EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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THE SLIPPERY SLOPE OF CONFLICT

Conflict may be defined as a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or desires. When differences are approached wisely, they can trigger respectful conversation and beneficial change. But all too often, we use habitual tactics that damage our relationships and intensify our differences. It's like sliding down a slippery slope.

ESCAPE RESPONSES

People tend to use escape responses when they are more interested in avoiding unpleasant people or situations than in resolving differences.

Denial—One way to escape from a conflict is to pretend that a problem does not exist. Another way is to refuse to do what should be done to resolve a conflict properly. These responses bring only temporary relief and usually make matters worse.

Flight—Another way to escape from a conflict is to run away. This may take the form of pulling away from a relationship, quitting a job or filing for divorce churches. Flight is legitimate in extreme circumstances (such as abuse), but in less severe cases it only postpones a proper solution to a problem.

Suicide—When people lose all hope of resolving a conflict, they may seek to escape from the situation (or make a desperate cry for help) by attempting to take their own lives. Suicide is never a right way to deal with conflict.

ATTACK RESPONSES

People tend to use attack responses when they are more interested in controlling others and getting their way than in preserving a relationship.

Assault—Some people try to overcome an opponent by using forms of force or intimidation, such as verbal attacks (including gossip and slander), physical violence, or efforts to damage a person financially or professionally. Such conduct always makes conflict worse.

Litigation—Although some conflicts can only be resolved by taking them before a civil judge, lawsuits usually damage relationships and often fail to achieve complete justice.

Murder—In extreme cases, people may be so desperate to win a dispute that they will try to kill those who oppose them. While most people would not actually kill someone, we sometimes murder others in our hearts by harboring anger or contempt against them.

PEACEMAKING RESPONSES

Peacemakers are people who breathe grace. They use love, mercy, forgiveness and wisdom to dissipate anger, improve understanding, promote justice and model repentance and reconciliation.

Personal Peacemaking

There are three ways to resolve conflicts personally and privately, just between you and the other party.

Overlook an Offense—Many disputes are so insignificant that they can be resolved by quietly overlooking an offense. Overlooking an offense is a form of forgiveness and involves a decision not to talk about it, dwell on it or let it grow into pent-up bitterness or anger.

Reconciliation—If an offense is too serious to overlook or has damaged our relationship, we need to resolve relational issues through confession, respectful correction and forgiveness.

Negotiation—Even if we successfully resolve relational issues, we may still need to work through material issues related to money, property or other rights. This should be done through a cooperative bargaining process in which you and the other person seek to reach a settlement that satisfies the legitimate needs of each side.

Assisted Peacemaking

When a dispute cannot be resolved personally, it is wise to seek assistance from others.

Mediation—If two people cannot reach an agreement in private, they should ask one or more objective outside people to meet with them to help them communicate more effectively and explore possible solutions. These mediators may ask questions and give advice, but the parties retain the responsibility of making the final decision on how to resolve their differences.

Arbitration—When you and an opponent cannot come to a voluntary agreement on a material issue, you may appoint one or more arbitrators to listen to your arguments and render a binding decision to settle the issue.

Accountability—If a person violates professional standards (e.g., as a doctor, lawyer or CPA) or the standards of a membership group (e.g., a church or charitable organization), it may be appropriate to notify the professional/membership organization so that it can review the situation and take appropriate corrective action.

As you can see, escape responses only postpone a proper solution to a problem, and attack responses usually damage relationships and make conflicts worse. Therefore, one of the wisest things you can do in life is to deliberately develop the skills of a peacemaker, which will improve your life and may also inspire those around you to follow your example.

WHAT ARE THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF PEACEMAKING?

Most of the conflicts in daily life can be resolved by applying a few basic peacemaking principles.

Conflict Provides Three Opportunities – Three perspectives that **supercharge peacemaking**

- Go higher – identify and live out your personal worldview and highest values
- Grow in character – strengthen attitudes and habits that preserve relationships
- Serve others – improve your ability to treat others the way you want to be treated

The Seven A's of Confession – How to make a sincere and complete confession.

- **A**ddress everyone involved (All those whom you affected)
- **A**void if, but, and maybe (Do not try to excuse your wrongs)
- **A**dmit specifically (Both attitudes and actions)
- **A**cknowledge the hurt (Express sorrow for hurting someone)
- **A**ccept the consequences (Such as making restitution)
- **A**lter your behavior (Change your attitudes and actions)
- **A**sk for forgiveness

The Four Promises of Forgiveness – The best way to truly restore a relationship.

- "I will not dwell on this incident."
- "I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you."
- "I will not talk to others about this incident."
- "I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship."

The PAUSE Principle – An interest-based approach to mutually beneficial negotiation.

- **P**repare (pray, get the facts, seek wise counsel, develop options)
- **A**ffirm relationships (show genuine concern and respect for others)
- **U**nderstand interests (identify others' concerns, desires, needs, limitations, or fears)
- **S**earch for creative solutions (thoughtful brainstorming)
- **E**valuate options objectively and reasonably (evaluate, don't argue)

For a more detailed explanation of these peacemaking principles, click here.

HOW CAN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IMPROVE MY ABILITY TO RESOLVE CONFLICT?

Multiple studies show that your ability to resolve conflict is strongly influenced by your emotional intelligence (El/EQ), which is your ability to read and manage emotions in yourself and others (see *Emotional Intelligence*, by Daniel Goleman).

Why is emotional intelligence so helpful in resolving conflict? Simply because most conflicts are triggered or inflamed by emotions. Even when people sincerely believe they are acting in logical and reasonable ways, they are usually being driven by emotions far more than they realize (see Jonathan Haidt's excellent book, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided on Politics and Religion*). Thus, emotions often act as

an "invisible puppeteer" during conflict, causing us to say and do things we would not do if we were acting in a completely rational manner.

As people grow in emotional intelligence, they are better able to identify and manage their own emotions, which will prevent them from saying and doing things that would aggravate a conflict. Improved EI also enables us to read other people's emotions and engage them in ways that promote understanding and reasonable problem solving.

RW360 has developed an enhanced form of emotional intelligence, which is called "relational wisdom®" and is available in both a values-based (secular) format and a faith-based format.

In addition to improving your ability to resolve conflict, relational wisdom can help you navigate the most difficult challenges you may face in life (see, e.g., Four Ways to Defeat Amygdala Hijacking).

Both employers and employees benefit from this type of training. When employees learn better relational skills, they are likely to see improved job performance and career advancement. When they take these same skills home at night, they are likely to build happy and secure families, which allows them to come to work refreshed, energized and focused, which improves their productivity. As one study concluded:

> "When companies invest in the physical and relational wellness of their workers, returns on investment can range between $1.50 and $6.85 for every dollar spent on these types of programs."

For more information on the family and workplace benefits of this type of training, see Relational Wisdom Strengthens Both Families and Businesses.

How Does My Worldview Influence My Approach to Conflict Resolution?

A worldview includes beliefs about the origin and nature of human life, the central problems that human beings face, and the solutions to those problems. As illustrated by Six Primary Worldviews, different worldviews give rise to different value systems, which guide our choices on how we live our lives, both personally and professionally.

As Chuck Colson wrote, "Our choices are shaped by what we believe is real and true, right and wrong, good and beautiful. Our choices are shaped by our worldview."

Although most Americans identify with one of the three theistic worldviews (Judaism, Islam or Christianity), many people unconsciously embrace various aspects of pantheism, naturalism, humanism and postmodernism. Lacking a cohesive worldview, many Americans go through life with a fluid value system, which leads them to respond to challenging personal issues and conflicts in impulsive and erratic ways.

People who have clarified their worldviews and value systems will be better prepared to navigate complex relational and moral issues and conflicts.

You can begin this clarification process by reading the following introductory articles about the major worldviews and then deciding which one you embrace and how you will study it more deeply and live it out more consistently in all areas of your life:

- Theism (Christianity, Judaism, Islam)
- Pantheism (Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, New Age Consciousness)
- Polytheism (Spiritism, Animism, etc.)
- Naturalism (Atheism, Agnosticism, Existentialism)
- Humanism (Marxism)
- Postmodernism

You can learn more about each worldview through further research on the internet. When you decide which worldview you will embrace, one of the wisest things you could ever do would be to study it more deeply and develop a practical strategy for living that worldview consistently in all areas of your life.

As demonstrated by Rosalind Picard, an acclaimed professor from MIT with 2 million TED talk views, it is wise to rigorously evaluate your options before deciding which worldview will guide your life (read about her challenging journey from atheism to faith here).

You can further strengthen your ability to deal with conflict and preserve relationships by integrating your worldview and value system with emotional intelligence through one of RW360's online courses: Exploring Relational Wisdom (secular/values-based) or Discovering Relational Wisdom (faith-based).

Is It Appropriate to Consider How Faith Influences Conflict Resolution?

As explained above, our worldviews give rise to our beliefs and values, which guide our choices, which can either aggravate conflict or promote peace, justice and reconciliation.

Consider, for example, the ***Golden Rule***, which is often expressed as "Do to others what you would have them do to you." This principle is an incredibly effective conflict resolution principle. It is also a global and universal value that is found in every major faith and worldview, including Agnosticism, Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Humanism, Islam, Judaism, Native Americanism, Naturalism, Taoism and Utilitarianism.

Most of these faiths and worldviews share additional values that can play a pivotal role in resolving conflict, such as "speak the truth," "honor your commitments," "take responsibility for your wrongs" and "treat others justly."

Unfortunately, even when people profess a particular faith or worldview, emotions often cause them to forget some of their key beliefs and values when they are embroiled in conflict. Therefore, it is wise to pause during conflict and reflect on how we can live out our worldview or faith and seek solutions that promote values like justice, peace

and reconciliation. We can also seek objective advice from friends who share our worldviews or leaders in our faith communities, such as a rabbi, Imam, pastor or priest.

Faith can also play a key role if we need to seek advice and assistance for resolving conflict. Most major faith communities in the U.S. have well developed alternative dispute resolution (ADR) systems for resolving marital, business, personal and legal conflicts. These systems have been consistently respected and supported by civil courts (see Mediation and Religion).

For example, the Beth Din of American is available to provide counseling, mediation and arbitration services to the Jewish community. Muslims can obtain similar services through the Islamic Arbitration and Mediation Services. Christians can seek advice and assistance through the Christian Conciliation Service, a Division of RW360.

These types of services are especially helpful in conflicts involving personal relationships (workplace, school, divorce, probate, etc.), which can sometimes be restored through mediation rather than destroyed through adversarial processes.

WHAT ARE THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE JEWISH AND MUSLIM ADR SYSTEMS?

All faith-based ADR systems share a commitment to restoring relationships, but each of them follows its own value system and procedural rules. The best sources of detailed information on the distinctive values, services, training and case examples of the Jewish and Muslim ADR systems are the Beth Din of American and the Islamic Arbitration and Mediation Services.

WHAT ARE THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF A CHRISTIAN ADR SYSTEM?

Christian ADR, also known as "Christian conciliation," is a process for reconciling people and resolving personal, family, workplace and legal disputes in a way that is consistent with Christian values (see Relational Peacemaking). The process is conciliatory rather than adversarial in nature–that is, it encourages honest communication and reasonable cooperation rather than unnecessary contention and advocacy.

This process is often used by trained conciliators to resolve complicated legal disputes (see How Can You Forgive Me? I Killed Your Baby, A Stolen Baby, $200M Lawsuit and an Astonishing Reconciliation and The Three P's of Satisfaction). The principles of Christian conciliation are so simple that they may be applied by any person who wishes to help others resolve the conflicts of everyday life (see Reconciling Two Stubborn Scientists, Reconciliation in a Christian School, If Your Enemy Needs Electricity, Reconciled by a Baby Moose, Penetrating Barriers with the Gospel and The Night My Father Died).

To learn more about the principles of Christian ADR, see Christian Conciliation Service, Guiding People Through Conflict and Transformed by the Gospel).

Information on RW360's training in relational wisdom, peacemaking, conflict coaching and conciliation is available here.