
A DEPLOY YOURSELF REPORT

COMPASSIONATE CONFLICTS

*The Complete Guide To Harnessing
The Energy In Conflicts
Without Destroying Relationships*



BY SUMIT GUPTA

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Table of Contents

What's Compassion Got To Do With Conflicts?	5
Conflict Arises Because We Care	6
1. Understanding Conflicts Better – The First Step to Conflict Resolution	9
2. What Not To Do When Conflicts Happen?	13
3. How to Prepare for a Conflict Resolution Conversation?	17
4. Eight Practical Tips for Making A Conflict Resolution Conversation More Effective	21
5. What To Do If You Can't Achieve Consensus in a Conflict?	24
Conclusion	27

What's Compassion Got To Do With Conflicts?

Conflict Arises Because We Care

We all face and deal with conflict, normally with skills which we have accumulated from our parents, peers or experience. Isn't it ironic that we are never formally trained to deal with conflict?

If you are like most people, you try to avoid conflict, or when pushed too far, handle it with aggression. Irrespective of whether you get your way or not, feelings of stress and discomfort are common after a conflict.

A New Way of Approaching Conflict - With 'Care'

What if you could approach conflicts more constructively? What if you could let go of anger, resentment and fear? What if you could see conflicts with compassion? What if you could use conflicts to form deep connections and strengthen your relationships?

Conflict arises because we care about something enough to argue over it. When you become present to this 'care', you can pay attention to the conflict with curiosity and openness.

I have found that most conflicts are avoidable, unnecessary and resolvable. They are often the result of misunderstandings, poor communication, lack of clarity, inflamed egos and ineffective or non-existent leadership.

Approaching conflict with care and compassion can open your eyes to new ideas and teach you listening and flexibility. It helps you get present to your values, and set limits and boundaries as you practice emotional intelligence.

This guide will inspire you to see conflicts as a source of positive change, and to make meaningful and impactful progress - one conversation at a time. It will allow you to create results that you thought impossible before.

5 Parts

The guide itself has 5 parts - each one focussing on an important aspect of meaningful conflict resolution.

Part 1 will focus on understanding conflicts better, why they arise and about the inherent energy present in each conflict.

Part 2 will highlight what we should not do (but can be very tempting) when faced with conflicts. Remembering and avoiding them in the heat of the moment allows us to deal with conflict consciously.

Part 3 makes that conscious start by differentiating positions from interests, and deciding ground rules based on a foundation of trust and respect.

Part 4 moves from the abstract into the concrete, and provides eight practical tips for effective conflict conversations.

In the end, **part 5** identifies some fallback steps when all the above guidelines fail to produce the desired result.

I use the steps outlined in this report almost daily when dealing with difficult conversations. This is not to say that it is all easy. Just like any skill, it takes some practice before these steps become second nature.

Ready? Let's start with **Part 1 - Understanding Conflicts Better**.

Understanding Conflicts Better

Understanding Conflicts Better – The First Step to Conflict Resolution

CONFLICT!

Is that a word that scares you? Is that something that makes you run in the opposite direction? Do you wish you had the skills to handle conflicts better?

If you are like most people, you are no fan of conflicts and have often been caught up in the maze of a conflict. I certainly have, and I can honestly attest that conflict (or the fear of it) has given me many sleepless nights.

In my 15 years of professional life, I have spent many a moment amidst conflicts, and many more reflecting upon them. Why do they happen? How can I best handle them? Can I still achieve my goals and enrich my relationships with conflict all around me? Can I beat the stress and anxiety which comes with conflict and still be happy and peaceful? Can I deal with conflict in a way that I can be proud of?

There has been wise advice shared with me which I have ignored out of arrogance or ignorance, only to stumble upon and be humbled by the same realisation later. Over time I have written down some notes which I have referenced later in times of conflict. This guide is a collection of such notes.

Human Beings Do Not Think or Feel Alike. Conflicts are Natural.

Wherever there is life, there is conflict. Every species on this planet experiences conflict in its fight for survival. Plants and animals strive for limited food, space and mates in the wild, often giving rise to conflict. Humans are much more complex. In addition to food, space and sex; we want power, fame and money; giving rise to even more conflicts.

Conflicts are a natural order of life, and if we step back and see the bigger picture, there is nothing unexpected around them. They are inevitable when we work with people who speak different languages, come from different cultures and countries, and have different values and beliefs.

They Should Not Be Surprising. Instead They Should Be Expected.

Today we live in a world driven by democratic and secular values (in most countries). If you don't see any conflicts, perhaps people are not speaking up enough, and that I believe is a bigger problem for any society or organisation.

In democratic societies differences of opinion are not only expected but it is also a duty of each citizen to express themselves without fear or hesitation. I believe that having diversity in thought is a strength, and knowing how to manage conflicts becomes a critical skill to learn if we are to live and work in such an environment.

Are Conflicts Bad? Or Do We Lack The Skills To Handle Them?

After facing and trying to avoid many conflicts over the years, I have come to believe that conflicts are not bad or something to be avoided. However, it is a common misconception and I have seen people do anything to avoid them.

We have no choice or power over when a conflict is going to present itself. Our only choice is in responding to them. We find them undesirable or unproductive not because they are unpleasant but because we have no idea about how to handle them.

Conflicts Are Not About Right or Wrong. Usually Both Sides Are Right.

In almost every conflict I have seen, both sides are right. There is no wrong side. Conflicts are about different perspectives, and each perspective is valid for the one holding it. A perspective becomes right or wrong only when we get attached to a particular point of view.

Can we see that we are all seeking to express the truth as we see it? Can we acknowledge that everyone sees the world differently and form their own perception of events? Conflicts happen not because of different perceptions, but because of our inability to acknowledge another's point of view.

Conflicts Have A Lot of Energy. Can We Use It Productively?

Conflicts are like a flowing river. If left unchecked, they can cause flooding and destruction. But if we can build a dam and channel the water in the right direction, we can turn it into electricity.

The same thing applies to conflicts. The only question is – Can we use the energy in a conflict productively? Can we channel this energy into productive conversations that can lead to creative solutions and better results?

However, if we can't control the energy in a conflict, it can result in damage (stress, frustration, bad results) and lost opportunity.

Conflicts Can Be The Foundation for Great Results and Relationships.

Healthy disagreement creates friction and energy. If we look back at history we will find that every great accomplishment has come out of differing opinions held by people who found a way to work together.

In every conflict, if we are willing to do the hard work required to navigate through it, we can turn them into an advantage instead of something to be avoided. Conflicts can be the bedrock upon which great successes and deep relationships can be built.

“An enemy is a person whose story we have not heard.”

– Gene Knudsen Hoffman

This brings us to the end of **Part 1**.

In Part 2 we will learn a few things which can be very tempting to do amidst a conflict, but that we MUST NOT DO when we encounter a conflict.

What Not To Do When Conflicts Happen?

What Not To Do When Conflicts Happen?

In the last 15 years of my professional career, I have had my own share of conflicts. One lesson that I have taken from them is that each conflict comes with a temptation to react in a certain way.

While there are different ways we can approach a conflict, an impulsive reaction rarely helps the conflict move forward. However, these are the very things we end up doing when we are not prepared or aware about how to respond to a particular conflict.

Let's take a look at some of these actions which are very tempting but we must avoid doing them, or we risk making the situation worse and hard to recover from.

1. Jump Right In and React

Conflicts can be complex, and attempting to handle them without preparation can be our biggest failing. As human beings, we (or our brains) seek safety. We don't want to be involved in a conflict, so whenever we encounter one, the first impulse is always to react with whatever comes up in our minds.

Our brains are hardwired to protect us from danger and to ensure our survival. An unexpected conflict is perceived as a threat, and it can lead us towards a fight or flight reaction. Doing so without understanding the conflict and giving ourselves time to process it can do damage which can take a lot of effort to undo in the future.

2. Deny or Avoid the Conflict

One of the most natural ways to react to a conflict is to deny its existence. There are always small signs you can notice as a conflict builds up. The sooner you act on it, the lesser damage control you have to do later. Don't pretend that it doesn't exist, or you are only postponing the problem.

Denial means acting like the conflict doesn't even exist, and I don't think there is any human being who has not acted with denial when presented with a conflict at least once

in their life. We can close our eyes and walk around like nothing has happened, but that can often result in falling into a pit which can then take a lot of effort to get out from.

“You can’t shake hands with a clenched fist.”

– Indira Gandhi

3. Surrender or Give Up

Many of us hate confrontation, and often we give up our needs and position to avoid an ‘unpleasant’ confrontation. While this prevents the confrontation, it often results in resignation and cynicism as surrendering doesn’t help in moving forward in our careers or life.

Surrendering never helps any party, and spoils the mood and culture in the organisation. It builds regret and resentment. We should not let anyone bully us or others, regardless of hierarchy or position. If we give up in a conflict, we must know that we have wasted an opportunity for a positive result.

4. Dominate a Conflict

On the other spectrum of surrendering is trying to get our way by dominating. We can do this by using our influence, position or personality over the other person. We might get our way if we dominate others, but we never truly “win” a conflict unless both parties are satisfied.

Domination, like surrender above, often ends up weakening the relationship rather than strengthening it. If people are unhappy and resentful, sooner or later it will boil up again as a conflict or show poor results in whatever we are trying to do.

5. Ignore the Relationship and the People Involved

We often get sucked up in tasks and getting the results we want, that we totally ignore the relationship and the people involved. We should always remember that the people and relationships come first, and that any success that focuses only on the “task” will be short lived if we destroy the relationships in the process.

A productive conflict resolution not only reaches a solution which works for both the parties, but also strengthens the relationship between all stakeholders. They end up feeling better about themselves and their work, without any frustration and cynicism.

Constructive conflict resolution can only happen in a space of trust and camaraderie between people, and all of the points above destroy this space. When people understand each others' needs and look beyond their fears and anxieties, they can work together to create new results which work for everyone. When this happens, you win WITH the other person rather than OVER them.

This brings us to the end of **Part 2**.

In Part 3 we will look at differentiating positions from interests, and deciding some common ground rules.

How to Prepare for a Conflict Resolution Conversation?

How to Prepare for a Conflict Resolution Conversation?

A conflict resolution conversation is one of the most critical conversations in any organisation. The success or failure of this conversation will determine how the inherent energy in a conflict will be used, and how the relationship between the involved parties will evolve in the future.

As I have written previously, conflicts have a lot of energy, like an overflowing river. It is upto us to build a dam and channel all this extra water (energy) into electricity? Because if left unchecked, all this extra water can cause flooding and devastation in its path.

The most effective tool to prevent the flooding and use the energy in each conflict productively is the Conflict Resolution Conversation. Below are 5 steps I think all of us can take before any conflict resolution conversation:-

1. Create A Foundation

Create a foundation of **trust and respect** among all involved parties, which is essential for any productive conversation to happen. This is more like a step 0, as trust is like oxygen in a conversation.

Take steps to apologise or forgive for any past behaviour, and prepare a clean slate by setting any prejudices aside. This will help create an environment of trust and mutual respect. **Work together as partners**, and not adversaries, as you set about resolving the conflict.

2. Decide Ground Rules

Decide common ground rules for the conversation before you start. These rules will allow you to proceed amicably in the face of differences and disagreements. They can include what is the common goal both parties are seeking, how would you treat each other, and what will you do if you can't agree on a common solution?

Having such ground rules will assist both parties to keep their egos in check and keep the focus on a mutually beneficial solution. Even in the case of an unproductive conversation, these rules will leave you with respect and understanding for the other person's position, rather than with resentment and cynicism.

3. Listen

The freedom to speak your mind includes a duty to listen and understand the other person's perspective. Walk a mile in the other person's shoes to see the situation from his point of view. Acknowledge the validity of the different perspectives without making any one perspective right or wrong.

Walk into the conversation with an empathetic attitude and care for the other side's concerns. Understand that the conversation is not productive unless the concerns of both parties are met. If you work to address what the other person cares about, you create the possibility of a win-win result which might be even better than what you initially wanted.

“Courtesy towards opponents and eagerness to understand their viewpoint is the ABC of non-violence.” — Mahatma Gandhi

4. Differentiate Your Positions From Your Interests

Ask yourself what do you really desire? And why? Let go of your attachment to your position and seek to discover yours and others' common desires. Asking the question “why” a couple of times can help you do that.

This will help you understand the other person better and create space for collaboration and flexibility. Understanding the concerns of each other will turn you into partners rather than adversaries, and it opens up the possibility of making $2 + 2 = 5$ happen.

As human beings, we function and operate in this world by forming positions on different subjects we face in our day to day interactions. When we encounter opposition or resistance to our point of view, we defend our positions and it takes some convincing for us to yield from our position.

What I have discovered with my experience of dealing with people over the last many years is that if we focus on people's interests instead of their positions, it can become much easier to negotiate and converse with them.

Positions are what you want. Interests are why you want them. Focusing on positions puts us against one another. On the other hand, distinguishing between the positions and interests helps us discover people's common desires.

These desires – like fairness, accomplishment, happiness and prosperity – might not be the same for both parties, but they often are compatible, which makes for easier negotiation.

5. Prepare your BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiable Agreement)

The BATNA is your lower boundary, the minimum you are willing to get out of the conversation. Knowing your BATNA increases your negotiating power.

When you enter a conversation knowing your BATNA, that gives you assurance and confidence. If nothing else works, you walk out with your BATNA.

However, we must be careful to not use BATNA as a threat, and always present our BATNA in a way that respects the relationship. This leaves the door open for two way communication and seeking win-win solutions.

To sum it up, doing this preparation before any conflict resolution conversation prevents us from reacting impulsively when the going gets tough. Conflicts are a natural order of life, and being prepared will allow us to turn them into an opportunity to build a strong foundation (relationship) not just for immediate but also long term results.

It is also important to note that the above steps do not guarantee a successful conversation, or the results we desire. But they will equip us to deal with conflicts with steady and not shaky hands, which is always a good skill to have.

This is the end of **Part 3 - How to Prepare for a Conflict Resolution Conversation?** So far we looked at **Understanding Conflicts Better in Part 1** and **What Not To Do in Part 2**.

Let's move to **Part 4** which takes the abstract into the concrete, and provides **eight practical tips for effective conflict conversations**.

Eight Practical Tips for Making Conflict Resolution More Effective

Eight Practical Tips for Making A Conflict Resolution Conversation More Effective

So you have prepared well (Part 3), and are walking into a conflict resolution conversation with trust and respect for the other person. You have established ground rules for the conversation, and you know your BATNA.

Even with all this preparation, it is easy to get sucked into our emotions and give into reacting impulsively. Below you will find some practical tips I find really helpful to navigate a conflict resolution conversation efficiently.

I have gathered and collected these tips from various books I have read and trainings I have undertaken, apart from my own mistakes and learnings in the past.

1. Speak in a Non-Attacking Manner

Use “I” language rather than “You” language. For example – Say “I felt angry when you said that.” rather than “You made me angry by saying that.” Take responsibility for your own emotions, and remember the aim is to work together.

2. Listen and Understand.

Summarise and paraphrase what the other person says to make sure you understand his/her concerns and they know it is very important for you to do so.

3. Walk the Talk

If you feel angry or frustrated by hearing certain words or voice tone, make sure to not use the same words and tone to the other person. I have often seen that observing my own thoughts and emotions helps me to understand others better.

4. Separate the Facts from the Opinions

Work together to challenge each other's assumptions, and distinguish opinions backed by emotions from opinions backed by facts and data.

5. Stay Silent

Use the power of silence to give the other person and yourself space to process what is being said in the conversation. It creates positive energy instead of building tension and enables us to handle tough situations in a more mature way.

6. Speak Up Only If It Makes Things Better

Speak Up only when what you have to say will help the conversation in one way or the other. If what you have to say will not make the situation any better, don't say it. In other words, do not vent or speak only because you had a thought in mind. Speak only when it helps you move towards a desired result.

7. Give Time for Emotional Release

If someone is venting out, don't interrupt. If it gets too heated, take a break. Wait for the (emotional) storm to pass before making repairs. Jumping in too early to fix things might backfire and cause more damage despite your good intentions.

8. Don't Push

When you push people, they will push back. Present your thoughts without trying to push them through, and be open and flexible to listen to others' concerns and thoughts. Give people a choice to accept or reject your ideas, as you cannot force them to your point of view anyway. Work together, not against each other.

This leaves us with the **last part - What To Do If We Can't Achieve Consensus?**

What To Do If You Can't Achieve Consensus?

What To Do If You Can't Achieve Consensus in a Conflict?

In this guide so far, we have seen what conflicts are, what not to do when they happen, how to prepare to solve them through a conversation, and some practical tips to follow during the conversation itself. However, doing all this doesn't guarantee the result you desire.

Conflicts can be complex, and there are times when people (including you and me) are more interested in winning (or getting our way) rather than working together to get what we really want. Human beings are complex emotional beings, and often we end up attaching the outcome of a conflict to our personal identity.

That leaves us with the question of what to do if we can't achieve consensus in a conflict resolution conversation?

1. Follow Pre-Decided Escalation Rules

If you have done your preparation well, you already know how to escalate the stalemate to your superiors in the organisation so that they can help. If you have not decided any escalation rules earlier, now is not a bad time to do it either.

The only thing we must keep in mind when deciding escalation rules or escalating an issue itself is to not do it unilaterally. It is always beneficial to work with the other party to decide whatever escalation rules you can come up with, and then if the situation demands, to escalate the issue together.

Escalating an issue alone without first communicating to the other party hurts the trust and the relationship which might make it even more difficult to resolve the conflict in the future.

2. Take A Break, And Try Again

If you have reached a stalemate, one common option is to take a break and reconvene later. Taking a pause at this time gives both sides space to reflect on the discussions so far

and evaluate options. You might decide to harden or soften your position during this time, and get a different perspective of the big picture.

When you meet again after a break, it is important to redefine the common purpose which both parties are seeking. Then you can work together to understand each other's point of view and negotiate again.

If the above two steps don't help you in moving forward, you can try these :-

3. Walk Away With Your BATNA

If the disagreement has reached a point where you can't reach a solution acceptable to both parties, it might be prudent for both parties to walk away with their respective BATNAs (Best Alternative To A Negotiated Agreement).

Not reaching a consensus in a conflict is not a bad outcome. Sometimes the best outcome is to not agree with the other party while still respecting them and keeping the relationship healthy.

Once the discussions are over and everyone walks with their BATNAs, you can look back and reflect upon the whole process. There might be lessons for you which might help you in future conflicts, and evaluating the choices you made is a good exercise after the discussion.

You should also acknowledge yourself for putting in the effort required to resolve the conflict. Give yourself credit for working together and strengthening the relationship, irrespective of whether you got the result you wanted or not.

4. Seek Mediation By A Third Party

Another step forward (if both parties agree to it) could be to seek mediation from a third party. This is different from escalation as escalation means involving your managers or seniors in the conversation. The rules of mediation seek the involvement of an independent third party.

And of course, the rules of mediation should be decided by both parties together. Below are a few ideas to keep in mind before you go down the path of mediation.

1. The third party must be agreeable and respected by both of you. Do not accept a third party mediator you don't trust, and never force a third party on another.
2. The third party should play a neutral role and not take sides. It must listen to both sides then take a decision based on the merits of the arguments and facts presented. Decide the rules of argumentation and reasoning together before starting the process.
3. Discuss possible solutions and compromises. See if you can agree on any tentative agreements. Take it step by step. Even if you can't reach your desired outcome, see if you can reach half way.
4. Close the mediation and finalize any agreements. Do a final check to see if both parties are satisfied? Do both the parties consider the mediation and final resolution fair and pragmatic? Without a YES to the above questions, any solution or agreement is unlikely to last the distance.
5. Create a provision for future conflicts. What will you do if one party goes back on the mediated settlement? Can any party seek a revision to the mediated agreement?

“The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly; it is dearness only that gives everything its value. I love the man that can smile in trouble, that can gather strength from distress and grow.”

— Thomas Paine

To sum up, the above four steps will help you amicably close a conflict resolution process – with or without an agreement. Learning to effectively manage conflicts in a constructive and respectful manner is an important skill to learn, and one which gives people freedom and confidence to work together.

Conclusion

In this 5 part guide, we have seen how conflicts can lead to misunderstanding and destroy relationships, or they can be an opportunity to collaborate constructively and strengthen relationships. We have seen that conflicts have a lot of energy in them, and they arise because we care deeply about something.

Just like excess rains can cause rivers to overflow and cause damage, the energy of conflicts can lead to our emotional rivers to overflow. If left unchecked, this extra energy (from conflicts) can cause damage to ourselves, our relationships and to the goals we seek.

We have been building dams over our rivers for over a century now, and that has enabled us to tap the excess energy in rivers to productive use. Building a dam helps provide water for irrigation of crops for farmers in dry times, and generates electricity when there is excess water in the dam.

Similarly, we can use the energy in conflicts to seek win-win solutions which are beneficial to both sides.

When two or more people create something new from constructive discussion, it creates long lasting change. This leads to moments which have the power to shape our lives, our relationships and our world.

In the high pressure business environment we all live in today, the ability to resolve conflicts can become a competitive advantage for us and the companies we work in.

What's Next?

Did you find this report useful?

If yes, then forward this report to someone who you think would benefit from it. You can send it via email, or share it on social media. The report itself can be found at

<https://www.deployyourself.com/r/compassionate-conflicts-report.pdf>

Are you ready to Deploy Yourself?

Deploy Yourself is about understanding ourselves, developing our strengths, and acting in a way that allows our own unique light to shine upon the world, instead of following the path others have decided for us.

Join the Deploy Yourself newsletter to understand coaching and leadership from different angles. Every two weeks, you will battle-tested ideas at the intersection of psychology, neuroscience, and leadership in your inbox.

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