

If you start a conversation with the assumption that you are right or that you must win, obviously it is difficult to talk.
 ~Wendell Berry

**Conflict Resolution
 in the Office of Financial Aid**

Willie Thomas

Conflict is...

An activity that is incompatible with another. It is something that prevents, blocks, or interferes with the occurrence or effectiveness of the second activity. A conflict can be as small as a disagreement or as large as a war. It can originate in one person, between two or more people, or between two or more groups.


Deutsch

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Causes of Conflict

Causes that influence, escalate, affirm, and support conflict:

- ✓ Resources
- ✓ Human Needs
- ✓ Values and Belief Systems
- ✓ Misinformation (inaccurate, outdated)
- ✓ Fear
- ✓ Laws and Policies
- ✓ Habits
- ✓ Culture and Customs
- ✓ Egos



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Cost of Unresolved Conflict

- Reduced productivity
- Poor use of resources and time
- Emotional stress
- Avoidance behavior
- Physical ailments
- Sabotage
- Undermining of relationships and reputations
- Decreased morale and motivation

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Positive Aspects of Conflict

- Produces the need to search for options



- Requires a clarification of points of view
- Tension arising from conflict may increase motivation.
- Conflict situations often produce better ideas.

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Different Kinds of Conflicts

Competitive – my way


Collaborative – our way

Compromising –some my way/some your way

Accommodating-your way

Avoiding-no way 

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Competitive

People with a competitive style:

- Take a firm stand and know what they want.
- Operate from a position of power, drawn from things like position, rank, expertise, or persuasive ability
- Useful when there is an emergency and a decision needs to be made fast; when the decision is unpopular; or when defending against someone who is trying to exploit the situation selfishly
- Can leave others feeling bruised, unsatisfied and resentful when used in less urgent situations

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Collaborative

People with a collaborative style:

- Meet the needs of all people involved.
- Highly assertive but unlike the competitor, they cooperate effectively and acknowledge that everyone is important
- Useful when you need to bring together a variety of viewpoints to get the best solution; when there have been previous conflicts in the group; or when the situation is too important for a simple trade-off

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Compromising

People with a compromising style:

- Find a solution that will at least partially satisfy everyone
- Everyone is expected to give up something, and the compromiser him- or herself also expects to relinquish something
- Compromise is useful when the cost of conflict is higher than the cost of losing ground, when equal strength opponents are at a standstill and when there is a deadline looming


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Accommodating
People with an accommodating style:

- Willingness to meet the needs of others at the expense of the person's own needs
- Knows when to give in to others, but can be persuaded to surrender a position even when it is not warranted.
- Not assertive but is highly cooperative
- Accommodation is appropriate when the issues matter more to the other party, when peace is more valuable than winning, or when you want to be in a position to collect on this "favor" you gave
- Others may not return favors, and overall this approach is unlikely to give the best outcomes


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Avoiding
People with an avoiding style:

- Seek to evade the conflict entirely
- Typified by delegating controversial decisions, accepting default decisions, and not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings
- It can be appropriate when victory is impossible, when the controversy is trivial, or when someone else is in a better position to solve the problem
- In many situations, this is a weak and ineffective approach to take

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**Strategies to Get Past
"Perceptions"**
Avoid Assumptions

- Assume nothing—assumptions are often wrong. Ask questions—it's harder to be wrong if you asked first.
- Try to understand the other's perspective before you try to get him/her to understand yours.
- Consider alternative explanations for the other person's behavior besides what you initially believe.

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Validation

- Allow the other person to have their experience and perception of the situation.
- Do NOT get defensive.
- Validate what they are experiencing (do not necessarily agree or disagree)
- Sometimes the thing that we think is the solution is actually the problem.



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Listen

- The goal is to understand, not to be right.
- Do not spend time preparing for what you are going to say back.
- Restate—both to make sure you did understand and to help the other person feel that you were listening.

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Problem Solving Skills

- Keep the focus on the problem rather than the emotion that results.
- Focus on one problem at a time—do not allow old issues to be resurrected as a diversion.
- Brainstorm, select a potential solution, implement the solution, and evaluate results.



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Tell Your Story

- Do not be passive and avoid telling your side of things.
- Do not be overly aggressive and ramrod your story as the only way it could be.
- Be assertive—get your information out while working to find solutions.

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Strategies to Resolve Conflicts


- Assume you do not have all the answers.
- Ask questions to understand the other person(s).
- Be prepared to compromise or make a deal.
- Postpone. If tired, sick, hungry wait until you feel better.
- Enforce. If there are consequences to the behavior you should follow through with them.
- Compromise. Be willing to give a little.
- Explore. Be willing to find other solutions that have not yet been discussed.



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Conflict Management Skills

Communications Fundamentals
Effective Listening and Speaking
Issues vs. Interests vs. Positions
Asking Effective Questions



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Communications Fundamentals

- Find an appropriate time to talk.
- Present information in way to encourage thought and dialogue.
- Tell the reasons you are asking a question or making a request.
- Confirm understanding of what you have said.
- Indicate if you want less or more information.
- Prepare prior to giving difficult, complicated, or upsetting information.
- Avoid words that might be offensive or hurtful.

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Effective Listening


- ✓ Listen for feelings as well as facts.
- ✓ Make eye contact.
- ✓ Check for words or phrases you might not understand.
- ✓ Summarize or paraphrase accurately.
- ✓ Create an atmosphere for listening.
- ✓ Have the patience to 'get it right'!

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Effective Listening

What to Avoid

- Making Judgments
- Mentally rehearsing your response
- Doing anything else while listening
- Interrupting or completing the speaker's sentence
- Assuming you know what the speaker is going to say
- Offering advice or solutions



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Steps in Resolving Conflicts

- Listen
- Ask Questions
- Listen again
- Simple Communication is at the heart of conflict resolution



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Questions?

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