

SERIES F: Topic 7

Reducing Conflict

When a person does something that angers you, it is natural to respond forcefully. Whether the cause of the disagreement is fair or unfair, logical or irrational, accidental or intentional or real or perceived, your emotions still need to be dealt with.

> **If your emotions overpower your reason, you can do lasting damage to a relationship.**

Most arguments are caused when one or both of you act or react before you have all the information. An improper reaction can cause a new argument that is even more heated than the first.

Emotions that are too forceful or don't fit the situation are usually driven by stronger, deeper and less obvious factors that may not be related to the cause of the conflict. Internal issues such as bruised egos, envy, grudges, insecurity or resentment from previous arguments that weren't resolved properly could be at work.

External forces like being reprimanded at work, being ostracized by friends or finding a ding in your brand new car can also cause an overreaction to a smaller problem. When a woman threatens her husband with divorce because he forgot their movie date, it's a symptom of something much deeper than the missed date.

Arguments are perpetuated when one or more people in the exchange are more concerned with winning their point or having their way than they are about finding the best solution for the problem. Most of the time, being happy is better than being right.

Most rants are born of frustration and the expectation that you will not hear or work on the other person's need. Try saying something like this: "You've got some important issues. I want to help. Tell me what you want me to do, and I'll work with you on this problem." If you can do this convincingly, it will disarm them. There will be no need for fault finding, defending yourself, diminishing the other person's arguments, or counter-complaining about their contribution to the problem.

Rather than complain, explain. State the problem. Give an example or two that might produce different results, and ask the other person for his ideas. Don't expect an immediate conclusion. Allow the matter to be unsettled for a while—depending on the issue, perhaps from a couple of hours to a couple of weeks.

Components of an Argument

The **posture** is the way an offended person presents himself using his temper, language, attitude or power. It is his negotiating style. People will assume a posture to make arguments as persuasive as possible and to put the opponent on the defensive. Your posture reveals your intention—whether it is to win, punish or intimidate or to improve the situation. Often the person on the receiving side of your posture will know your position better than you will! Keep in mind that the alienation caused by a posture that is too powerful can make the posture ineffective.

The **hurt** is the degree to which the relationship, trust and feelings of the other party have been injured.

The **infraction** is the act that has angered the other person. That person, if very upset, has likely replayed the incident over and over in his mind and may not be receptive to logic or reason.

Approach and Sequence

1. **Never comment on the other person's posturing unless youcan compliment it in some way—even if he is acting crazy.** React as if the other person will be fair and work with you toward a reasonable settlement of the issue. Try to get the other person to reveal anything he hasn't already said about the problem or your relationship.
2. **Attend to the hurt.** Make sure the other person knows the issue is small in relation to the importance of the relationship. Convince the injured party you are genuinely sorry and you understand how you may have caused the hurt. Try not to be defensive.
3. **Accept responsibility for your part of the infraction.** Restate the parts of his arguments that have truth. Mention the ways the other party was not at fault (be generous), or how he could have come to the conclusion he did. Ask questions about his points you do not understand or need to know that might make your side of the argument go away.
4. **Be patient.** Try harder to let the other person win. You can often gain more from allowing the other person to win than you can by winning yourself. Settling an argument in a way that is good for both parties can relieve pressure from elsewhere in your relationship, or make it better than before.

Losing Friends and Arguments

Having the following behaviors while arguing convinces the other person you value your posturing more than their friendship. It also shows you are willing to lose the relationship to prove your point:

- Using explanations that are untruthful, insincere or self-serving.
- Using a demeaning tone of voice.
- Attacking—going after a weakness or sensitivity.
- Embarrassing others—revealing faults or secrets of others in public.
- Being egotistical—being arrogant, unforgiving, self-centered, ungrateful or belligerent.
- Exaggerating your hurt—acting as if you are hurt more or more often than appropriate for what you have experienced, showing self-pity, oversensitivity.
- Pretending—faking a hurt to embarrass the other person so he will leave you alone or lessen his expectations that you will comply.
- Unloading—showing resentment from previous issues.



ASK YOURSELF

What is causing the distance between me and him or her?

How can I get the closeness back?

Can I give up my need to win arguments?