

## A state of mind for working with conflict



*"The world is divided into two sorts of people: those who think that the world is divided into two sorts of people and those who think it is more complicated than that." Oscar Wilde*

Successful conflict resolution is dependent on your communication abilities. The Tao of Negotiation (1993) defines successful communication as having ten elements.

Successful communication occurs when the thoughts, images and feelings that are generated in the receiver are the same ones that were intended by the sender. This doesn't mean that someone has to agree with you, but simply that there were no misunderstandings.

### Successful Communication

We need to be conscious of what makes communication successful to maximise our chances. Here are the ten basic elements –

#### 1. Commitment

You need to be committed to making your message understood. Your commitment may follow from your intention. For example, "I intend to help you produce the best possible outcome for both of you."

#### 2. Self-observation

In order for someone to understand you, you must understand yourself. How aware are you of how you feel, think, do and say? Do you make snap judgements? Do you feel nervous or powerless? Do you fail to hear what someone is saying because you are thinking of how to respond to them? Try

stopping and listening to yourself. Quieten that inner voice and focus on what the other person is saying. And work on what you can do to change how you respond.

#### 3. Honesty

Not just telling someone the truth, but also respecting your own truths, feeling & vulnerabilities.

#### 4. Going beneath the surface

People often speak in general terms. To understand them we need to find out what their motivation, concerns and fears are. We do this by asking them questions based on what they've said.

#### 5. Separating intention from conduct

If you think there are misunderstandings, stop and clarify intentions.

#### 6. Separating facts from feelings

Acknowledge people's feelings and distinguish how anger, pain or frustration affects the outcome of the conversation.

#### 7. Using 'I' messages

Speak for yourself and own your responses. Nobody makes you angry, you get angry in response to what people have said and you have a choice about it. To blame another for your feelings is to avoid your responsibility for whatever is going on.

## 8. Listening

We all listen. But effective listening means hearing what people are saying, reflecting back key points and then clarifying meaning. With the intention of understanding them.

## 9. Having a willingness to admit you don't know everything

This can focus you on the areas of mutual misunderstanding and enhance the conversation. In all conflicts there will be unknowns. If you want parties to reach a mutual agreement, acknowledging these can be very useful to the process. This point also links to the notion of being honest.

## 10. Having the willingness to admit your mistakes

This way we can avoid the burden of having to be right and the burden of blame. Being open, honest and vulnerable takes courage, but if you remember that all you want and others want is to be understood and respected then it's easy.

## Putting it into practice

Translating this into conflict resolution means starting with yourself. Are you willing to notice your feelings and inner dialogue? Are you willing to learn from the process? Is your intention when resolving conflict to minimise conflict and maximise the benefits?



When you get in the conversation are you:

- Upfront about your intentions?
- Willing to help people search for options with the other parties?
- Objective and fair?
- Focussing on facts and not opinions?
- Checking the other parties' needs?
- Checking for understanding?

## Neutrality, impartiality and being non-judgemental

You also need to be all these three things. But what do they mean? Simply put, you need to keep your opinion to yourself; be aware of how your opinion may impact on your behaviour towards each party and be aware of how your opinion might 'leak'.

**Neutral** – not showing or sharing a perspective on the matters discussed. Your role is to facilitate discussions between the parties.

**Impartial** – you are neither seen to be or perceived to be on one side over the other. And you manage the air time to allow people the space they need to talk about the issues.

**Non-judgemental** – you keep your thoughts, ideas and opinions about the matter to yourself. It's hard enough to learn to keep quiet about them, but even harder to recognise when your behaviour might give away your perspective. For example a smile to one party, but not the other!