LIZ GRIFFITHS

Handling Conflict

I'm Director of Training for Bridge Builders Ministries, a small Christian charity which offers courses and workshops and provides consultancy, facilitation and mediation services.

I was born and grew up in South Wales. After leaving university I worked as a physics teacher, and then in the computer industry for a number of years, before finally giving in to God's persistent call and being ordained in the Church in Wales. During the past 20 years I've served in city centre and urban estate parishes in both Wales and England. I've also worked in theological education as Vice Principal of the Eastern Region Ministry Course, helping to train ordained and lay ministers.

I live with a gorgeous cat called Myla and I hugely enjoy being a doting auntie to two teenage and just-moved-on-from-teenage nephews. I love wildlife of all kinds, but I'm a particularly keen birdwatcher and will talk endlessly about red kites and woodpeckers! I'm currently trying to extend my range by learning about different species of bees. I also love music, especially opera, and enjoy following sport of all kinds, although I now admit my days of playing cricket are probably behind me. I do however still attempt to keep fit by lots of walking and regular visits to the gym.

I've been passionate about issues of peace and justice since my student days and I see the work of Bridge Builders as part of my vocation to living out of the gospel of reconciliation.

LIZ GRIFFITHS
T 020 3968 4999
E liz@bbministries.org.uk

Director of Training
Bridge Builders

HANDLING CONFLICT
1. Patterns of Behaviour

Our Experience of Conflict

ASSOCIATED FEELINGS AND TYPES OF BEHAVIOUR

My Basic Assumptions as a Bridge Builder

- Conflict is normal: it's simply there.
- Conflict brings danger and opportunity.
- Conflict may be a sign that people care.

Swimming Against the Tide

- Our culture does not prepare us to deal well with conflict.
- To lead like Jesus means being counter-cultural:
  - ⇒ **Attitude**: open-hearted (Mt 5:44), honouring those who are different.
  - ⇒ **Actions**: taking initiatives to restore strained relationships (Mt 5:10, 5:23, 18:15).

Conflict Patterns

Each person or group of persons has a way of 'doing conflict' that is culturally determined. Earliest influences in our lives are often the strongest because the patterns we learn first are hardest to unlearn.

'Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals.'

Interpersonal Conflict, Hocker & Wilmot

'Conflict is the tension we experience when a difference is discovered.'

Making Peace With Conflict, Carolyn Schrock-Shenk

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Matthew 5:9

God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body.

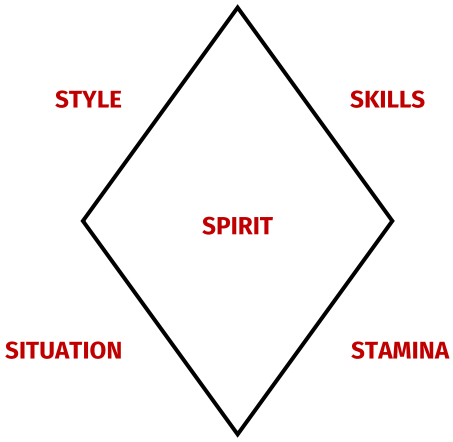
1 Corinthians 12:24

Bridge Builders
P.O. Box 3612
Barnet
EN5 9RZ
T 020 3968 4999
E bb@bbministries.org.uk
W www.bbministries.org.uk

©BRIDGE BUILDERS MINISTRIES. NOT TO BE USED WITHOUT PERMISSION.

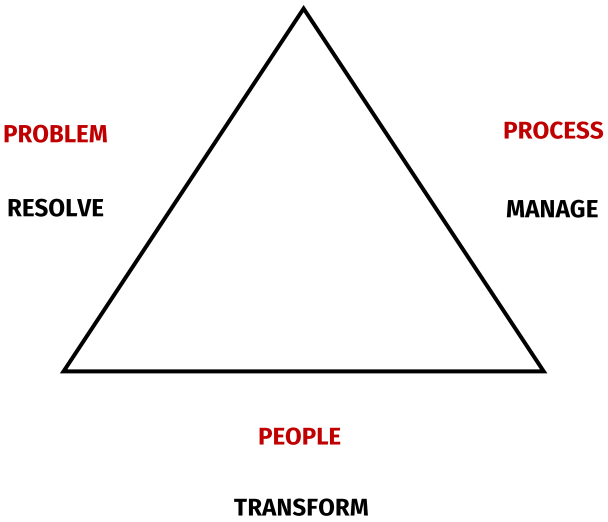
HANDLING CONFLICT
2. Different Ways of Doing Conflict

Who You Are in the Midst of Conflict



KEY Go on learning:
how I can give of my best,
how I can help others give of their best.

DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT



KEY INSIGHTS

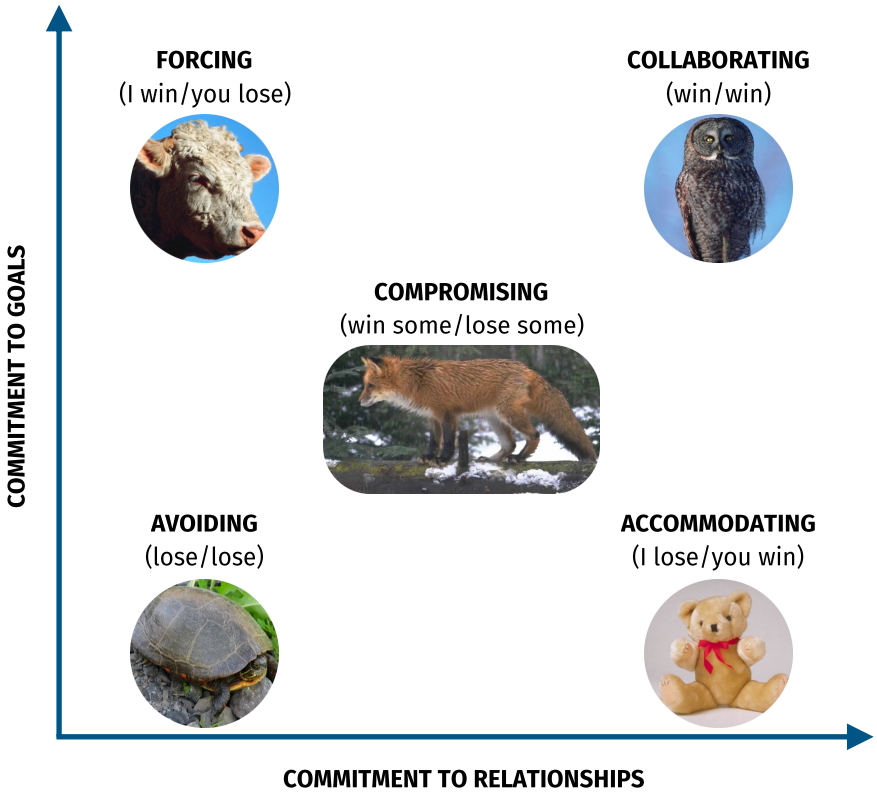
Although he [Jesus] was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

Hebrews 5:8

©BRIDGE BUILDERS MINISTRIES. NOT TO BE USED WITHOUT PERMISSION.

HANDLING CONFLICT
2. Different Ways of Doing Conflict

Five Conflict Styles



Each style is appropriate in some circumstances.

Each style is problematic if over-used by a leader.

KEY INSIGHTS

As in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

Romans 12:4-5

©BRIDGE BUILDERS MINISTRIES. NOT TO BE USED WITHOUT PERMISSION.

HANDLING CONFLICT
2. Different Ways of Doing Conflict

Exploring Styles in your Own Case Study

Think about an example of a conflict **between you and another person (or two)**. Looking at the five different styles or approaches to conflict outlined earlier, reflect on the styles that you and the other person (or people) have employed.

Looking first at yourself, **which style have you primarily used** through the course of the conflict? Or if you used different styles, what was the order or progression?

How does the style or styles which you used **match up with the preferred and backup styles** suggested for you by the style inventory?

Looking next at the other person (or people), **which style do you think that the other(s) primarily employed** through the course of conflict? Or if they used different styles, what was the order or progression?

Considering what you know of the other person (or people), **how typical does the approach they took seem for them?**

Reflecting on the styles that you each employed, **to what extent might some of your conflict be attributed to the interaction of your respective styles?**

Are there any **different styles which you might have used** that could have been more fruitful in easing or in resolving the tensions between you?

In what ways might it be **helpful to be more conscious** in future of your preferred and backup styles?

SKILL Practise moving out of default mode.

TOOL A three-dimensional perspective on conflict (see p2).

KEY INSIGHTS

'Our responses to conflict depend on many factors, including: our stake in the outcome and our determination to have it realised; our physical and emotional state; the personality and response of the person who opposes us; the dynamics of power in the relationship, etc. We are most successful in conflict when we are flexible in our abilities and can use each of the five styles skilfully in the appropriate circumstance.'

Style Matters, Ron Kraybill

©BRIDGE BUILDERS MINISTRIES. NOT TO BE USED WITHOUT PERMISSION.

HANDLING CONFLICT
3. Getting Below the Surface of a Conflict

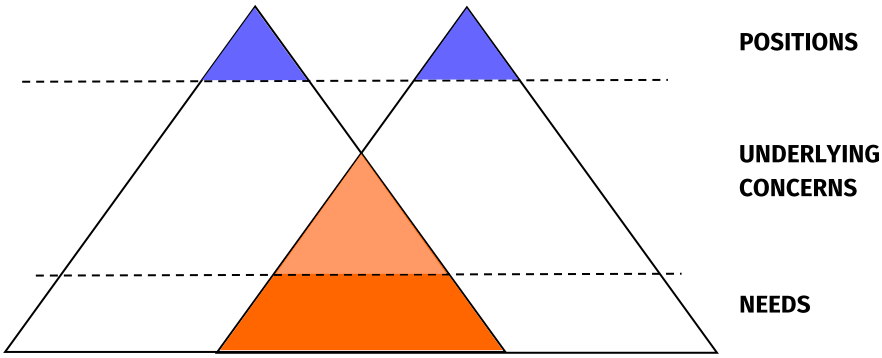
Addressing Entrenched Positions in Conflict

TOOL A map of what lies 'underground'.

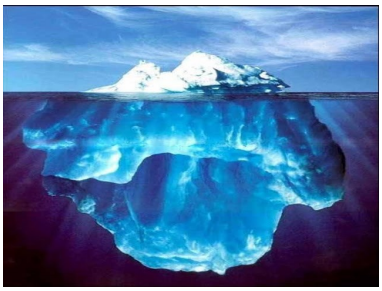
People often view a conflict only in terms of competing demands('positions'). One way of getting things unstuck is to change the focus of attention. In circumstances where there is an obvious presenting issue, it is often possible to find a way forward by exploring *why* positions are being adopted, and thus to 'dig down' to the level of underlying concerns and basic needs.

SKILL Drawing out the *underlying concerns*.

Searching for Common Ground



KEY INSIGHTS



Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
Philippians 2:4

©BRIDGE BUILDERS MINISTRIES. NOT TO BE USED WITHOUT PERMISSION.

HANDLING CONFLICT
3. Getting Below the Surface of a Conflict

Group Task: Working on a Case Study

Agree quickly whose case study of group conflict you wish to work on. Choose one where there seems to be an obvious presenting issue. **(5 minutes)**

Then let the person contributing the case study briefly outline the events that have led to escalation of tension. **(5 minutes)**

Working as a group, do some analysis of the conflict. **(15 minutes)**
(N.B. If the situation has got to a point where it is very complex or unmanageable, you may want to focus on an earlier moment when there was more chance of making constructive progress):

- Who were the **key parties** (may be individuals or groups)?

- What was the **presenting issue**? (Try to express this impartially: 'What to do about X')

- What **positions** did each party take on this issue?

- What **underlying concerns** of each party needed to be acknowledged?

- What **common ground** was there to work with?

Suggest some ways forward that might build on the common ground and address underlying concerns of all parties. (**5 minutes**)

KEY INSIGHTS

©BRIDGE BUILDERS MINISTRIES. NOT TO BE USED WITHOUT PERMISSION.

HANDLING CONFLICT
4. Constructive Communication

Being Less Reactive

Conflicts are fuelled by emotional reactivity, much of it expressed non-verbally. The crucial contribution from a leader is to be a calm presence in the midst of other people's emotional storm. This can help make it possible for them to start communicating more constructively (or at least less destructively).

Typical Forms of Reactive Behaviour

DEFEND ATTACK WITHDRAW

Handling Difficult Conversations

SKILL Listening in a way that demonstrates understanding.

Summarise, using your own words

- Do it face to face.
- Invite and allow the other person to speak.
- Press the pause button.
- Acknowledge strength of feeling.
- Ask 'Is there is anything more?'
- Be cautious in rushing in with your own view.

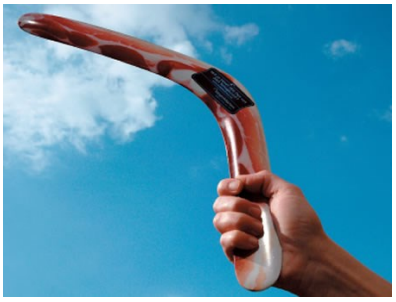
SKILL Confronting in a way that minimises threat.

Use 'I - messages'

- Be clear about your purpose.
- Focus on the impact of actions.
- Maintain emotional contact.

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7



God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

2 Timothy 1:7

Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

James 1:19-20

Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head. ... Putting away falsehood, let us all speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another.

Ephesians 4:15, 25

'Conflicts in the church can seem such a distraction from getting on with the real work; but *this is the real work*. When people come near such a community they will instinctively know how real the relationships are.'

Being Human, Being Church, Robert Warren

©BRIDGE BUILDERS MINISTRIES. NOT TO BE USED WITHOUT PERMISSION.