

Say What You Mean: Avoiding, Reducing & Resolving Conflicts



SAMPLE

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Note: This is a sampling of excerpts from some of the lessons found in *Say What You Mean: Avoiding, Reducing and Resolving Conflicts*. To order the full version, click <http://artofeloquence.com/store/SocialCommunication/SWMConflicts>

Section I: Introduction to Conflicts



1. What are Conflicts?
2. What Causes Conflicts?
3. What Can Conflicts Cause?

***Bonus:** English Problems Video [**Bonus Link Not Available in Sample**]

What Do Conflicts Cause?

"An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of the citadel." -Proverbs 18:19

Now that we've looked at what causes conflicts, I'd like to talk a bit about what conflicts can cause us. Proverbs 25:11 tells us how important our communication is: *"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver."* and Proverbs 18:19 (above) tells us what can happen if we are not careful with it. Conflicts manifest themselves in many ways, wreaking all kinds of havoc on all parties involved.

Contention:

Once a conflict arises, the communication changes within the relationship. Each party will focus more on the behavior of his adversary and justify his own behavior by what the other has done rather than by a universal standard. Each sees the other as a rival and engages in a tit-for-tat response or even attack against the other.

Escalation:

Emotions and sheer noise level will naturally progress at alarming rates unless something is done to diffuse the situation leading to increasing conflict, disagreements and bruised feelings.

Polarization:

As a conflict continues, both parties (and those who might at first be neutral bystanders) begin to polarize as they start to see each other as adversaries on opposite sides of an issue. This polarization eventually engulfs other issues as well, even those having nothing to do with the original disagreement. It becomes more of an us-against-them proposition in which trust and respect are lost and perceptions are distorted. Each sees the other as the enemy, ascribing evil characteristics to them. Eventually it becomes difficult for either party to see the other in an unbiased way where they may assess their intentions fairly. Each becomes almost a caricature to the other, all evil or at least mostly evil.

Character Attacks:

When warring parties feel they are being unfairly treated, emotions take over and the result is personal attacks against the other's character or personality. You see this a great deal in politics. Rather than dealing with the issues upon which they disagree, they resort to name calling, making their opponent appear as an evil dictator bent on world domination. The more the person is attacked and the more unfair the characterization, the more they feel justified in lashing out at the other.

Worst Case Scenario:

After assassinating each other's character, it is difficult to see the other party as a human being with both good qualities and human failings. The tendency is to view everything about the other as bad, giving each additional ammunition to use against the other and justify the belief that they are evil.

Mexican Standoff:

The situation may escalate to the point where neither party is willing to admit that the other's position has any validity at all. It may end in a stalemate or a standoff where one or more issues stand in the way of any resolution. While time may heal some wounds, it may instead, make the heart grow harder.

Conflict Contemplation:

What have conflicts caused in your life? Have you seen these issues manifest themselves in your own conflicts? What does this teach you about conflicts you might have in the future? What have you already learned in this section that will help you keep conflicts to a minimum?

Section II: Avoiding Conflicts



1. **Best Way to Deal with Conflicts: Avoid Them!**
2. **Tips for Speakers**
3. **Tips for Listeners**
4. **Tips for Group Settings**

***Bonus:** Do You See the Person as Half Flawed? **[Bonus Link Not Available in Sample]**

Tips for Listeners

"He who answers before listening-that is his folly and his shame." -Proverbs 18:13

Effective communication is a two way street. It takes a good communicator and a willing listener. There are a few things listeners can do in order to facilitate effective conversation. Here are eight tips:

Listen Carefully

So many times we aren't paying close attention to what the speaker is saying. How often have you received an email from a friend and completely missed a vital point or even half of what they typed because you weren't paying attention? Was there ever a time when you had so much on your mind you didn't notice that your son was trying to get your attention? How many times have you been on the phone with a relative who was desperately trying to explain something to you for 15 minutes until the light bulb finally went on because you realized she didn't say what you thought she did?

Not listening carefully may communicate to the speaker that you don't respect them or their opinion. It may tell them that you aren't interested or that you don't care what they think. Selective listening can become a habit. Everyone makes mistakes, but if your friend sees a pattern emerging where you don't pay attention to them when they speak, their hurt feelings may cost you your friendship even if that friendship has survived years.

Ask for Clarification

If you come into the conversation midway through and aren't clear on what the speaker is talking about, it's always best to ask for clarification or a recap that will bring you up to speed. Have you ever received an email and have no idea what the author is referring to? "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find," ask and all will be revealed to you.

Your friend says, "Dinner's at 4am so don't be late, Cindy!" You're pretty sure Nancy wouldn't have dinner at 4am, but 4pm is a little early for dinner. If you simply assume she meant 4pm, you might arrive too early creating an awkward moment when Nancy is trying to get things ready for the dinner party. When you ask her to clarify the time, you find that Nancy was thinking about a phone call she had received this morning at 4am, but meant to tell you that her dinner party would be at 5pm.

Don't Assume the Worst

Most people do the best they can with what they have and with good intentions. Most misunderstandings do not result from intended offense, but from miscommunication. Folks are busy these days and may be careless with their words; however, a thoughtless word choice can change the entire flavor of the sentence. Improper or inadequate punctuation can change the meaning as well. If you think back to the misunderstandings you have had in the past, you'd probably find that most of the offenses were simply a poor choice of words.

Hearing is NOT Listening

As we discussed last time, true communication requires a thoughtful speaker who carefully sends his words out into the world. Just as it takes two to tango, so true communication takes two. Real communication is not complete without a thoughtful listener who, not only hears, but truly listens.

Listening means to pay attention to the sound, to hear the speaker's words with thoughtful attention. That's the listener's job.

It is, indeed, the speaker's job to be understood and not the listener's job to pull it out of him. However, the listener has the ability to facilitate and enhance that communication. A great communicator may be able to give a great speech, but even an accomplished speaker will have trouble getting his message across if the listener is not doing his job. Next week, I'll discuss misinterpretation.

Section III: Reducing Conflicts



1. General Tips for Reducing Conflict
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***Bonus:** Real Rhonda vs Automated Audrey [**Bonus Link Not Available in Sample**]

General Tips for Reducing Conflict

"Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones." -Proverbs 16:24

Okay. There. You said it. It's out there. You've caused a conflict. Now what? Well, all hope is not lost if you are an effective communicator. When conversation becomes conflict, don't let it go too far. Now more than ever before, it's vital that you listen intently to the other party and carefully craft your response. The following are 20 tips for reducing conflicts that work regardless of who was the cause.

Soften Your Voice

I "hear tell," from my southern friends, who were taught you could get away with saying just about anything as long as you did it with a sweet voice. It's true that when you soften your voice, you don't sound as harsh. You can sweeten almost any communication and take all the sting out of whatever you need to say just by softening your voice. As they used to say, "Try it. You'll like it!"

"I Feel" vs "You Always"

Using "you" statements puts the other party on the defensive. "You always interrupt me when I'm talking!" Everyone has a right to their own feelings. Sharing how you feel about something is usually less confrontational and allows the other party to understand where you are coming from. "Please don't interrupt me; it makes me feel like you don't care what I have to say."

Listen and Give Yourself Time to Respond

Find out what the other person wants you to hear, even if you don't agree with it. Many arguments go on unpleasantly and without progress because each side is trying to be heard but neither side is listening. By listening, you will understand how the other person feels and most likely discover what you can do to resolve the emerging issue.

Confirm Your Understanding

Summarize your understanding of the other person's position, by stating it in your own words, and then ask if your understanding is accurate. "Are you saying ____?" You have now changed the dynamics of the conversation. Instead of trying to persuade the other person that you are right, you are trying to understand their concerns. This will defuse the situation, create an opportunity to correct any misunderstandings or allow you to show good faith while you attempt to get the conversation back on a more peaceful course.

Confirm that You Have Been Understood

Now, ask the other person if they understand where *you* are coming from. In attempting to summarize your position, they may realize that they have not been listening to you. This allows you to explain, clear up any misunderstanding and, hopefully, end the conflict right there. Even if it doesn't, at the very least it will make sure the other party completely understands what you feel and why you feel it.

Make It Easy for Them

Avoid saying anything that will encourage the other person to respond out of defensiveness: blaming, accusing, criticizing and diagnosing. Show your sincere appreciation and respect for the other parties involved. Communicate to them in a way that shows you truly care about their needs. Own up to

anything you've done that might have contributed to the conflict.

Be Objective

Be careful not to get caught up in the emotion of the conflict in order that you might see both sides objectively. How would a neutral third party view the conflict to this point? What would this mean for reducing the conflict right now?

Consider Your Options

Before plunging headlong into a tactic you think might reduce the conflict, it's important to weigh your options, though you may need to do this rather quickly. Is there a misunderstanding that asking a question might clear up? Did you realize you misstated some statistic? Used the wrong word? Is there a misinterpretation that requires a simple explanation? If that explanation would cause further conflict, is it best just to let it slide? What option is best given the time you have to reduce the conflict?

You Don't Need to Be Right

Wanting to be right during a conflict is the surest way to further it. Does it matter who is right? Does it matter who said it first? Would you rather be right, or remain friends? Humbly bite your tongue and allow someone else to take the credit unless there are dire consequences to doing so. Letting the little things go, is the simplest way to reduce a conflict.

Conflict Contemplation

Think back to a time when you had a small conflict with someone. How would any of these tips have helped you to reduce the conflict quickly? Which of these have you tried in the past or seen others do with good results? Look for opportunities to use these techniques in your daily conversations with people. Record how they worked for you? What went right? What could you have handled better? What can you do in the future to reduce little conflicts before they grow into full arguments.

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