

## Avoiding Conflict

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Newsletter 6: 4 1998 pages 15-16*

### Assume good intentions

Most people do not wake up in the morning and instantly start to plan how they will deliberately get into conflict with someone else. Most people want to have good relationships with others. The problem is that many people lack the necessary interpersonal skills. We all do the best we can but, if we have not learned an effective way to interact, we have problems. We may not have learned interpersonal skills well in school, particularly the techniques we need in the working environment. Instead, we learn by copying skills from the people around us; these may be peers, parents or teachers. If these 'role models' did not display the appropriate abilities, we have little chance of acquiring such skills ourselves.

What happens when we lack skills is that we do the best we can. We use whatever approach we are accustomed to, even though that approach didn't work for us in the past. We literally don't know what else to do! Underneath our outward behaviour, we generally have good intentions. We want to be able to interact effectively - and we may blame the other person because we are convinced that we are doing everything possible to get along with them.

When you get into conflict with someone, start by assuming that they have good intentions. Work on the basis that they merely lack a skilled way to interact with you. Look for what their positive intention might be. Ask questions if necessary to find out. By focusing on the positive in this way, you will be able to get beyond the conflict.

## Be curious about motives

It has been suggested that we should approach everyone we meet as a messenger - our task is to find out what message they are bringing us. Whether you truly believe this or not, it is a very useful operating belief. Acting as if it is true means that you will be curious about what people have to say. This will keep you out of conflict with them.

Being curious means you will ask questions and that you will remain open-minded about their responses. This is a very effective way of ensuring that you have an amicable interaction. They cannot get into a conflict with you if you concentrate on asking questions and checking you have understood.

Remember that asking and listening does not mean that you have to agree. You can still make up your own mind. However, we are all much more likely to listen to someone else once we feel we have been heard. So, as you listen to them, you create the environment in which they will afterwards be willing to listen to you.

## Using a timeline for decision making

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Once we make a decision, we soon find out if we have overlooked any aspects of the impact it will have – unfortunately, this may be too late! One method for avoiding such a problem is to put yourself into the future. This does require you to be imaginative!

It uses the notion of a *timeline* – an imaginary line that represents the passing of time. We all have such a line although we are generally unaware of it. Test for yours and allow your intuition to guide you:

- think about the future – where is it located? It may be in front of you, to the side, somewhere inside your head or a long way away from your body.
- think about the past – where is this? Again, it may be located in a number of places – but it is unlikely to be in the same spot as the future.
- now think about the present – where is this located? It may be inside you, so that you are in the present now – but it may just as well be outside you – many people sense that they are slightly separate from the present, so that they have a feeling of observing what is happening to them as it happens. Both are quite normal!
- finally, imagine the line that joins these three points. Is it straight or curved? Does it pass through you or is it suspended separately? Again, all are normal.

Having established that you have a timeline, you can now use it to view the future! This may sound weird but we urge you to try it – it works because we have much untapped potential within our minds. Once we relax enough to allow our intuition to come fully into effect, we realise that we are far more aware of the future than we thought.

The process for this is:

- Imagine that you have taken your timeline and put it on the floor in front of you. You might like to straighten it at this point if it is curved; this may make it easier for what follows.
- Now step onto it at the present point, facing towards the future.
- Thinking of the decision you have just made, walk into the future until you come to a point that is just beyond the time when the decision will have taken effect.

- Relax and allow your intuition to make you aware of what has happened.
- Ask yourself some questions at this point:
  - has the decision turned out as you expected?
  - who has been affected, and how?
  - have there been any unanticipated effects?
  - with the benefit of hindsight, would you change the decision?
- Now move to a point further in the future – make this far enough ahead to ensure that the total impact of your decision will have been felt – this can be several years if necessary.
- Staying at this point, turn around and look back along the timeline to the point where the decision had just taken effect.
- Repeat the questions you asked yourself at that point – do you get the same answers?
- Finally, return to the present and step off your timeline. Don't forget to put it away (mentally) – you'd find life difficult without it as you wouldn't know where to store your memories and your anticipations!

Having completed the timeline process, you now have the options of:

- implementing your decision unchanged;
  - changing it and walking the timeline again to check you've taken care of any problems;
  - gathering more information or involving more people before you make the final decision.
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