

Part of the problem - Part of the solution: Knowing ourselves in conflict and interpersonal stress

Personal Conflict Styles

We all have a natural personality based preferred style of dealing with conflict:



Bulls – the I Win / You Lose paradigm:

Bulls tend to deal with conflict by bringing others around to their point of view. They are highly committed to what they believe is right and are prepared to go into battle to make sure that their solution is applied. They don't like disagreement and tend to work towards seeing firm policies applied and clear decisions taken. A distinguishing feature of this power strategy is that resolution of the problem is often unrelated to the relative merits of the arguments (e.g. "You will do what I say because I said it!"). It may take the form of "pulling rank" or simply outmanoeuvring the opposition. Those who tend to this style as their dominant strategy will typically view conflict as having two possible outcomes--winning or losing. Win, and self-esteem or competence is enhanced. Lose or be "wrong", and suffer a loss of status-- there is the sense of being incompetent or weak. The result can become an aggressive, dogmatic, inflexible and unreasonable approach to conflict management; one in which the goal is to overcome an adversary.



Koalas – the I Lose / You Win paradigm:

Koalas like to deal with conflict by giving in or yielding to others in order to keep the peace. They would rather miss out on their preferred solution to a conflict than cause an upset by communicating their disagreement. They tend to support others and convince themselves that it is not a 'big deal' and 'we will all get over it'. This *placate-yield* style reflects a concern for the effect of conflict on the well-being and durability of all relationships koala types enter. There is an assumption that persons and relationships can be fragile and cannot endure the trauma of working through genuine differences. So the tendency is to avoid conflict and appease others by ignoring, denying and avoiding conflict. Should differences persist, giving in, placating and submitting to another's goals are seen as effective means of self and relationship protection. (It's OK, you're right, we'll do it your way...). One-sided domination in the relationship is the likely outcome of this strategy.



Turtles – Withdraw and Overlook:

Withdrawers find it easiest to back right out of conflict situations. Turtles "pull their heads in"! They prefer not to deal with either the issues or the people and like to get to a calm situation as quickly as possible. They often deal with conflict by disappearing or becoming silent. The strategy of overlooking the offence or difference removes the need to engage. Turtles find it more comfortable to deal with their emotions alone. In taking their 'their bat and ball' and going home, they make it impossible for anyone else to play or to resolve the conflict if their presence is needed. There is power in this position as it can bring a halt to either a heated damaging situation but also to a healthy robust resolution process.



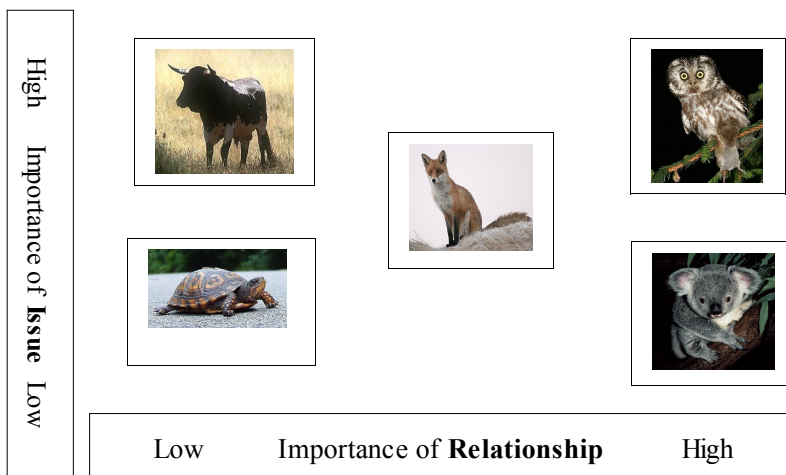
Owls – We all win together:

As a dominant style for conflict management, this approach attaches major importance to both the goals of the parties involved and to the well-being of the relationships. This is a "win-win" outcome and assumes that everyone will enthusiastically co-operate since the positive total effect is greater than what could be achieved by individual efforts. (e.g. If we work hard and pull together, we can achieve each of our goals collaboratively). Tolerance for differences and a recognition of the legitimacy of feelings are central to this strategy. Each individual must agree to abide by the rules of negotiation and agree to solve the conflict constructively. Any "hidden agendas" are brought out in the open so they may be effectively dealt with. Resolvers are prepared to work hard to find the best solution for everyone. They are keen to co-operate, to listen, to share their own views and to find a way through the conflict to a solution that meets everyone's needs. They believe that there is a solution to every conflict and are prepared to work hard to find it. While the style has many attractions, it requires significant amounts of hard work and is often highly energy draining.



Foxes – The ½ way compromise:

Compromise is a negotiated resolution process based on each person making some concessions to the other (e.g. "If you will give..., I will give..."). Within this style, however, the other person may still be seen as an opponent. Compromise is often seen as a means for making the solution more tolerable to each party. It is a persuasive and often manipulative conflict management style in which both ends are frequently played against the middle in an attempt to serve the "common good" (e.g. Let's all give a little for the "good of the whole group"). Compromisers believe that the middle ground is best. It is good to be reasonable, to give and take, and work out the middle ground so that everyone has at least some of their needs met. Compromisers are comfortable with half way solutions that at least allow a way forward in reasonable time.



How do I respond to conflict? (Personal Styles Inventory)

Inventory of personal conflict management styles

INSTRUCTIONS:

Consider your response in situations where you have differences with another person. **Note the statements (A) - (J) deal with your initial response to disagreement; statements (K) - (T) deal with your response after the disagreement has become stronger.** If you find it easier, you may choose one particular conflict setting and use it as a background for all the questions.

PLEASE NOTE: The reflection this inventory can create is more important and more reliable than the simple results the tally sheet yields. **There are no "right or wrong" answers,** nor are there standardised scores for this instrument. Some participants agree with the results, others disagree. Whether you like the results or not, you should rely on them for an accurate picture of yourself only after further self reflection and discussion with others. This inventory is merely a tool to enable these more important tasks.

Circle one number on the line below each statement.

A. WHEN I FIRST DISCOVER THAT DIFFERENCES EXIST

I make sure that all views are out in the open and treated with equal consideration, even if there seems to be substantial disagreement.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

B. WHEN I FIRST DISCOVER THAT DIFFERENCES EXIST,

I devote more attention to making sure others understand the logic and benefits of my position than I do in pleasing them.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

C. WHEN I FIRST DISCOVER THAT DIFFERENCES EXIST,

I make my needs known, but I tone them down a bit and look for solutions somewhere in the middle.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

D. WHEN I FIRST DISCOVER THAT DIFFERENCES EXIST,

I pull back from discussion for a time to avoid tension.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

E. WHEN I FIRST DISCOVER THAT DIFFERENCES EXIST,

I devote more attention to feelings of others than to my personal goals.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

F. WHEN I FIRST DISCOVER THAT DIFFERENCES EXIST,

I make sure that my agenda doesn't get in the way of our relationship.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

G. WHEN I FIRST DISCOVER THAT DIFFERENCES EXIST,

I actively explain my ideas and just as actively take steps to understand others.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

H. WHEN I FIRST DISCOVER THAT DIFFERENCES EXIST,

I am more concerned with goals I believe to be important than with how others feel about things.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

I. WHEN I FIRST DISCOVER THAT DIFFERENCES EXIST,
I decide the differences aren't worth worrying about.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

J. WHEN I FIRST DISCOVER THAT DIFFERENCES EXIST,
I give up some points in exchange for others.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

K. IF DIFFERENCES PERSIST AND FEELINGS ESCALATE,
I enter more actively into discussion and hold out for ways to meet the needs of others as well as my own.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

L. IF DIFFERENCES PERSIST AND FEELINGS ESCALATE,
I put forth greater effort to make sure that the truth as I see it is recognised and less on pleasing others.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

M. IF DIFFERENCES PERSIST AND FEELINGS ESCALATE,
I try to be reasonable by not asking for my full preferences, but I make sure I get some of what I want.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

N. IF DIFFERENCES PERSIST AND FEELINGS ESCALATE,
I don't push for things to be done my way, and I pull back somewhat from the demands of others.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

O. IF DIFFERENCES PERSIST AND FEELINGS ESCALATE,
I set aside my own preferences and become more concerned with keeping the relationship comfortable.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

P. IF DIFFERENCES PERSIST AND FEELINGS ESCALATE,
I interact less with others and look for ways to find a safe distance.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

Q. IF DIFFERENCES PERSIST AND FEELINGS ESCALATE,
I do what needs to be done and hope we can mend feelings later.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

R. IF DIFFERENCES PERSIST AND FEELINGS ESCALATE,
I do what is necessary to soothe the other's feelings.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

S. IF DIFFERENCES PERSIST AND FEELINGS ESCALATE,
I pay close attention to the desires of others but remain firm that they need to pay equal attention to my desires.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

T. IF DIFFERENCES PERSIST AND FEELINGS ESCALATE,
I press for moderation and compromise so we can make a decision and move on with things.

Not at all characteristic < -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----> Very characteristic

WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED, transfer the number from each item to the tally sheet provided. For example, on item A, if you selected number 6, write 6 on the line designated for A on the tally sheet. Then add the numbers. SAMPLE: B 6
+H 7= 13.

INTERPRETATION:

1. This exercise gives you two sets of scores. **CALM** scores apply to your response when disagreement first arises. **STORM** scores apply to your response if things are not easily resolved and emotions get stronger.

2. The scores indicate your inclination to use each style. The higher your score in a given style, the more likely you are to use this style naturally in responding to conflict.

<p style="text-align: right;">B _ + H _ = _ Calm L _ + Q _ = _ Storm</p> <p>FORCING (Bull) Communicates high concern for issue - low concern for relationships</p> <p>Strategies: Discourage disagreement, persuade, be firm, set limits and consequences, cite policy, insist, repeat, control, be inaccessible.</p> <p>Source of Power: From position</p> <p>Benefits: Speed, decisiveness, protection of innocents, preservation of important values, stability</p> <p>Costs when over-used: Destroyed or hierarchical relationships, loss of cooperation, atrophy of gifts in others, anger, depression, and diminished self-respect in others, stagnation.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">A _ + G _ = _ Calm K _ + S _ = _ Storm</p> <p>COLLABORATING (Owl) Communicates high concern for issue - high concern for relationships</p> <p>Strategies: Assert self while also inviting other views; welcome differences, jointly list strengths and weaknesses of all views, cooperate in seeking additional information.</p> <p>Source of Power: From trust, skill, ability, good will, creativity.</p> <p>Benefits: Trust and mutuality in relationships, high cooperation, creativity and growth, others blossom and develop new gifts, energy and joy</p> <p>Costs when over-used: Fatigue and time-loss, distraction from more important tasks, analysis paralysis.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">C _ + J _ = _ Calm M _ + T _ = _ Storm</p> <p>COMPROMISING (Fox) Communicates medium concern for issue - medium concern for relationships</p> <p>Strategies: Urge moderation, bargain, split the difference, find a little something for everyone, meet them halfway</p> <p>Source of Power: From moderation and reasonableness</p> <p>Benefits: Relatively fast, enables the show to go on, provides a way out of the stalemate, readily understood by most people, builds atmosphere of calmness and reason.</p> <p>Costs when over-Used: Mediocrity and blandness, possible unprincipled agreements, likelihood of patching symptoms and ignoring causes.</p>	
<p style="text-align: right;">D _ + I _ = _ Calm N _ + P _ = _ Storm</p> <p>AVOIDING (Turtle) Strategies: Withdraw, delay or avoid response, divert attention, suppress personal emotions, be inaccessible, be inscrutable.</p> <p>Source of Power: From calmness, silence, non-cooperation, being above-it-all</p> <p>Benefits: Freedom from entanglement in trivial issues or insignificant relationships, stability, preservation of status quo, ability to influence others without doing anything.</p> <p>Cost when over-used: Periodic explosions out of pent-up anger, freeze out - slow death of relationships, residue of negative feelings, stagnation and dullness, loss of accountability sapped energy</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">E _ + F _ = _ Calm O _ + R _ = _ Storm</p> <p>ACCOMMODATING (Koala) Strategies: Agree, support, acknowledge error, give in, convince self it's no big deal, placate</p> <p>Source of Power: From relationships or approval of others</p> <p>Benefits: Approval /Appreciation of others, freedom from hassle, in the short run at least, self-discipline of ego.</p> <p>Costs when over-used: Frustration for others who wish to collaborate, resentment and depression, stunted growth of personal gifts, over dependence on others, denies others benefit of healthy confrontation</p>