

**Managing Conflict: Difficult Conversations and Cooperative Problem Solving  
MACDDS Conference, October 23, 2014**

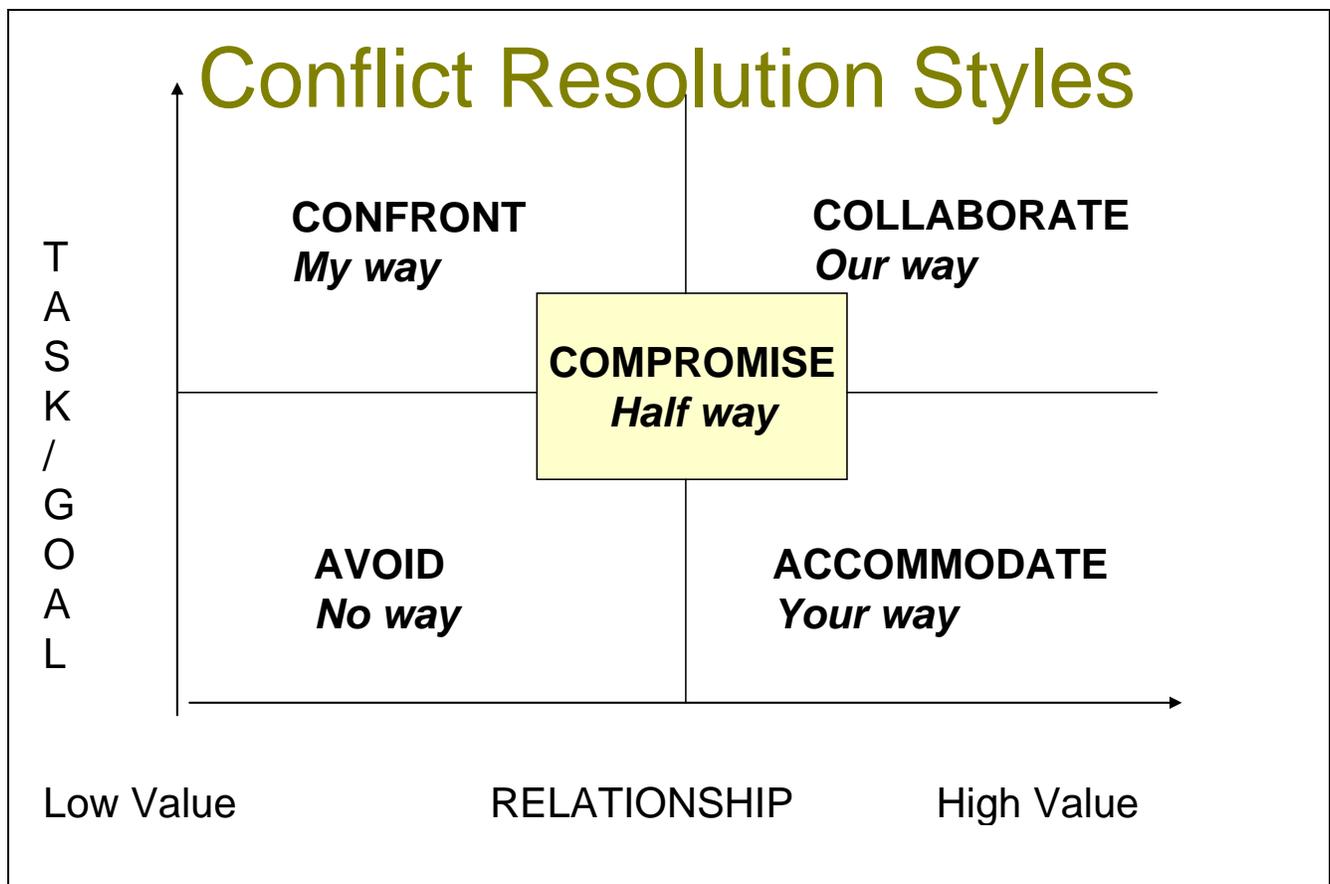
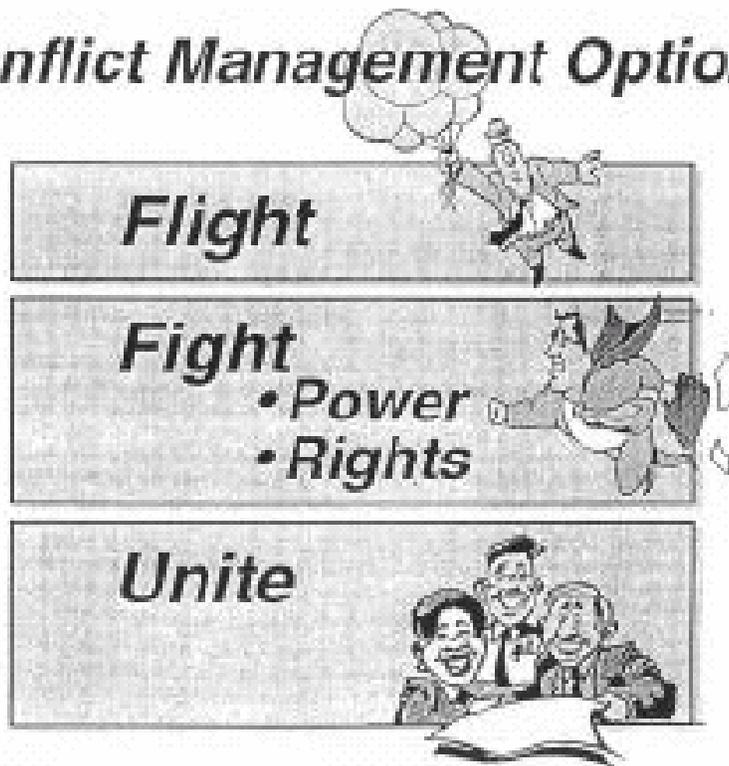
We all experience conflict occasionally. It can happen with clients, providers, coworkers, or supervisors. It is a natural result of the fact that we are different from each other. We have different roles, different goals, different styles, etc. How we communicate and problem solve in these situations can determine whether there is a constructive outcome.

At the conclusion of this workshop you will:

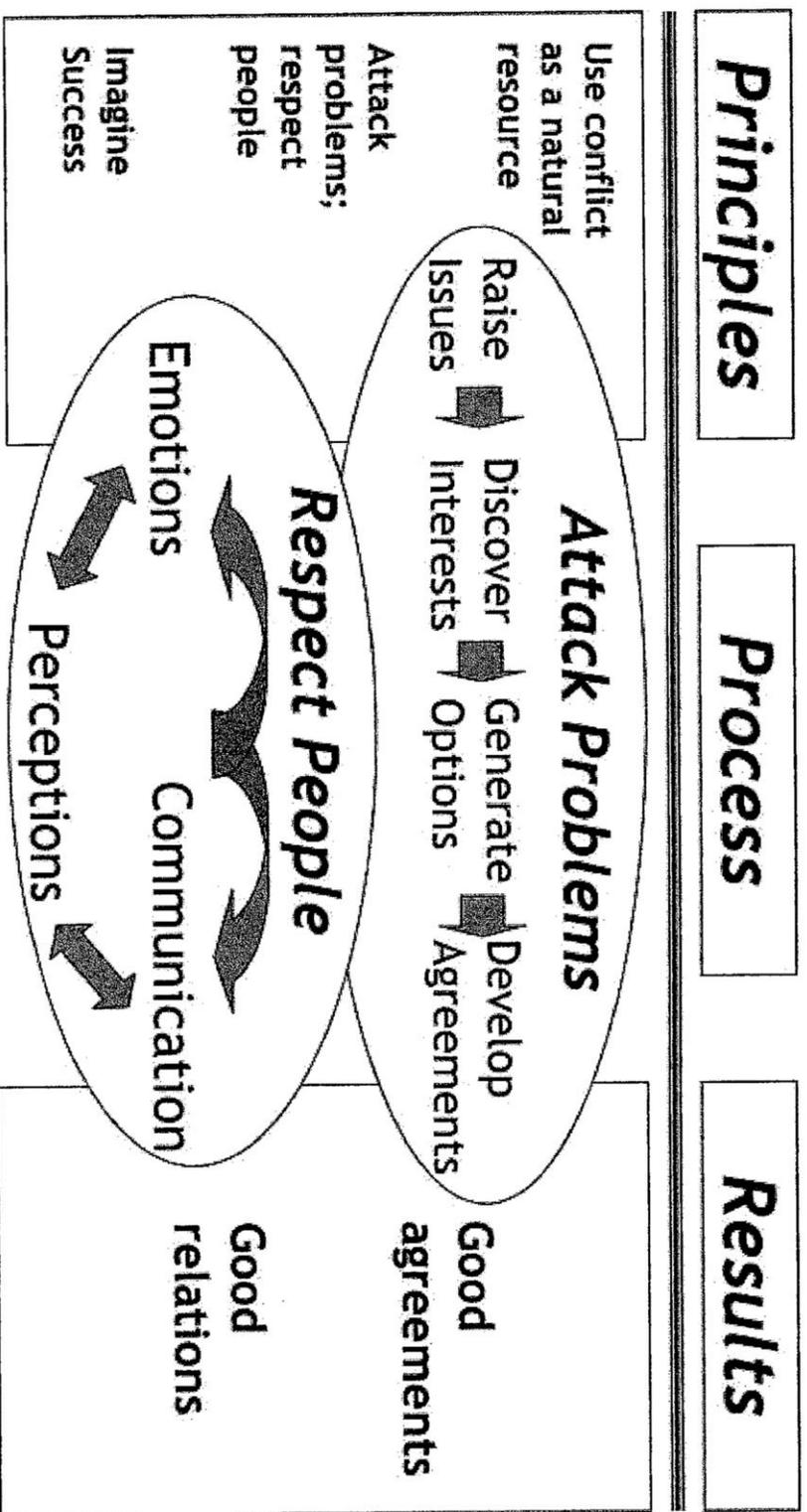
1. Recognize common responses to conflict, in yourself and in others;
2. Understand some principles of cooperative problem solving and effective strategies for managing difficult conversations constructively; and
3. Possess a few practical skills that you can implement to increase constructive outcomes to conflict in your workplace.

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# Conflict Management Options



# Map of Cooperative Problem-Solving



When discussing interest-based negotiation and collaborative problem solving, the question often arises, “What if they won’t play the interest-based way? What do you do with difficult people?”

In his book “Getting Past No: Negotiating Your Way From Confrontation to Cooperation,” William Ury identifies five common barriers that inhibit cooperation and offers strategies for dealing with each. The strategies are based on *indirect action*, and require doing the opposite of what we often naturally feel like doing in difficult situations. As in the Japanese martial arts of judo, jujitsu, and aikido, you avoid pitting your strength directly against the other’s strength. Direct efforts to break down the other’s resistance often lead only to increased resistance and a contest of power and will.

<b>Common Barriers to Cooperation</b>	<b>Strategies to Move toward Cooperation</b>
<p><u>Your own reaction to other’s difficult behavior.</u> When feeling stressed or under attack, we naturally feel like fighting or fleeing. Striking back usually just perpetuates an action-reaction cycle. Likewise, giving in can lead to exploitation and resentment.</p>	<p><u>Go to the Balcony.</u> Suspend your reaction and imagine yourself standing on a balcony looking down at the negotiation. Pause to regain your mental balance and stay focused on your interests, intentions and preferred process.</p>
<p><u>Strong negative emotions</u> like anger, hostility, fear and distrust. Their defensiveness and suspicion can lead them to expect you to behave like an adversary.</p>	<p><u>Step to Their Side.</u> To create a climate for joint problem solving, defuse their negative emotions by listening, acknowledging their points and feelings, agreeing with them where possible and showing respect.</p>
<p><u>Positional behavior.</u> People are used to positional bargaining. It’s familiar and often habitual. They expect to dig into their position and attack yours while you attack theirs.</p>	<p><u>Reframe the conflict.</u> Act <i>as if</i> you are partners genuinely interested in jointly solving the problem. Rather than reject their position, accept it as an attempt to deal with the problem. Ask for their help exploring how their idea can be improved to better meet both your needs.</p>
<p><u>Psychological factors.</u> Even if an idea satisfies their substantive interests, people sometimes feel dissatisfaction or that they will “lose face” or that they should reject it because it was your idea.</p>	<p><u>Build them a Golden Bridge.</u> Don’t push them to accept an idea, bridge the gap between their interests and yours. Review how the idea meets their needs and help them see the outcome as a victory for them.</p>
<p><u>Power history.</u> If they feel that they can get what they want using power plays, why should they cooperate with you? Despite your best efforts, some people will persist in believing their best way to their interests is to beat you at a power game.</p>	<p><u>Use Your Power to Educate, not Escalate.</u> Don’t be tempted to use threats and coercion based on your own power options. Rather, educate them about your options to show them that they cannot win by themselves, but only together with you.</p>

In his book "The Third Side," William Ury identifies three major opportunities to divert the momentum of conflict away from destructive escalation and violence toward constructive change.

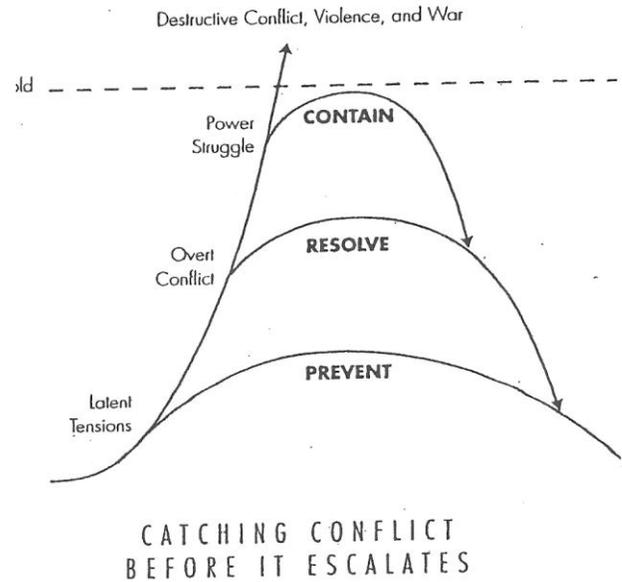
The first is to prevent destructive conflict from emerging in the first place by addressing latent tensions. The second is to resolve overt conflict that does develop. The third opportunity involves containing escalating power struggles that temporarily escape resolution. He also describes ten possible roles for people on "the third side" of conflict to take.

Of course, these roles are not always exclusive and distinct. A given situation might require several of these third side roles. For example, roles from each of the three phases often occur in reverse order. First the conflict must be contained, a role for a peacekeeper, referee or witness. Then, an intervener can help the parties to resolve the particular conflict; a job for a mediator, arbiter, equalizer or healer. Finally, steps to prevent future conflict from arising can be explored with help from a third side taking the role of provider, teacher or bridge-builder.

Depending on the parties and the conflict, different individuals may need to play roles in the descending stages of the conflict, or a single person might be called upon to operate in several roles at once or in succession.

Ury gives the motto of the third side as

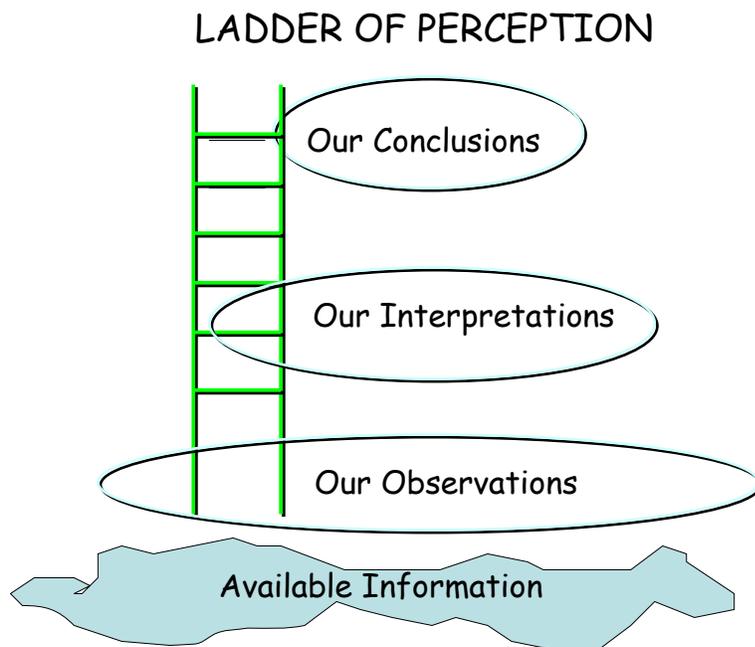
Contain if necessary,  
Resolve if possible,  
Best of all prevent.



TEN ROLES OF THE THIRD SIDE		
WHY CONFLICT ESCALATES		WAYS TO TRANSFORM CONFLICT
<b>PREVENT</b>		
Frustrated needs	→ 	1. THE PROVIDER
Poor skills	→ 	2. THE TEACHER
Weak relationships	→ 	3. THE BRIDGE-BUILDER
<b>RESOLVE</b>		
Conflicting interests	→ 	4. THE MEDIATOR
Disputed rights	→ 	5. THE ARBITER
Unequal power	→ 	6. THE EQUALIZER
Injured relationships	→ 	7. THE HEALER
<b>CONTAIN</b>		
No attention	→ 	8. THE WITNESS
No limitation	→ 	9. THE REFEREE
No protection	→ 	10. THE PEACEKEEPER

# Core Concerns as Causes

- Understand strong negative emotions in terms of “core concerns”
- Respond to core concerns by
  - Expressing appreciation
  - Building affiliation
  - Respecting autonomy
  - Acknowledging positive status
  - Identifying a fulfilling role for the other person



<b>1. Explore Partisan Perceptions</b>		<b>2. Recognize Joint Contributions</b>	<b>3a. Separate Intent</b>	<b>3b. From Impact</b>
What's my story? How do I explain what has happened and why?	The story they might tell about the situation:	I contributed to bringing us to where we are by:  They contributed to bringing us to where we are now by:	For each of my contributions, what might have been the impact of my actions on them?  For each of their contributions, what was the impact of their actions on me?	For each of my contributions I intended:  What reasonable intentions might they have had in acting as they did?
<b>4. Sort Out Feelings</b>		<b>5. Consider Identity</b>		<b>6. Prepare for a Good Beginning</b>
This situation makes me feel:  How could I describe the range of my feelings without blaming?	This situation may make them feel:  How might I acknowledge their feelings without agreeing to their view?	My self-image or identity is at stake because:  A more balanced and realistic way I could see myself would be:	Their self image may be threatened because:  A more balanced and realistic way they could see themselves would be:	A nonjudgmental "Third Story" way to describe this situation (as a difference of views, preferences, or styles) might be:

# References

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UNESCO/APC MULTIMEDIA TRAINING KIT *Trainers' manual: Cooperative Problem Solving* Developed by: Search for Common Ground  
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