs and also recognize the change in how work is done. The economy continues to shift from an age of heavy industry wherein workers’ “hands” were their principal asset to the current age of technology and information wherein workers’ principal assets are their “heads” and the knowledge they bring to the job. Current management models call for managers to serve more as facilitators and team leaders who support employees at a more interpersonal level to guide them through communication challenges and conflicts. Accordingly, as described by Mark Gerzon in *Leading Through Conflict: How Successful Leaders Transform Differences into Opportunities*, the ideal managerial role has transformed from that of “demagogue,” who harshly commands compliance through fear and intimidation, or generic “manager,” who does not deal with conflict outside the boundaries of his self-interests or the interests of his team, to the role of “mediator”.⁴

[T]his model of leadership is able to turn conflict into a positive force for achieving our larger purposes. This kind of leader transforms conflict from a force that can be destructive and divisive into one that is healing and connecting. Since we human beings urgently need to make conflict work for *us* rather than *against* us, those who can lead through conflict hold the key.⁵