

Understanding **CONFLICT**

How perceptions affect a conflict situation

Objective

- Understand how people can view things differently and how the differences impact their interactions.

Audience

High school and above

Time

25-30 minutes

Supplies needed

- Copies of the 2 pictures (see attached support materials)
- Flip chart and markers
- Copies of logos from FedEx and Goodwill (found on public websites)

Source

Adapted with permission from materials developed by Rob Ricigliano and Nancy Burrell, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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Background

Based on our life experiences, we all have a different outlook on life. And those differences contribute to variations in our perceptions of situations. Perception is the personal version of reality that we each experience. While a group of people may be looking at the same, simple object, every person looking at it has his/her own perception or reality of what the object is.

In this lesson, we will look at what perception is and how it can affect a conflict situation.

What to do

Break the group of participants into small groups (3-6 participants per group is a good size).

Activity 1: Old woman or young woman?

1. Show the participants the picture of the old woman/young woman (Activity 1 at the end of the lesson plan).
2. In their small groups, ask them to discuss what they see. Don't immediately offer up the options; the discussion will be more beneficial if the groups discuss it first. Ask the groups to come to a consensus about what they see.
3. Survey the groups to see if they have come to consensus on the picture or if they still have group members who are unable to see both figures.

4. Processing:

- Were there individuals who were able to see both figures?
- Were they helpful in guiding others to see the two figures?
- What were some of the feelings toward those who didn't see both figures and couldn't see it even after further instruction?
- How did people's different perspectives on the picture lead to conflict within the group?

Activity 2: Looking at the logos

1. Show participants pictures of the logos for FedEx and Goodwill.
2. Ask them to look carefully at the logo and describe what they see. Give them a couple of minutes to think about the logos.
3. Once the individuals have started deciding what they see, ask the group for volunteers to share what they see. When looking at the Goodwill logo, people will look at it and see either half of a smiling face or a lower-case G. When looking at the FedEx logo, ask participants if they notice anything standing out. (This one is a bit more difficult at first. There is an arrow between the E and the X in the logo.)
4. Processing:
 - Use the processing questions from Activity 1.

Activity 3: What's happening in this picture?

1. Show participants a large picture of three women in a kitchen (Activity 3 at the end of lesson).
 2. Ask them to write down what they think is happening in the picture. Allow them 5-10 minutes to formulate a story of what is going on in the picture.
 3. Have volunteers share their story of the picture.
 4. On a flip chart, take notes of the major themes identified by group participants.
 5. Processing:
 - Were you surprised at the differences or similarities in others' perspectives and stories?
 - How did your background/previous life experiences shape your perception of what was happening in the picture?
 - Did listening to others' perspectives help you see a different point of view?
3. Once they all seem like they have an initial count, survey the group to see what the most common answer is. Don't give out the correct answer at this time; wait until everyone has given their idea.
 4. Circle all the F's that are written in the sentence.
 5. Processing:
 - What were some reasons that you didn't get the same number of F's? Were there things that confused you or made you interpret things differently?
 - What does this activity prove about data interpretation, even in a situation where the data is simple to interpret?
 - The point of the exercise is that if it is difficult to be certain about the number of F's in this sentence, when the data is clear, easily understood, and something we can all do (e.g. read, count to 11), how hard is it to be certain about much more complex things like human relationships, big projects, or even what happened in a meeting, etc.? Being completely certain is an impossibility, yet we are trained to do so, and this sense of certainty keeps us from asking good questions, understanding their ladder of inference, or listening well.

Activity 4: How many F's?

1. On a large flip chart or an overhead projector, write the following sentence: "Two of the most powerful and effective of all human fears are the fear of failure and the fear of success."
2. Give the participants a few seconds to count the number of F's that they see in the sentence.

Processing

In the large group, the facilitator could use the following questions, if desired, to help generalize the activities:

- How can seeing something in a different light be useful?
- How might looking at the way others view a situation increase our own skills in dealing with others or resolving conflict?

Summary

Our perceptions come from our own personal experiences and background in life.

Those perceptions can cause conflict in a group, because we use our perceptions to formulate a conclusion.

When presented with the logos or old woman/young woman activities, many people are only able to see one of the two pictures, and some aren't able to see any at first. In order to see the opposing picture, they must acknowledge their own perception first and then gather opposing views of the picture.

Our brains are only able to see one picture at a time. The same goes for our perceptions of a conflict situation. We tend to only see our perspective at first. But until we suspend our conclusions and perceptions, and listen to others' perspectives (listening for understanding, not just listening in order to dispute their idea), we are not able to truly understand others' views and move toward a mutual understanding.

Activity 1



Activity 3

