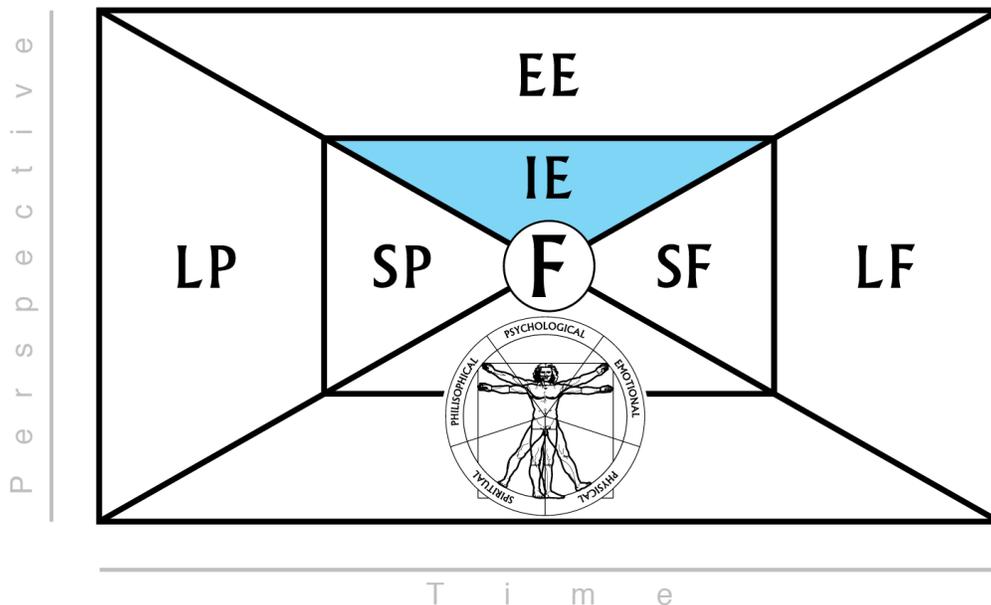




FINDING YOUR FLOW TOOLKIT VOL. 10 EMBRACING CONFLICT

"Conflict cannot survive without your participation"

-- Dr. Wayne Dyer



China is one of my favorite places on Earth. There are few business and political cultures that are more intriguing at this time in history. In my mind, Chinese culture and philosophy expresses the power of dualistic thinking—holding opposing truths that need one another to be fully expressed. One of my favorites is this symbol:

危机

which symbolizes the dual notion of crisis and opportunity.

For many of us, conflict takes the form of interpersonal crisis. Like any crisis, most of us do not invite it into our lives, but few can avoid it. So, how can this inevitable circumstance be put to good use?

If approached properly, most conflict is a great opportunity to take our relationships to the next level of understanding or de-escalate them so they are more functional. So, without overly complex models or processes to memorize, let's focus on a handful of principles that can help you find more flow as a by-product of "doing conflict well."

Once again, we start with Mindset:

In her groundbreaking book, *Mindset*, Dr. Carol Dweck describes the difference between a "fixed" and a "growth" mindset. Through her years of research, she discovered that some people see themselves and others as genetically "fixed". To them, if you are "fixed" there is little you can do to get smarter or evolve. In this case your genes rule. Your potential is fixed. So why bother trying to change.

On the other hand, people who have a "growth" mindset see themselves, their lives, and their situations as opportunities to express, learn, grow, and evolve over time. With this mindset individuals exhibit greater capacities for growth, change and development. People no longer have to see themselves as "stupid"

or “without talent”. These things can grow; our relationships can grow.

This growth mindset is an important mental tool to take with you as you consider interpersonal conflict. With a growth mindset, each time you decide to work through your conflict you are taking your relationships to a new and often better place.

To get you thinking about how to apply this and other principles, consider the language below and see if it might help the next time you face conflict. Know that this is “best practice” language and not easily copied, so consider it a guideline as you approach your personal situation.

Suggested Language: “I’d like to connect with you on an issue that I know we both have been struggling with. I think we can both grow from the conversation. Can we set up a time to talk about it?”

Separate the Person from the Conflict

A line is all too quickly crossed when people ignore this principle. Even when core values, beliefs, ideals etc... are at the center of conflict, one’s innate value and respect must not be comprised. Violate this rule and progress halts.

Healthy conflict begins with this separation. It allows the engaging parties to place the conflict on the table objectively, look at the issue piece by piece, and seek to find mutual agreement or even to agree not to agree. In both cases, there is closure.

Remember inside of all of these principles you will be confronted by emotions: yours and theirs. Do your best to acknowledge them, label them, and move forward despite them. If your emotions get the best of you or them, the game is over—at least temporarily.

Suggested Language: “Our relationship is important to me and I value you as a person. Might we share our perceptions—even emotions with one another and see what we can jointly agree upon

(or agree to disagree) while honoring our long-term relationship?"

Use Data Not Assumptions

I'm amazed how much conflict is not conflict at all, but a lack of information and understanding. The culprit: lazy thinking. Think for a minute how easy it is to put people and issues in quick and tight boxes without checking the facts. Much of the time, conflict is either simpler or more complex than we currently know. To model effective conflict management skills, you must be committed to a more rigorous process of data gathering while expecting others to do the same.

To make the most of conflict, agree up front to stick with the facts. On both sides, make it a rule to challenge perceptions and create a shared understanding that you both can agree on. Remember, through this process to acknowledge your emotions but stick to the facts.

Suggested Language: "I know that each of us has our 'perceptions and opinions' about this issue. Let's agree to put our perceptions, emotions and assumptions on the table and agree to work from the facts we both know."

Be First to Listen

The first rule of negotiation is: "make the other person go first". The opposite is true when in conflict. From my experience, the one who listens and seeks to understand first, sets the standard for the entire conversation.

Dr. Covey has is right: By "seeking to understand, then to be understood" you are proactively making deposits within the "emotional bank account" for which you can make withdrawals when needed and appropriate. Many physicians should take note of this principle, as the current research shows that after making substantive mistakes, physicians who listen and seek understanding, minimize their chances of a lawsuit.

Suggested Language: "My goal is to limit the conflict we are both experiencing. I'd like to understand what you see as the problem, and when you feel that I've understood you completely, I'd like you to do the same for me. Are you in?"

Agree on Mutual Wins

Out of any conflict, both can leave with something of value. If you truly want to alleviate the conflict, you need to be as interested in the other person's success as your own (this can be tough given your history with this person.). It takes maturity and you need to muster it.

Don't feel that by taking a mature position that you will lose your ground. Instead, think of it as a way to set the stage for getting what you need and want from the situation.

Suggested Language: "While we may not agree on X, I want to remove or limit our conflict so that both you and I walk away as satisfied as possible. Let's start with you, then discuss what I need. Let's create something we can both live with."

Learn from Every Conflict

Every conflict is just another "Moment of Performance" (MOP). It's a concrete time to create an outcome that advances the issue and the relationship. While it may be tough, there are lessons to draw from each one so don't miss it.

Whatever the outcome: win/lose/draw—even if you agree to disagree on all counts, each conflict can teach you something important that you can apply the next time around.

Before closing out an argument (long or short) consider a final step for the benefit of you both:

Suggested Language: "For the benefit of both of us, I'd like to

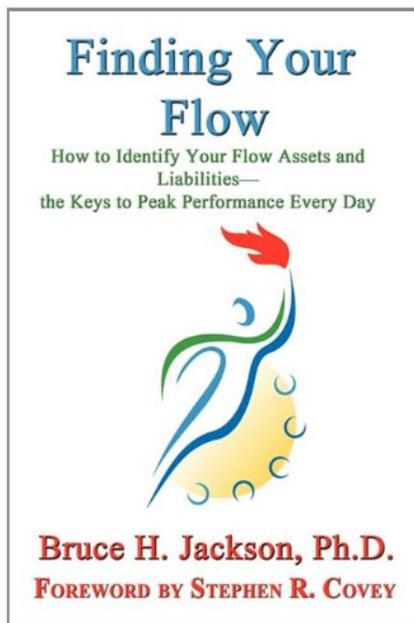
debrief our struggle. I'd like to know: 1. Did we make progress? 2. What made this conversation work—or not work? 3. What can we do next time deal with conflict more effectively?"

Of course there are many principles at play in conflict, but these above may prove useful the next time that conflict strikes. Remember, finding more flow with others doesn't mean no conflict, it means useful conflict.

The next time you consider conflict as a mini crisis to be avoided, consider the opportunity at hand and look for ways to take your relationships to the next level.

EXERCISE AND PRACTICE:

- Review the questions in: Embracing Conflict exercise sheet

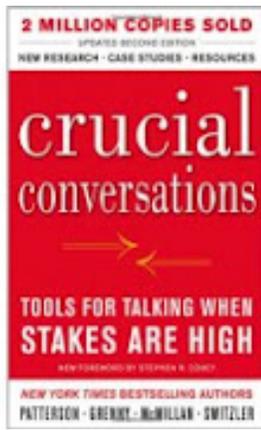


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