

Styles of Conflict Resolution Reading 25

Conflict Resolution Skills Module

Shark: Forcing & Competing

Sharks try to overpower opponents by forcing them to accept their solution to the conflict. Their goals are highly important to them, and the relationship is of minor importance. They seek to achieve their goals at all costs. They are not concerned with the needs of other people. They do not care if other people like or accept them. Sharks assume that conflicts are settled with one person winning and one other losing. They want to be the winner. Winning gives sharks a sense of pride and achievement. Losing gives them a sense of weakness, inadequacy, and failure. They try to win by attacking, overpowering, overwhelming, and intimidating others.

Best Used: When the goal is very important to you and the relationship is not. Examples are buying a car or trying to get your internet company out for the 3rd time to fix your service.

Limitations: Most people don't want to be in relationships with someone who sees conflict as a matter of winning and losing and doesn't care about their needs. People don't like to feel overpowered and intimidated. Unfortunately, some people in leadership positions believe this is the best style. However, the people who report to them don't want to work for them and may leave as soon as possible.

Turtles: Withdrawing & Avoiding

Turtles withdraw into their shells to avoid conflict. They give up their personal goals and relationships. They stay away from the issues at the center of the conflict and from the people they are in conflict with. Turtles believe it is hopeless to try to resolve conflicts. They feel helpless. They think it is easier to withdraw (physically and psychologically) from a conflict than to face it.

Best Used: When confrontation is too dangerous or damaging, when an issue is unimportant, when a situation needs to be cooled down, or when you need more time to prepare, or when the goal is not important, and you do not need to keep a relationship with the other person. Examples include avoiding a hostile stranger or stepping away from a conflict to clear your head and help you decide how to proceed.

Limitations: Issues may never get addressed.

Teddy Bears: Smoothing & Accommodating

To Teddy Bears, the relationship is of great importance, while their own goals are of little importance. Teddy Bears want to be liked and accepted by others. They think conflict should be avoided in favor of harmony and believe that discussing conflicts can damage relationships. They fear that if the conflict continues, someone will get hurt, which will ruin the relationship. They give up their goals to preserve the relationship. Teddy Bears say, "I'll give up my goals, and let you have what you want, for you to like me." Teddy Bears try to smooth over the conflict in fear of harming the relationship.

Best Used: When you are wrong, when you want harmony or credit toward a more important issue, when the goal is of no significant importance to you, but the relationship is of high importance, and when the other person feels strongly about something, and you don't.

Problems: You may never get your concerns addressed or your needs met

Fox: Compromising

Foxes are moderately concerned with their goals and relationships with others. Foxes seek a compromise. They give up part of their goals and persuade the other person in a conflict to do the same. They seek a solution where both sides give up something—the middle ground between extreme positions. They are willing to sacrifice part of their goals and relationships to find agreement for the common good.

Best Used: When all else fails, for fast decision-making on minor disagreements, when it seems you will not get everything you want.

Problems: You may lose sight of more significant issues and values, and possibly not please anyone. Neither person may be happy with the solution.

Owls: Confronting and Collaborating

Owls highly value their own goals and the relationship. They view conflicts as problems to be solved and seek a solution that achieves both their own goals and the other person's goals. Owls see conflicts as opportunities to improve relationships by reducing tension between two people. They try to begin a discussion that identifies the conflict as a problem. They are not satisfied until a solution is found that achieves their own and the other person's goals. And they are not satisfied until the tensions and negative feelings have been fully resolved.

Best Used: When your goals and the relationship are very important, and you have time to work through the conflict.

Problems: It is not helpful for minor decisions, and when time is limited.

Summary

In most conflicts, when your goals and the relationship are both very important, and you want a win/win result, it is most effective to confront and smooth, as these are the two most effective strategies. When the goal is important, confront, and when the goal is not important to you, smooth. Both of these strategies maintain good relationships. Compromising is usually only a good idea if you have limited time and cannot negotiate a mutually satisfactory solution to the conflict, or the other person is unwilling to do anything more. But remember, ideally, you will be skilled in all five strategies and can use each, depending on the other person and the situation. A successful resolution to a conflict (win/win) will result in:

1. You and the other person are satisfied with the outcome
2. The relationship is stronger, and both of you are better able to interact with each other
3. You both like and trust each other more
4. You are both better able to resolve future conflicts with other people