Deep Listening and the Skillful Art of Communication: Foundations for Effective Conflict Resolution

Handouts for Workshops

“To really listen deeply is to risk being changed.”

Thomas Merton

“To be able to really listen, one should abandon or put aside all prejudices.....When you are in a receptive state of mind, things can be easily understood...But, unfortunately, most of us listen through a screen of resistance. We are screened with prejudices, whether religious or spiritual, psychological or scientific; or with daily worries, desires and fear. And with these fears for a screen, we listen. Therefore, we listen really to our noise, our own sound, not to what is being said.”

Krishnamurti
Deep Listening and Effective Communication

Listening: The word “listen” is derived from 2 Anglo-Saxon words:

*Hlystan* – hearing (physiological sensory processes by which auditory sensations are received by the ears and transmitted to the brain).

*Hlosnian* – to wait in suspense.

**SKILL CLUSTER ____ SPECIFIC SKILL**

**Non-verbal skills**

- Being Present
- Creating a safe container
- Posture of involvement
- Appropriate body movement
- Eye contact

**Following skills**

- Door openers:
  - Description of other person’s body language
  - Invitation to talk or to continue talking: “Care to talk about it?” “Please go on.”
  - Silence/ non verbal clues
- Minimal encouragers:
  - mm-hmmm, tell me more,
  - oh?, I see, really?, go on, I hear you.
- Infrequent questions:
  - Open-ended questions
  - 1 question at a time
- Attentive silence

**Reflective skills**

- Paraphrasing: concise response stating essence of speaker’s content
- Reflecting feelings: mirror emotions speaker is communicating
- Reflecting meanings: tying feelings to content
Giving and Receiving Feedback

Giving Feedback:

- It is intended to be helpful to the recipient (and something they would be able to do something about if he or she chooses to).
- It is given directly and honestly, based on a foundation of trust.
- It is descriptive rather than evaluative, based on observable behavior (not interpretations or judgments).
- It is specific, not general using clear, recent examples.
- Chose a time when the recipient appears to be able to hear what you have to say.
- Make it short, simple and to the point.
- Address the behavior, not the personality.
- Adjust for the individual’s preferences (i.e. some people prefer balanced feedback including both strengths and challenges and some don’t).
- Stick around for the results - allow the other person to have time to reflect and respond.

Receiving Feedback:

- Be present in the moment – listen to what is being said, notice the sensations in your body.
- Wait before responding
- Make a sincere effort to not be defensive – remaining open to the possibility.
- Summarize what was said to you – using your reflective listening skills. Making sure you understand what the other person is saying.
- If you are not open or ready to receive feedback – state that and set up another time to meet.
- You do not have to do anything or change anything because of the feedback.

Assertion Statements:

When you _________ (behavior)
I feel _________ (feelings)
because _________ (effects)

SHARING EARLY, CULTURAL “STARTING POINTS” RELATED TO CONFLICT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

G. Woo, 2003

• What were the different messages you received about conflict and conflict resolution when you were growing up?

• How were your early messages about conflict conveyed to you?

• Who sent you your early messages about conflict and conflict resolution?

• Why do you think your early messages about conflict were relayed to you?

• Early on, who were your “enforcers” of appropriate conflict conduct?

• How did the messages you received differ from the message you noticed others receiving (peers, siblings, elders, cultural insiders, cultural outsiders, people of other generations, etc.) regarding what was appropriate?

• How do you think your early “starting points” connect to how you experience and work with conflict now?
**Conflict Styles Worksheet**

Directions: After reading each of the techniques listed below, decide whether this is the way you deal with conflict frequently, occasionally, or rarely.

If it describes your frequent response, write “3” in the appropriate blank below.
If it is an occasional response, write “2” in the appropriate blank below.
If it is a rare response, write “1” in the appropriate blank below.

How do you usually handle conflict?

1. Threaten or fight with the other person.
2. Try to deal with the other person’s point of view as well as your own.
3. Look for middle ground.
4. Admit you were wrong even if you do not believe that you are.
5. Avoid the Subject when possible.
6. Firmly pursue your goals.
7. Try and find out specifically what you agree/disagree on to narrow down the dispute.
8. Try and reach a compromise.
9. Give in and go along with the other person.
10. Change the subject.
11. Whine or complain until you get your way.
12. Try and get it all out in the open.
13. Give in a little and encourage the other party to do the same.
14. Pretend to agree.
15. Try and turn the conflict into a joke.

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**Totals:**

A. ______  B.______  C.______  D.______  E.______

Scoring – Now add all the numbers in each column. The columns reflect 5 styles of working with conflict.

Source: The Community Mediation Center of Rhode Island

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p.5
STYLES of WORKING with CONFLICT

A. **Competing** --- “hard bargaining” or might makes sense”

   Pursuing your own position at the expense of the other party. Competing can mean “standing up for your rights,” defending a position which you believe is correct or simply trying to win.

B. **Collaborating** --- “negotiating” or “two heads are better than one”

   Working with someone by exploring both of your interests, generating options, assessing alternatives, and finding a solution that mutually satisfies both parties.

C. **Compromising** --- “splitting the difference”

   Seeing middle ground by splitting the difference”, the solution partially satisfies both parties.

D. **Accommodating** ---“soft-bargaining” or “killing your enemy with kindness”

   Yielding to another person’s point of view, paying attention to their concerns and neglecting your own.

E. **Avoiding** --- “leaving well enough alone”

   Not addressing the conflict, either by withdrawing from the situation or postponing the issues.

Source: The Community Mediation Center of Rhode Island
Understanding STYLES of WORKING with CONFLICT

Build Relationship

**ACCOMMODATE**

Your way

**COLLABORATE**

Our way

**COMPROMISE**

Half Way

**AVOID**

No Way

**COMPETE**

My Way

Lose Goal

Weaken Relationship

Achieve Goal
LOOKING DEEPLY into CONFLICT

There are multiple contexts for understanding conflict, styles of conflict resolution as well as patterns of communication:

- **Individual beliefs/attitudes**
  
  What are your beliefs/attitudes/gender-based/cultural context(s) of conflict?

  How might the impact how you handle conflict?

- **Cultural Context**
  
  1. the specific community the conflict is occurring within (all communities have beliefs and values about conflict)
  
  2. the communities the parties involved with the conflict come from or belong to (connects to all their values and beliefs and communication styles)

  Who will you be working with? How can you find out how they might deal with conflict and be respectful?

- **Power and Privilege** — identities such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, level of education (to name a few), are intimately connected to issues of conflict both directly and indirectly.

  How will your crew see you in conflict? What power/privilege do you have that you might not see, readily, that impacts how YOU ARE VIEWED in conflict?

Please note: communities have many diverse perspectives on understanding and working with conflict.
Additional Resources


