

INTRODUCING RELATIONAL PEACEMAKING

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1. Turning Conflict into Opportunity

Effective conflict management involves much more than simply resolving a conflict. It actually provides everyone involved with the opportunity to grow in character, to clarify their values and deepen their relationships.

These concepts are totally overlooked in most conflicts because people naturally focus on escaping from the situation or overcoming their opponent. Therefore, it is wise to periodically step back from a conflict and ask yourself whether you are doing all that you can to take advantage of these special opportunities.

One of the best ways to turn conflict into an opportunity is to approach it by using the **4 G's of conflict resolution**:

- **Go higher** - Live out your highest values whenever you seek to resolve conflict
- **Get the Log Out of Your Eye** - Take responsibility for your contribution to a conflict
- **Gently Restore** - Help others take responsibility for their contribution to a conflict
- **Go and Be Reconciled** - Reconcile relationships and reach agreement through forgiveness and interest-based negotiation

2. Go Higher

Conflict is often triggered by differing or competing values, goals or agendas. It can also be inflamed by intense emotions that cloud our judgment and cause us to act impulsively and in ways that are contrary to our highest values, which may include:

- Treat others the way I want to be treated
- Look out for the interests of others as well as I look out for my interests
- Believe the best in others until I have facts to show otherwise
- Take responsibility for my actions and my contribution to a problem
- Speak the truth in love
- Treat others with patience, kindness, mercy and forgiveness

Therefore, whenever you are in conflict, it is wise to slow down and ask yourself, "What are my highest values in life? Am I living up to those values in this situation? If not, how do I need to change my words and actions to be more faithful to my values?"

3. Get the Log Out of Your Own Eye

One of the most productive ways to resolve conflict is to follow an ageless wisdom principle that is often expressed as, "First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

There are often two kinds of "logs" you need to look for when dealing with conflict. First, you need to ask whether you have had a critical, negative, or overly sensitive attitude that has led to unnecessary conflict. The second kind of log you must deal with is hurtful words and actions. Because you are often blind to your own hurtful behavior, you may need an honest friend or advisor who will help you to take an objective look at yourself and face up to your contribution to a conflict.

When you identify ways that you have wronged another person, it is important to admit your wrongs honestly and thoroughly. One way to do this is to use the "**Seven A's of Confession:**"

- Address everyone involved
- Avoid if, but, and maybe (don't make excuses)
- Admit specifically (both attitudes and actions)
- Apologize (express sorrow for the way you affected someone)
- Accept the consequences
- Alter your behavior (commit to changing harmful habits)
- Ask for forgiveness

4. Gently Restore

After you have acknowledged your contributions to a conflict, you will be in a better position to help others understand how they may have contributed to the conflict. Before you decide to confront someone, however, remember that it is appropriate to overlook minor offences. As a general rule, an offence should be overlooked if you can answer "no" to all the following questions:

- Has it permanently damaged a relationship?
- Is it seriously hurting other people? and
- Is it seriously hurting the offender himself or herself?

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, an offence is too serious to overlook, in which case it will be necessary to go and talk with the offender privately and lovingly about the situation. As you do so, remember to:

- Pray for humility and wisdom
- Plan your words carefully (think of how you would want to be confronted)

- Anticipate likely reactions and plan appropriate responses (rehearsals can be very helpful)
- Choose the right time and place (talk in person whenever possible)
- Assume the best about the other person until you have facts to prove otherwise
- Listen carefully
- Speak only to build others up
- Ask for feedback from the other person
- Recognize your limits (you can sometime influence people but should not try to force them to do your will)

If an initial confrontation does not resolve a conflict, do not give up. Review what was said and done and look for ways to make a better approach during a follow-up conversation. It may also be wise to ask a mature friend for advice on how to approach the other person more effectively. Then try again.

If repeated, careful attempts at a private discussion are not fruitful, and if the matter is still too serious to overlook, you should ask one or two other people to meet with you and your opponent and help you to resolve your differences through mediation or arbitration.

5. Go and Be Reconciled

Forgiveness is a key to restoring strained or broken relationships. One of the best ways to express forgiveness to others is to use the “**Four Promises of Forgiveness:**”

- I will not think about this incident.
- I will not bring this incident up and use it against you.
- I will not talk to others about this incident.
- I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.

Note that if the conduct in question is something which keeps being repeated even after forgiveness has been extended , then it may become necessary to raise the matter again, not to ‘use it against’ the person but because the behavior is still an ongoing issue which is hurting the relationship and therefore still needs to be addressed.

6. When You Need to Negotiate, PAUSE

Even when you manage to resolve personal offences through confession and forgiveness, you may still need to deal with substantive issues, which may involve money, property, or the exercise of certain rights. These issues should not be swept under the carpet or automatically passed to a higher authority. Instead, they should be negotiated in an honest and thoughtful manner.

It is usually wise to negotiate substantive issues in a co-operative manner rather than a competitive manner. In other words, instead of aggressively pursuing your own interests and letting others look out for themselves, you should deliberately look for solutions that are beneficial to everyone involved.

This approach to negotiation may be summarized in five basic steps, which we refer to as the **PAUSE Principle of Negotiation**:

- **P**repare (get the facts, seek godly counsel, develop options)
- **A**ffirm relationships (show genuine concern and respect for others – begin by telling them your relationship with them matters to you!)
- **U**nderstand interests (identify others’ concerns, desires, needs, limitations, or fears)
- **S**earch for creative solutions (prayerful brainstorming)
- **E**valuate options objectively and reasonably (evaluate, don’t argue)

If you have never used this approach to negotiation before, it will take time and practice (and sometimes advice from others) to become proficient at it. But it is well worth the effort, because learning the PAUSE principle will help you not only to resolve your present dispute but also to negotiate more effectively in all areas of your life.

7. Be Prepared for Unreasonable People

Whenever you are responding to conflict, you need to realize that other people may harden their hearts and refuse to be reconciled to you. When that happens, it is wise to keep these five principles in mind:

- Control your tongue (avoid saying things that will inflame the situation)
- Seek wise advisors
- Keep doing what is right
- Recognize your limits (instead of retaliating, keep living out your highest values)
- Use the ultimate weapon: deliberate, focused love

At the very least, these steps will protect you from being consumed by the acid of your own bitterness and resentment if others continue to oppose you. And in some cases, these responses may soften the other person’s heart and lead them change their behavior.

8. Get Help

As you live out these basic peacemaking principles, you will be able to resolve most of the normal conflicts of daily life on your own. Sometimes, however, you will encounter situations that you do not know how to handle. In such situations, it is appropriate to turn to a wise and mature person who can give you advice on how you might be able to

apply these principles more effectively. In many cases, such “coaching” will enable you to go back to the other person in the conflict and work out your differences in private.

When individual advice does not enable you to resolve a dispute, you should ask one or two mutually respected friends to meet with you and your opponent to help you settle your difference through mediation or arbitration.

9. Peacemaking and Abuse

The principles described above will enable you to resolve most of the conflicts that occur in normal, everyday life. If you are dealing with situations involving major power imbalances or abuse of any kind, however, it is unwise to attempt to resolve a conflict on your own. Instead, see help from a counselor, mediator or attorney who trained and qualified to deal with those dynamics.

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