

Session 5: The Nature of Conflict; Incidents Defined

Purpose: Participants will become familiar with specific precepts about conflict and the role of incidents in conflict.

Supplies:

- Blank sheets of paper
- Don's handout on Conflict Resolution

Content:

- Review the 4 styles
- Conflict – What it is; strategies for coping with it
- Incident – the first step in conflict resolution

Activities:

- A. One-on-one: You and the 4 styles
- B. One-on-one: The 4 styles at work; paired and group
- C. Discussion of 4 styles
- D. Brainstorm conflict indicators
- E. Discuss conflict strategies
- F. Make a list of incidents
- G. Go-around – share an incident on your list

T> Welcome to Session 5 of Transformations. Tonight we're going to review and discuss the four styles of communication. We're also going to begin to look at what conflict is and how to resolve it. We're going to start with the Name Game! Who wants to begin?

T> Good! In order for us to be grounded here tonight, we're going to relax with a short meditation. So put everything off your laps; place your feet squarely on the ground; uncross your legs and arms; place your hands on your knees and begin to relax. Close your eyes; stretch if you need to, particularly your neck and shoulders. Now take a few deep breaths; and another. (Note: Trainers can use the following meditation, or any variation.)

Tune in to your sensations. Notice any areas of tension. (10)

Now let the tension go. (10)

Tune in to your feelings. Notice any emotions you may have. (10)

Now let your feelings go. (10)

Tune in to your thoughts. What are you thinking about right now? (10)

Now let your thoughts go. (10)

Tune in to your wants. What do you want from this evening? (15)

Imagine that your mind is a lake. See the choppy waves on the lake. Gradually smooth the waves until the lake is like glass. (30)

When you're ready, open your eyes and come back to the room.

T> Choose a partner for a one-on-one. In this paired share, take out your chart of the four styles and share with your partner what you noticed about yourself and the four styles this week. You'll have about two minutes each. I'll call time for you to switch at midpoint.

T> What are the four styles? (Trainer questions group and writes on board. Keep your energy up as you ask for participation.)

U> *Small talk:* What is its intention? When do you use it? What are some examples of small talk?

Control talk: What is its intention? When do you use it? What are the two types of control talk? What are the two types of Heavy Control? What are some examples?

Search talk: What is its intention? When do you use it? What are some examples?

Straight talk: What is its intention? When do you use it? What are some examples of straight talk? Why is this a high risk style?

Does anyone have any questions about the four styles of communication?

We're going to work a bit more with them tonight.

T> We have a lot of choice in how and when we use the different styles; depending on our intentions, each style has its usefulness. Here is an example of a situation and how I might use the four styles. (Note: Space for a trainer's individual examples follows this one.)

I really wanted a dog and my partner didn't.

Small talk: Dogs are fun to have around!

Control talk: You're really selfish to deny me a dog!

Search talk: I wonder if we can find a compromise. I wonder what it would be like to have dog.

Straight talk: I feel lonely at times. I would really like to have a dog to take care of. Let's explore your questions about dogs and look at the pros and cons. I'm willing to be responsive to what concerns you may have about a dog.

[My example]

T> Are there any questions about this? Now we'd like you to go through a similar exercise. Choose a partner because you'll be working on this in teams. On one of your handouts is an exercise where we'd like you to imagine that you are interacting with a new co-worker and taking him or her out to lunch. We'd like each team of partners to decide and write what you might say to this new person in each of the four styles. Talk it over together. One of you write. Use your chart of the four styles. You'll have about 7 minutes to complete this and then we'll share it.

(Note: Call on a few teams to share a few of each of the phrases in each style. Discuss.)

T> Does anyone have a question or comment about the four styles? What is confusing? Which of the styles is the easiest for you? The most difficult? What do you think is useful about the four styles? Remember – the point of the four styles is to observe and choose which style will suit your intention.

T> **Conflict Lecture:** There are three important points about conflict. As you probably just noticed, straight and search talk are most effective when trouble occurs. In order to use these styles most effectively, we need to know a few points about conflict.

1. **Conflict is inevitable.** Conflict is unavoidable in the process of living and relating to others. In many situations, there is no right or wrong – only differences. Even in a relatively harmonious relationship, two people will disagree about which movie to see. We want to believe that there would be no conflict if we found the right job, the right mate, the right group. But this is not so. Conflict exists with all jobs, mates, and groups.

2. To avoid conflict is to avoid significant relationships. There are two ways to avoid conflict: withholding and placating. When we withhold feeling or communication or withdraw from closeness because of conflict, we avoid intimacy. If we go along in our relationships not expressing what we think or how we feel because we want to avoid conflict, then we'll soon have a big space of resentment between ourselves and others. The quality of a relationship is determined by the ability to deal effectively with differences and resolve conflict.

3. Conflict resolution skills can be learned. No one is born knowing how to resolve problems with others. We are born only with our unique beings, which means with our differences. We believe that there are skills we can learn to resolve problems; and like any skills, it takes practice and effort to put them into use.

T> How do you know when you're having a conflict with someone?

- What are some of the physical sensations you experience?
- What are some of your behaviors?
- What kinds of feelings do you have?
- What kinds of thoughts?

[Trainer, write these on the board.]

T> We all learned different strategies for conflict in our families. We use these strategies out of habit; it's what we learned when we were young, and we don't know any better. How did your family treat conflict? Maybe your mom handled conflict in a certain way, and maybe your dad handled it the same way, or perhaps a different way. What strategies did *you* learn in order to cope with problems in your family? Be with

yourself a minute to think about this and remember. [Write these strategies on the board or flipchart:

- Be nice/placate
- Pretend the conflict doesn't exist
- Yell and scream
- Whine and complain
- Withdraw
- Etc.]

What we now know about a lot of these strategies is that they don't work very well. None of them resolves the problems and brings us closer to others. We're going to talk about a different approach to resolving conflict.

T> **Incidents Lecture:** Recognizing conflict is one of the first steps in resolving it.

Conflict begins with what we call incidents. *What is an incident? An incident is something that happens to one or both of us that affects how we are together, our space, our relationship. (Repeat)*

Now that we know what an incident is, how do you know you've had one?

1. Do any of you remember Jack Webb in "Dragnet"? You can still hear it on WAMU's "The Big Broadcast" on Sunday nights. What did he say? "JUST THE FACTS, ma'am." He said or did _____. She said or did _____.
2. You may know you've had an incident by the physical sensations that accompany it (sweaty palms, butterflies in your stomach, clenched jaw), as well as the feeling you have that "something happened."

3. You may know you've had an incident because you keep on replaying the event over and over in your head.
4. If we ignore our incidents and don't resolve them, they come between us and start to kill the relationship. We often say that relationships die, not from the conflicts directly, but from boredom, because the two people eventually are separated by a minefield of unresolved incidents, and they have nothing left that they can safely talk about.

Although some incidents draw us closer together (for example, you sent me a birthday card), in this class we'll focus mostly on the ones that create distance. When an incident is resolved, it can bring us closer.

Normally, the most dramatic incidents, those with the greatest intensity, occur with our closest significant others: partners, friends, siblings, parents, and bosses.

We may have minor incidents with parking enforcement workers, service people who don't come when they say they're coming, the post office, government officials, other drivers. But these incidents don't have much staying power, even though we may be extremely upset at the moment. Use the time in this class to focus on incidents with people who are fairly significant in your life – mates, partners, bosses, friends, family.

Here's a list of the incidents I've had in the last few weeks: (Note: This needs to be a substantial list to illustrate incidents.)

T> I'd like each of you to make a list of incidents that you've had today, this week, this year, whenever. No one besides you will see this list. It's just for you to use to jot down the facts (just the facts) in your own shorthand. We'll ask you to share one in a minute. If you're having trouble getting started, think of all the significant people in your

life and what it has been like with them lately. Do you notice any “blips” on the screen from when you’ve been with them lately?

T> Let’s have a go-around now. Choose and say one incident from your list.

(NOTE: Trainers may need to work with participants who may have difficulty separating the incident from embellishments. A participant may say, “Joe said in the rudest tone possible” Trainer can then say, “Good! What was it that Joe said? The incident is that Joe said he couldn’t go with me. The incident is just the facts. Description of the event or guesses about it come later in the analysis process.”)

T> [Inner Critic Reminder] Just one final point: In an ironic twist for a course about relationships, communication, and conflict, it may seem this week that you’re having more conflict, rather than less, because your consciousness has been raised. Also, your Inner Critic may go wild this week thinking about old relationships that died and playing woulda/coulda/shoulda with them. If this starts happening for you this week, know that you’re not alone; others in the class may be experiencing something similar. And use your Inner Witness to notice what the Critic is saying about you in relationships.

T> [Depending on time] It’s time for a final go-around. Say whatever you want to say about how tonight was for you. What did you create for yourself, notice about yourself? Or say whatever you want to to say goodnight.

T> Homework for tonight is to notice incidents and list them (for extra credit). Also, read Don Montagna’s lecture on conflict resolution, which is one of the handouts.

Have a good week!