TEN TIPS FROM THE MEDIATOR'S TOOL KIT

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What is mediation and what does it have to do with leadership and conflict resolution in the workplace? Good questions! Let’s take a look.

Mediation is most generally defined as a guided process for resolving or transforming conflict. A third party helps feuding folks try to work through their disagreements or conflicts, usually in a joint session. Mediation may end up with a solution to the problem, a better relationship, an agreement to disagree, or just a willingness to continue the dialogue.

All mediators learn and use certain core skills to help people in conflict. And while a true mediator is an outside neutral who has no personal stake in the outcome, the skills can be used by anyone in every kind of interaction, at home, work, school and anywhere people may gather. Mediators view conflict as the intersection of differences and a potentially productive opportunity for greater understanding and mutual concern.

Every organization experiences conflicts, complaints, disagreements and tensions. Every individual has to deal with conflict some of the time, whether it is a county employee dealing with an irate member of the public, co-workers reacting to perceived unfair treatment, meeting conveners trying to get a group to consensus on a difficult topic or any other workplace stress. And even though as employees, administrators or HR personnel you may not be true neutrals, everyone can use mediator skills to diffuse tension and guide conversations toward more productive and positive ground, any time and in any setting.

So come along to explore the mediator’s toolkit of skills! We will address people skills, process management and problem solving. Be ready for a few stretched analogies on the road ahead and think of them as fun mnemonics! Let’s explore!
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I. INTRODUCTION

Tool One
The Little Red Tool Kit: Understanding Conflict.

First things first. Tools have to be used for the right task at the right time and that means understanding the nature of conflict itself. The toolbox provides a framework and context for thinking about conflict. Most scholars agree that the core of interpersonal conflict is a sense of threat to something important to the participants. Conflict begins in disagreement, annoyances, competition or inequities and can escalate into full scale hostilities in turn generating personal, community and sometimes public responses.

Conflict proceeds on at least two levels. People generally take a “position” or a stand about what they want or think they want. Underlying most positions are deeper needs or “interests,” things that are really driving them. Let’s look at a well-known example from conflict literature. Two kids are fighting over the last remaining cupcake for desert. Each insists they should get the whole cupcake and neither wants to cut it in half. Each has a position. An adult comes across the fracas and asks some questions, among them: “what do you like best about cupcakes?” After a while it becomes clear that one child likes the icing and the other likes the cake; they have discovered their true interests. Problem untangled and solved! The cake can be split half and half horizontally and meet the true interests of each child. Had the adult walked away or scolded either child, raining negative judgments down on them, or exercised less patience, or even insisted the cupcake be cut in half conventionally, the situation could have been resolved but not with such a favorable “win-win.”

Mediators understand that conflict proceeds at these different levels and have developed basic tools to address the components of any dispute. As a conflict intermediary, mediators need the ability to assist and manage people; the savvy to navigate the process; and the creativity to help folks come up with solutions to problems. Those same tools can help anyone, whether they are acting as a third party or are in the conflict themselves, do a better job of working through a knotty mess!

The key is becoming more acutely aware of what tools are available and when to reach for which one. Conflict resolution tools are content-neutral, that is, they are not focused on finding the "right" or "legal" or "policy-oriented" solution to an issue, but rather to exploring perspectives and encouraging respectful communication. Thus, as an
administrator or HR manager, you may be obliged ultimately to “enforce” legal standards and work toward compliance; but as a leader and a role model for those in conflict, you also can help create a good, productive process that can lead to the “right” result.

So tool number one, the tool kit itself, is the vehicle for understanding that dealing with conflict has to start with an open mind and heart and create a process that can help people move to positive outcomes.1

Conflict is not to be feared, but transformed into opportunity.

II. FUNDAMENTAL PEOPLE SKILLS

Tool Two
The Flashlight: Illuminating the Situation through Attention and Acknowledgement

A. Attention

Step one in addressing any conflict is figuring out what is going on, shining a light onto the fray. That means paying highly focused attention to the people involved, who they are, what they have to say. "Attention" is not the same as “hearing” or even “listening.” Rather, it means a deep, quiet, patient mindset, being prepared to drink in deeply, see very clearly and absorb thoroughly what is being said.

To attain this state of mind, some mediators start any listening process with a conscious deep breath or by silently repeating a word to themselves ("quiet"), or by saying something out loud that clearly orients their attention on the other person:

"I'd very much like to hear what you have to say."

"Thank you for this complaint, I want to hear more about it."

"Please tell me about your concerns."

1At the end of this paper are some exercises you can do on your own to test your mediation skills. Check out the “Pop Quiz: Attitudes Toward Conflict” (Appendix A-2) and give some thought to how you approach the subject.
True focused attention is conveyed not only by the words chosen, but by tone of voice, facial expression, body language, orienting toward the person and being comfortable with silence. Creating a feeling that someone is being fully and carefully attended to builds rapport and can begin to enlighten the parties and diffuse tension.\(^2\)

**B. Acknowledgement**

People in conflict tell their stories from their own perspectives. These personal narratives need to be acknowledged. The story may be superficially about a member of the public upset with lack of services or an employee with allegations of discriminatory treatment, but underneath lie deeper interests like self-identity, equal treatment, family, fairness, or justice. Conflict management means acknowledging the parties’ stories on all levels.

The successful mediator acknowledges at least three things: the story that is being told, the emotions the speaker has experienced, and the real interests or values at stake for the storyteller. This means acknowledging both the verbal narrative and its nonverbal content. It means being aware of and accepting without judgment the emotional response that the speaker has experienced. And it means listening with care for the speaker to identify not just positions ("I am getting too many emails to keep up with") but the important underlying values or interests at stake for that speaker, the things that really matters the most ("because it is important to my sense of accomplishment to keep up with my work")

When people tell a story to a willing listener who acknowledges the narrative, the feelings and the deeper interests, they tend to calm down. They tend to feel heard and therefore gratified. They tend to gain clarity about their real concerns. They can often de-escalate and steer a conversation to safer ground.

Acknowledgement does not mean agreement. Use language that focuses on what the other person has said; not on your reaction to it or opinion of it. Acknowledging may take any number of forms. These are all simple statements of acknowledgement.

"I understand what you are saying." (general acknowledgement)

"It sounds like this all began when you arrived at the office yesterday." (acknowledging the narrative)

"I hear that you felt very frustrated." (acknowledging emotion)

As leaders and doers, you may find this tool rather difficult and it is very easy to discard it prematurely. We all have a tendency to react to a grievance by rushing in to solve, ameliorate or even dismiss it quickly. Mediators have learned that rushing to solutions can result in sub-optimal situations where the immediate issue is papered over or soothed,

\(^2\) See how you fare on a listening inventory, “Supportive Listening: What’s Your Score?” (Appendix A-3-A-4)
but the opportunity to address deeper schisms and more important interests is lost. Taking the
time for acknowledgment can lead to the possibility of a richer, more authentic
interchange and more durable agreements or consensus.

Tool Three
Phillips Screwdriver: Set a Centering Tone

Have faith, the analogy will become clear! Did you know that Henry Phillips was an
engineer who invented the Phillips screwdriver in the 1930’s to aid production lines in
the auto industry? The face of the screwdriver corresponded to intersecting groves in the
screw head, an innovation that would allow the two pieces to be “easily centered and less
likely to slip.” This self-centering made all the difference in the world to production lines
and the invention was widely adopted.

And so, the right tone for an intervention into conflict should accomplish the very same
thing: allow the disputants to center themselves comfortably and provide sure footing that
allows everyone involved to be “less likely to slip” back into old grievances and
resentments (analogy accomplished!)

The best tone to set when dealing with conflict will encourage civility and honesty. A
mediator tries to model and project an air of trust, respect, kindness, dignity, candor,
patience, and a genuine sense of curiosity. The calmer the tone and the more the
intervener models an attitude of respect, the more likely that the participants can achieve
genuine and honest dialogue.

Setting the tone means paying attention to and measuring the impact of surroundings,
from tone of voice, body language, and how a phone is answered, to whether the room is
noisy or quiet, whether food or drink is offered, whether interruptions are tolerated.

Tone setting can include simple steps like:

"Let me just turn off my cell phone so we won't be interrupted."

"Can I get you some water?"
"I am sorry, I am expecting another call in just a minute; can I get your number and call you back?"

Although we cannot always control it, the physical setting is important too. Most difficult conversations are better had in a quiet, neutral setting with various seating options (circle, a table, easy chairs).

**Tool Four.**

**Tape Measurer: Don’t Judge**

When a carpenter takes out his tape measurer, he does not “tsk tsk” at the result of his measurement or blame the material he is working with! The tape measurer provides information but does not judge it. Withholding judgment a key “people” tool to obtain objective information and keep folks engaged.

"Should" "ought" "right" "legal" "in my opinion" "the law requires" are words that a mediator consciously puts aside. Withholding judgment means not condemning, punishing, arguing with, shaming, or disagreeing with a person while they are telling their story. Obviously, in some contexts, it is critical to reach a correct legal solution or to hew to a department directive. But even in that context, withholding judgment is key.

For example, to the complaint "Why do you have to shut down every road in the county with construction all at once,” you might be tempted to respond: "Because that’s the way construction works and we have to do it when we can.” Accurate as that may be, you may have missed an opportunity to delve deeper. Asking instead “Tell me how that is affecting you” might reveal that in addition to sounding off, the speaker wants a map of detour routes which of course you can easily provide! Even when you have to give a “legal” answer, it should come in the form of a neutral statement about what the law/policy is, rather than jumping to condemn or set straight the complainer's own feelings.

Withholding judgment is demonstrated by neutral and impartial language:
TRY: "It sounds as if you want to challenge your performance review. Let’s talk about that.”

NOT: “Just because you are legally entitled to challenge a performance review doesn’t mean I have to listen to you complaining about it all the time.”

TRY: "You are feeling harassed because of some gossip going around the office. Tell me more about that.”

NOT: “Don’t listen to gossip; just get over it.”

Remaining non-judgmental is not the same as having no opinions. It is more akin to a willingness to consider another’s perspective and even allow it to influence your own.

III. MANAGING THE PROCESS

Tool Five
Hammer: Use Ground Rules

"Process" tools are most useful in group contexts such as a multi-sided disagreement or managing a fractious meeting, but also helpful in one-on-one contexts. Here, you are using mediator skills to guide participants to direct their energies toward productive solutions or at the very least to appreciation of each other’s perspectives.

The first process tool in any group is to set ground rules. Although a mediator is non-judgmental and sets a tone which encourages the parties to remain centered and on task, that does not mean countenancing incivility, abuse or threats. That kind of dysfunctional behavior can be partially controlled in advance by gently hammering out rules of conduct at the start. Wield the hammer with utmost care – elicit from the parties their own ideas about how to interact, rather than dictating them. When people agree to their own rules, they are more likely to follow them. Despite that, sometimes – as in a public hearing – rules must be set unilaterally from the get-go.
Don’t forget this step, because ultimately, reminding people of how they agreed to (or were required to) conduct themselves is the single most effective way to keep boundaries intact and discussions productive. You probably already have certain ground rules in the form of employee handbooks and workplace standards; don’t hesitate to use them.

Most common behavior issues in conflict confrontations include interruptions, emotionally extreme behavior, accusations, repetition, personal attack, name-calling, going off on tangents, dominating the discussion, failing to allow others to speak, failing to speak, intimidation. Given that, it is not surprising that mediators and parties alike usually come up with the same ideas for ground rules or guidelines. Simply stated, they usually are:

Be civil

Don't interrupt

Don't yell.

Don’t name-call.

Take turns.

Listen.

Let others speak

Stick to one issue at a time.

Take a break when emotions get high.

If participants find themselves unable to follow these rules, they will be excused and/or the session/dialogue/phone call will be closed.
Now we are in the heart of the process. Just as a mechanic may use pliers to bend, compress, grip, and handle materials she is working with, a mediator uses tools to help people in conflict shape and build upon their interaction. Restating, reframing and summarizing are keys to forging a constructive process.

A. Restating

Restating or asking the parties to restate the other side's point develops understanding. A mediator can restate what has been said as a check on her own understanding of the positions and interests and an acknowledgment of what the parties have said. The people in conflict can use restating to hear and acknowledge another’s view point. Asking parties to restate what they have heard can come across as patronizing, so think of this tool as delicate jewelry pliers, to be used with care. It is effective when things seem to be really off-track and ideas, accusations, or arguments are sailing by each other like ships passing in the night.

Example of restating:

"A couple of times, I've mentioned that changing our office hours is not negotiable and I think it important that I comment on that again" (restating own position)

"Remember, we all agreed to avoid shouting.” (restatement of group’s position)

"I heard you earlier say that you are very upset by the name-calling." (restating other's position)

“Just as a way of getting our bearings, I wonder if you, Sally, could tell me what you have heard from Joe about the way we can better handle invoice
processing and Joe, maybe you can tell me Sally’s position on that.”
(asking parties to restate the other’s words).

Asking someone to restate another’s position has to be done even-handedly and each speaker has to have a chance to comment so that they do not feel forced to "adopt" the point of view being restated. The point of restating is to begin to move the parties towards perspective-taking and understanding the interests the parties hold. It is a tool to smooth the process, not to humiliate or coerce.

B. Summarizing

Summarizing compresses what has happened in the meeting or session, keeps people on track, focuses attention, and organizes the threads and layers of discussion. It helps everybody understand "where are we" especially after a long discussion. Taking notes during the discussion can be an invaluable aid to summarizing well. Summarizing can, however, be risky, because putting too much in or leaving too much out can foster misunderstanding.

Thus, summarizing should be carefully used to gather the conversational threads together, review what has been agreed to or what still needs to be done, and move the entire conversation along.

Example. Let’s say an employee at a meeting has complained bitterly and at length about some new LEAN processes recently implemented. You summarize:

"So far, what I've heard you say is that you don't like the way the LEAN process is working. You feel that it has placed so much emphasis on efficiency that other values like innovation have been sacrificed. You think this has made your job less enjoyable. You have some ideas about changes; should we talk about that now?"

A neutral summary is like a TV episode recap; a reminder of the prior discussion and a set-up to move on.

C. Reframing

Reframing means redirecting the conversation. Let’s say our employee says “I can’t do my job anymore with these LEAN procedures in place; it just inhibits my creativity.” If you were restating, you would repeat back pretty much what the person said. If you were summarizing, you might say something like the example above. When reframing, you are trying to take the negative direction of a remark or conversation and turn it to productive ends. So to reframe this statement, you might say “It sounds like we should talk about how we can enhance your sense of creativity even using the LEAN protocols.”
Reframing is an assertive tool that deliberately begins to shape the conversation toward problem-solving. If done prematurely or ham-handedly, with the biggest pair of pliers you’ve got, the person you are helping may feel leveraged or manipulated. The key to making reframing work is the invitation to talk about productive solutions and not the imposition of the “answer.”

Good reframing: "One thing you identified is your dislike of the LEAN procedures. Do you have some ideas about what we could do to address that?"

Bad reframing: “You are not expected to like your job, just do it.” (!)

Reframing moves from problem to opportunity, weakness to strength, unkindness to understanding, and so on.³

IV. HOW TO HELP SOLVE PROBLEMS

Tool Seven
Monkey Wrench: Ask Questions.

Asking questions must be done deftly, because it will either mess everything up (“throw a monkey wrench into”) or set you on the path toward achieving a snug, secure fit (reaching a solution and an agreement). Questioning is a potentially beneficial and potentially damaging monkey wrench!

Risky or not, questions are everything in building toward solutions for conflict. Questions establish the opening tone and invite the opening narrative. Questions elicit information. Questions help identify what is most important to the parties, the interests underlying the positions they have taken. Good questions ameliorate and bad questions exacerbate tensions. Most importantly, well-placed questions will begin to shape solutions and test whether agreement or resolution or peace is possible.

³ Practice turning negative to positive with the worksheet “Turning Negatives into Positives” (A-5).
Until you are practiced, approach questions on high alert. Keep in mind “what” and not “why;” “can you tell me” and not “what are you talking about?” and “open-ended” instead of “closed.” Remember the tape measurer (no judgment) and Mr. Phillips “self-centering” screwdriver, maintaining a tone less likely to slip into bad vibes. Make your questions direct and true, a product of genuine empathy and interest, not of a hurried rush toward imposing a result that you might favor. Although there is certainly a place for that kind of directness, it is not the best tool for peaceably resolving conflict.

Examples of Good Open-Ended Questions:

Tell me what you are concerned about? (opening questions)

Can you describe what happened? (opening questions)

After you got the objectionable email from your co-worker, what happened? (eliciting information)

How did you feel about that? (eliciting emotional response)

Examples of Bad Closed-Ended Questions

Why didn’t you say something right away? (accusatory)

If you don’t like standing in line at our counter, why don’t you just bring something to do while you wait?

Can’t you find some other route to work so you don’t have to get road rage because of construction? (dictating solution)

Why don’t you quit if you don’t like LEAN? (hmmm?)

(How about instead “do you have some thoughts on what might help here?)

A great way to becoming a skilled questioner is to listen to your own daily interactions and ask yourself whether your questions tend to be open, neutral and fair.⁴

⁴ See “A Questionable Exercise” for practice in identifying open and closed questions. (A-6 – A-7)
Tool 8
Saw: Send the Dust Flying in a Brainstorm!

Once you have successfully navigated to the problem-solving stage, it is time to focus on solutions. The saw stands for sending the dust flying, cutting through things, building something new! Working together, people can often come up with solutions or resolutions or end-points that no one would reach independently. Listen for the kernel of an idea that may lead to a fresh approach. Ask good questions to elicit creativity. Brainstorming is intended to be an unfiltered free flow of ideas, good, bad and indifferent, that might solve the problem.5

Make sure everyone knows that listing an idea is not the same as accepting it; no one is agreeing to anything by participating in this exercise. Then:

Make a list of ideas without regard to deciding if they will work or not

Establish a "don't say no" ground rule so that even zany ideas can just float around without being judged at the outset.

Keep it moving fast and furious: "Anything else? Can you think of more?"

Contribute your own ideas. "What if we put the application process online so people could do it from home and not have to stand in line in an office?" “What if we used helicopters to transport people over construction zones?” “What if every county employee took mediation training to improve their ability to handle conflict with civility?”

Explore each idea in turn, test for consequences, what the idea might solve, what are the weak points.

5 The iconic example of crazy brainstorming comes from Canada (depending upon which internet version you read!) It makes the point that no matter how crazy an idea may sound, something may come of it. The story of “Bears, Honey Pots and Helicopters” is at A-8. A brainstorm exercise is at A-9.
Then keep the good and the workable, throw out what doesn't work.

Sometimes, brainstorming is inhibited by lack of anonymity, especially when people are together in hierarchical groups. So try “brainwriting” instead. Ask each person in a group to spend 10 minutes thinking about solutions through free writing or word association. Have them jot ideas down and turn them in to a group leader or a neutral or use post-its and let people just stick theirs on a wall. Then engage the group in evaluation and winnowing of the ideas. It is surprising how much innovation arises out of individual brainwriting activities.

This can be the best part of conflict resolution. This is where the tangled knots of disagreement and discord can be untangled and even, actually, be fun!

**Tool Nine**  
**Flat-Head Screwdriver: Test for Agreement**

Unlike its modern cousin (the self-centering Phillips screwdriver), the traditional flat head screwdriver was invented centuries ago and is one of the most common tools in the world for fitting and fastening, often the final touch on a product. Our toolkit reserves this screwdriver for testing and tightening up the final agreement after a conflict has been resolved.

When solutions are found for a problem, ideally everyone involved will agree. If an agreement is to be durable, however, the agreement needs to be tested. Testing for agreement simply means restating the ideas around which consensus seemed to form and then asking a series of questions to make sure that last, tight fit can be achieved. The goal is not necessarily to arrive at a legally enforceable agreement or a new policy or a firm solution. The goal is to re-affirm, if it is possible, that the interchange has resulted in a practical and next appropriate step.

   I've heard a consensus about a meeting with the IT experts to explore our computer problems. Is that acceptable to everyone?

   Is there anything about this that you find uncomfortable?

   You are okay with the planned meeting?

   And you realize all we can do is explore solutions; we don't know exactly what would be feasible or ultimately approved.

   So does the plan seem okay to you?

   Use five-finger consensus.6

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Testing for agreement may result in more discussion and more ideas. It may result in yet another different approach. So the very end of a conversation, assuming that agreement or some resolution has been reached, restate the outcome. Again, the point is not necessarily to reach a binding document (you may need lawyers for that in some cases), but to reach closure.

In some situations, no "solution" to a "problem" may be forthcoming. Even then, however, something positive will hopefully have arisen out of the exchange, using the mediator's tools. In lieu of agreement on a specific approach, the facilitator/mediator may find himself affirming simply that the process was helpful. Instead of "here's the answer" the end stage may be "thank you, I found this very helpful, I appreciated hearing your point of view. I'm sorry I can't change our policies to accommodate your ideas, but if you have any other concerns, please don't hesitate to call."

**Tool Ten**
**You: Lead and Model Conflict Resolution**

As you no doubt surmise, the key to conflict resolution is "you." No tool kit in the world can replace someone who is knowledgeable about conflict, patient and willing to see it through, self-confident and self-effacing at the same time, slow to anger and quick to sense someone else's needs, able to pull out the tape measurer or the hammer or saw. You don't have to be an angel or an expert; just sincere, informed and willing to lead and model good conflict resolution techniques.

Conflicts cannot always be resolved but they can almost always be managed. Conflicts serve as valuable sources of insight into the challenges an organization or a person may face and the possibilities of ever-increasing ways to address them.

Practice makes perfect and conflict resolution skills are no exception. Consciously use these tools whenever you can - in talking to a family member, dealing with road rage, rejecting an unwanted dinner-hour sales call, or changing a habitual response to a co-worker who annoys you. As you consciously reach for and employ these tools, they will
fit more easily in your hand. Using the tool kit will become routine and you will soon exhibit the skills of a master builder in conflict resolution.  

Ready to start hammering and sawing away? Take home your tool kits and go for it!  

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7Take a test now and then again in a few months to assess your current skills and how they can develop with practice: “Skills that Make a Difference.” (A-11) And if you want to consider a lofty theme, check out “The Ideal Peacemaker: Can You Imagine That?”(A-12 – A-13)
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**Defining Conflict: Where Do You Stand?**

**Handout**

**Pop Quiz: Attitudes Toward Conflict**

In each row across the page, check off the one phrase that best represents your way of thinking. (Your choices should involve your thoughts about present-day conflict in the workplace.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I believe conflict:</th>
<th>Check Here</th>
<th>I believe conflict:</th>
<th>Check Here</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hurts relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strengthens relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should be avoided</td>
<td></td>
<td>Should be resolved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution is based on status and power</td>
<td></td>
<td>Resolution is based on equality of power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disregards differences of opinion</td>
<td></td>
<td>Recognizes and appreciates differences of opinion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has nothing to be gained from it</td>
<td></td>
<td>Can generate growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is about blame</td>
<td></td>
<td>Is about understanding and coming to agreement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produces a winner and a loser</td>
<td></td>
<td>Can produce a win-win resolution</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total the number of checks in each column. Join the group for comments and further discussion.
Supportive Listening: What's Your Score?

PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISE: To help you become more aware of your listening skills, determine where your strengths are, and discover what aspects you might develop more fully.

INTRODUCTION: This exercise provides a quantitative self-assessment analysis to evaluate your listening skills in questionnaire form.

WORKSHEET

Circle the number that most clearly describes your choice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening Competency</th>
<th>Almost always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Almost never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pay full attention to the speaker's message instead of what that person looks like?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Assume you know what the speaker will say and quickly start thinking of other things?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Listen carefully to others whose opinions are different than your own?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Make extra effort when you hear an accent?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Avoid listening if it will take extra effort to understand?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Listen without making judgments?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Let your own emotions get in the way?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Make the speaker think you’re giving them your full attention, even if you’re thinking about other things?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Figure out and acknowledge the feelings that the speaker might be experiencing?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Attempt to determine the purpose of the communication (the speaker’s real needs)?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Talk more than listen?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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### 50 Activities for Conflict Resolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Check assumptions about the message, the messenger, and the means of communication before you respond?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Summarize in your own words what you heard the speaker say?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Turn your listening experience into a learning one, especially when it involves different people, places, and ideas?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Start thinking what you will say while the speaker is still talking?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Recognize your “hot buttons” and not let them get in the way of your listening?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Interrupt without giving the speaker an opportunity to finish the thought?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Check assumptions about the message, the messenger, and the means of communication before you respond?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scoring**

Total the numbers in each category you circled on the questionnaire to get your score.

\[
\text{Almost Always} + \text{Frequently} + \text{Sometimes} + \text{Almost Never} = \text{Total}
\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>59–72</td>
<td>Super Listener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46–58</td>
<td>Better than Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32–45</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–31</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SUMMARY**

The art of listening is far more important than people realize. Experienced
Turning Negatives into Positives

PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISE: To practice the art of re-framing negative statements into positive ones.

INTRODUCTION: Negative statements put others on the defensive. If you find yourself using negative statements, remember that it is positive statements that contribute to solving a problem.

WORKSHEET

Listed below are typical statements that could arise during a conflict resolution session. Write in the space next to each negative statement the appropriate positive counterpart statement. (See the first line for an example.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Statement</th>
<th>Positive Counterpart Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You aren’t listening to me.</td>
<td>I’d appreciate your full attention for a while.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve never heard of anything like this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s not the way we did it before.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re wrong!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t think you’re open to change.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re not willing to give me what I need.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t tell me what to do.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You never give me a chance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You always get your way, regardless of others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You got exactly what you wanted and I got nothing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t see it your way.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not going to do that.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s not acceptable to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not going to discuss this further.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You go your way; I’ll go mine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The meeting can’t go on like this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
50 Activities for Conflict Resolution

9. "What can the rest of us do to help us get back on track?"

   Purpose of the question:

   Alternative:

10. "When did you file the last set of reports?"

    Purpose of the question:

    Alternative:
BEARS, HONEY POTS AND HELICOPTERS

An urban myth about brainstorming and letting crazy ideas fly starts with Pacific Power and Light. Plagued with trying to figure out how to de-ice electrical lines after winter storms, without endangering personnel, the company held brainstorming sessions for solutions. Nothing appeared feasible. Finally, they held one last session, encouraging maximum diversity including everyone from secretaries to linesmen to executives. Craziness was encouraged and humor was high. One linesman suggested sending bears up the poles to shake the wires free of ice. Another cracked that they’d have to figure out how to train the bears. Another suggested using helicopters to place honey pots on top of the poles so the bears would naturally be attracted. Amid frustrated laughter, a secretary suddenly spoke up. She said she had been a nurse in Vietnam and she remembered the impact of the down-wash from helicopter blades bringing in the wounded. Would that vibration be enough to shake the lines and knock ice off? It would be! The tale goes that PP & L used helicopters for years after that to de-ice their lines. And they would not have had the idea of helicopters if someone hadn’t brainstormed the idea of a bear.

Remember, just because it didn’t happen doesn’t mean it isn’t true!
BRAINSTORM BRAINWRITE

Imagine you are a county employee who works in Department A in County X in the State of Flyover. In recent years, budgets have become increasingly tight. Popular programs have been cut. Hiring and wage freezes are in place. Everyone has to do more with fewer resources and fewer staff. Complaints from constituents are at an all-time high. You want to come up with solutions to these problems by brainstorming in a group or brainwriting.

Half of you will brainstorm in small groups and half will brainwrite on your own. To brainstorm, use a round robin technique where you go around the group, one by one, and ask for possible solutions to the several problems presented, whether possible, feasible solutions or far out. Keep everyone to a few words and keep going around the group until time is called. Designate someone to write down the ideas; don’t judge or leave anything out.

The other half will take a piece of paper, leaving it anonymous, and make a list of as many possible solutions you can think of. Jot them down quickly without censoring and keep going until time is called.

For example, one solution might be “raise taxes.” Another might be “use sixth graders as free interns to answer phones.” Another might be “put a written apology to the public on your website.” Let ‘er rip!
FIVE-FINGER CONSENSUS

Developed by Michael Wilkinson

Five-finger consensus is designed to encourage significant agreement without jeopardizing the quality of the solution. It is best used with groups of 25 or more and particularly useful in public or community settings where consensus is desired. Wilkinson defines consensus as “I may or may not agree with it, but I can live with it.”

Once an alternative is proposed and discussed, and the group is ready to check for agreement, the facilitator explains that on the count of three, each person should hold up between one and five fingers indicating their level of support for the recommendation on the table.

- 5 Strongly agree
- 4 Agree
- 3 Can see pluses and minuses, but willing to go along with the group
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly disagree and cannot support

If everyone holds up a 5, 4 or 3, that is consensus and the group moves on. If there are 1s or 2s, they will have a chance to address the group, explain their rating and suggest changes to the recommendation so that it is more acceptable to them. Whoever originated the initial recommendation can accept or reject the proposed changes.

Another vote is held. This time, if there are all 5, 4, 3 and 2 votes, the consensus is reached. If there are any 1s, they get another chance to address the group as described above.

Another vote is held and this time it is by majority rule.

This requires a group to listen twice to dissent, but does not allow dissent to overpower a strong agreement. It also allows the dissenters to be heard.
Skills that Make a Difference

PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISE: To revisit the skills that make a difference in the outcome of a conflict-resolution session.

INTRODUCTION: It is important from time to time to review the skills that contribute to successful conflict resolution. This exercise will give you an opportunity to rate yourself on those skills.

WORKSHEET
Rate yourself on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) in each of these skills:

____ To be open to differences
____ To treat people as individuals
____ To look at whether expectations are real
____ To be aware of stereotypes
____ To check assumptions about other people or groups
____ To accept ambiguity
____ To be comfortable communicating with people different than you
____ To be nonjudgmental
____ To exhibit empathy
____ To listen and observe

If your total is close to 50, you are probably communicating well when dealing with conflicts on a variety of issues. If your total is less than 40, you have some work to do to improve your skills.

SUMMARY
A nationally-recognized team of experts in the field agree that the above ten skills on which you rated yourself are the most important in conflict resolution. Experience has proven that these obviously desirable skills can help considerably when they are introduced in the resolution process.
The Ideal Peacemaker: Can You Imagine That?

PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISE: To determine what qualities and skills are most typical of effective peacemakers. ("Peacemaker" is defined in Webster's New World Dictionary as "a person who makes peace by settling the disagreements of others").

INTRODUCTION: More than any other time in our history, we are surrounded by violence. Though it seems easier to identify people who practice violence than think about those who possess peacemaking skills, here is an opportunity to look at ideal peacemakers, both real and imaginary, and what distinguishes them from the rest of us.

WORKSHEET

Think back to the conflict situations you have read about or been a part of. Begin by considering the finest peacemaker you have ever met, worked with, or read about. Decide on a real person. Fill out the worksheet below:

1. Who is that person? __________________________________________

2. What are the qualities of this person that make him or her stand out so clearly in your mind? __________________________________________

3. What peacemaking skills does that person demonstrate? __________________________________________

Now select a fictional character—based either on a folk tale or other well-known story, or from your imagination. Continue by answering the following questions:

1. What is your imaginary character like? Describe him or her.

2. __________________________________________________________________________
50 Activities for Conflict Resolution

2. What are the qualities of this person that make you think of him or her as an ideal peacemaker?


3. What peacemaking skills would you expect that person to demonstrate?


4. Do you think those skills are transferable to your personal conflict-resolution ability? In what way?


SUMMARY

It would be a good idea if, from time to time, we gave some thought to those qualities and skills that contribute to the character of an effective peacemaker. When you work on your conflict resolution skills, keep in mind the lessons in the above exercise. Good luck!!