Third International Congress on
Transformative Mediation

RESOURCE GUIDE

Transformative
Conflict Coaching

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THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

The **Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation** owes its beginnings to a group of leading scholars and practitioners who sought to influence views of conflict based the Transformative model first described in *The Promise of Mediation* by Robert A. Baruch Bush and Joseph P. Folger, published in 1994 and again in the revised edition in 2005. Conflict is primarily about being different and thinking differently, testing individuality and self-determination, risking the human connections we naturally value and need. It is this relational view of conflict that has come to be known commonly as the transformative approach to conflict.

The Institute is a not-for-profit corporation that has a mission is to study and promote the understanding of conflict processes and intervention from the transformative framework by: conducting research; developing publications; developing and disseminating educational and training materials, resources and programs; presenting education and training programs for educational institutions, agencies, corporations and other public or private organizations; organizing conferences, workshops, and seminars; and developing a network of researchers, mediators, trainers, and teachers who understand and promote the transformative framework for conflict intervention.

Since founding the Institute in 1999, leaders in the field have worked to study and promote the understanding of conflict processes and intervention from the transformative framework. Through various projects and initiatives, the Institute has become the nation's premier center of expertise on the transformative framework. Its work provides critically needed research, educational resources and training based on relational premises.

For more information about the ISCT, please visit our www.transformativemediation.org or follow us on Facebook.

About the Trainer

Basia Solarz, MAdEd, CPCC serves as the inaugural Consultant, Communication and Conflict Competence, for the award-winning Workplace Conflict Resolution Program at the Nova Scotia Health Authority (Canada), providing mediation, conflict coaching, and education & training across the province.

A Certified Transformative Mediator™ and Fellow of the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation, Basia completed a master's degree in adult education from Saint Francis Xavier University with a research focus on conflict coaching.

She is a Certified Professional Co-Active Coach through the Coaches Training Institute.

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Goals of the Training

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First, engage in a reflection about our own relationship to conflict to establish the foundation for a **responsible and ethical coaching practice:**

- Explore our experiences of conflict using the transformative framework to better understand conflict's destabilizing effects;

- Consider the benefits of using a moral grounding to guide our behavior in times of conflict;

- Explore practical strategies to support responding, rather than reacting to conflict.

Then, from the foundation of reflective practice:

- Consider the **benefits** of expanding your current professional services to include conflict coaching.

- **Compare and contrast** conflict coaching with other human change work.

- Identify **basic elements and principles** of coaching.

- Apply the **three insights** from the transformative framework to conflict coaching.

- **Practice** using the transformative framework's **supportive and non-directive approach** as coaching "best practice."

Conflict and the Conflict State

Recall a recent conflict – one that you were a part of, not simply an observer.

Individual Journaling, then share with a partner:

- How were you were feeling and what were the emotions you experienced when the conflict was at its worst?

- What you were thinking and feeling about the other person?

- Looking back on it, what was the most troubling part of the conflict for you?

- What do you like and dislike about how you responded while the conflict unfolded? What does this say about you?

Insight #1

Awareness of the incapacitating effects of weakness and self-absorption is the first step to responding, rather than reacting, to conflict.

The occurrence of conflict tends to destabilize our experience of both **self** and **other**, so that we interact in ways that are both more vulnerable and more self-absorbed than we did before the conflict.

When we are in conflict, we tend to experience a sense of both relative **weakness and r**elative **self-absorption.**
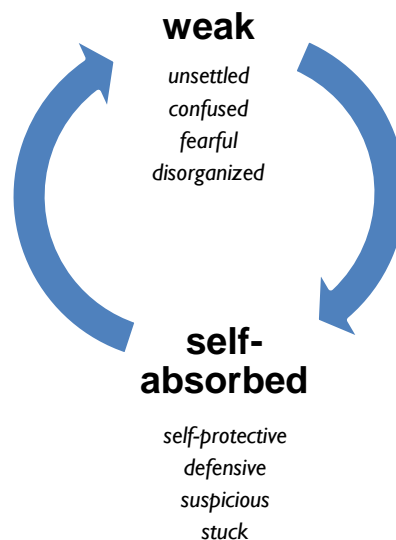
These negative dynamics often feed into each other in a vicious circle that intensifies both our own and others' sense of weakness and self-absorption.

As a result, the interaction between ourselves and others quickly degenerates and assumes a mutually destructive, alienating, and dehumanizing character. Conflict can be understood as a crisis in human interaction.

Destructive Conflict Cycle

**NEGATIVE
DESTRUCTIVE
ALIENATING
DEMONIZING**

weak

*unsettled
confused
fearful
disorganized*

**self-
absorbed**

*self-protective
defensive
suspicious
stuck*

Experiencing Weakness and Self-Absorption

Key Self-Reflective Questions:

1) What tend to be your initial thoughts and emotions when confronted with a difficult conflict?

2) What physiological reactions do you tend to have in the midst of a difficult conflict? How aware are you of any physiological changes the conflict is creating? When are you most likely to sense these changes?

3) How would you describe any feelings you experience during a difficult conflict interaction?

4) When do your responses in conflict tend to be driven by defensiveness and self-protective urges? What does it feel like when you are deeply defensive or acting mostly out of self-protection?

5) Under what conditions is it difficult for you to see the other's perspective during a conflict? What does it feel like when you cannot let yourself see the other's perspective?

6) In challenging conflicts, when do you tend to simply react rather than being able to consider what your alternative responses might be?

W hat people find most significant about conflict is not that it frustrates their satisfaction of some right, interest, or pursuit, no matter how important, but that **it leads and even forces them to behave toward themselves and others in ways that they find uncomfortable and even repellent**.

More specifically, it alienates them from their sense of their own **strength** and their sense of **connection to others**, thereby disrupting and undermining their interaction between them as human beings.

(Bush & Folger, 2004)

Insight #2

We can choose to respond to conflicts by drawing from our innate strength and connection to others – our moral grounding. This is compassionate strength.

The transformative framework provides us with a useful grounding in conflict because:

- We can strive to act with **Compassionate Strength** - Staying true to ourselves, our values, our beliefs, while simultaneously being open to and understanding of those who differ from us.

  Strength without compassion is selfishness.
  Devotion without self-awareness is mindlessness.

- It encourages us to act with a balance of strength and connection so that we respond to conflict with our fullest human capacity -- independent of what the specific outcomes of the conflict are.

- Even if our behavior is not perfect or the conflict takes negative turns, we can be satisfied with our efforts and choices knowing what we were trying to achieve, and why.

- The struggle to act with strength and connection – in the face of differences with others -- is a life-long opportunity for moral growth. It supports our effort not to act out of our lesser human traits of weakness and self-centeredness.

Compassionate Strength is our "north star," our compass
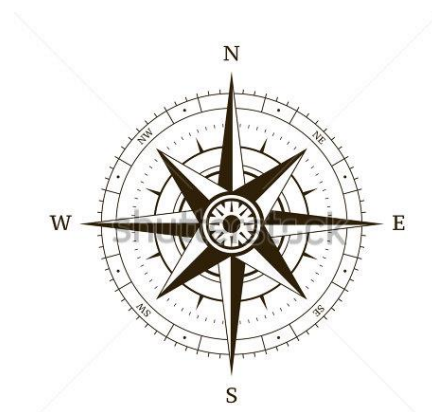
Insight #2
Emerging Strength and Responsiveness

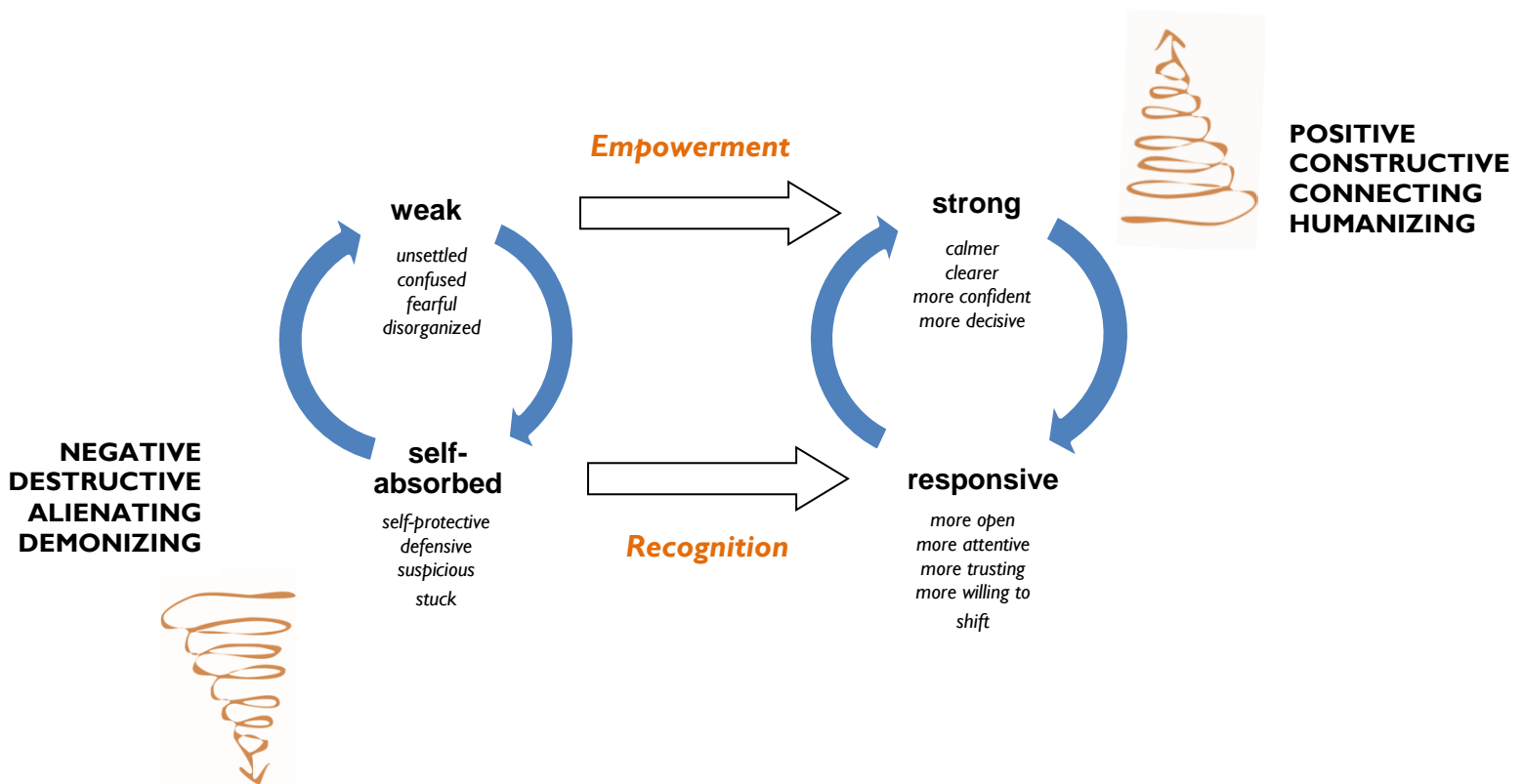**Conflict** can be understood as a **crisis** in **human interaction**.

In conflict, we tend to experience a sense of both:

Weakness: unsettled, confused, fearful, disorganized, and unsure

Self-absorption: self-protective, defensive, suspicious, and incapable of stepping outside of our own frameworks

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We can and do make dynamic shifts back to our innate strength and responsiveness to others:

Strength: Increasing calmness, clarity, confidence, organization, decisiveness, and personal strength

Responsiveness: Increasing openness, attentiveness, and responsiveness to the other; and appreciation for the other's situation.

Destructive and Constructive Cycles

Empowerment

weak
unsettled
confused
fearful
disorganized

strong
calmer
clearer
more confident
more decisive

POSITIVE CONSTRUCTIVE CONNECTING HUMANIZING

NEGATIVE DESTRUCTIVE ALIENATING DEMONIZING

self-absorbed
self-protective
defensive
suspicious
stuck

Recognition

responsive
more open
more attentive
more trusting
more willing to shift

Applying Insight 1 &2
Preparing for the Conversation

A Reaction happens from weakness and self-absorption, not a place of strength and openness (a response.) Reactions can get in the way of achieving your purpose as well as modify your intentions.

Identifying and planning for **reactions** and deciding how to handle them before the conversation takes place can help you stay open:

- What provokes reactivity for me (Insight 1)?

- What provokes reactivity for me when relating to this specific person?

- If I experience myself becoming reactive, how will I handle that?

- How do I provoke the other person's reactivity when we talk?

- How will I respond if the other person reacts in the conversation?

A conflict conversation is more likely to be constructive when *your intention and purpose is clear*. Understanding your motivation, as well as what you would like as a result of the conversation, can help you stay strong and responsive.

Contact your **moral/best self** by asking questions to get clear (Insight 2):

- What do I want for myself?

- What do I want to get out this conversation?

- What does the other person want for him- or herself?

- What do I need to do to be successful in balancing regard for self and other?

Applying Insight 1 & 2
During the conversation

- Be quiet and listen.

- Show you got it.

- Find out more.

- Share your perspective.

Applying Insight 1 & 2
After the conversation

We don't always have an opportunity to prepare for all of our conflicts and important conversations. This is why contemplating our conflicts and conversations can be so important. Reflection after a conversation can serve as preparation for the next unplanned, yet important, conversation:

- What did I learn from this experience?

- What did I learn about myself?

- What did I do to support myself to act from compassionate strength?

- What do I feel proud of?

- What do I want to do differently in the future?

- What do I need in order to do this?

Insight #3

Achieving the balance of strength and responsiveness is success, no matter what the outcome may be.

Why is reaching for this balance useful?
What is the value of always trying to act with compassionate strength -- independent of the substantive outcomes of the conflict?

Benefits of working from this moral grounding:

- We gain an inner-sense of strength, stability, & calmness.

- We make decisions that support our ability to continue to connect with & not vilify people despite significant differences we have with them.

- We can more easily live with the undesirable outcomes and unintended consequences that unfold in our conflicts.

- We are seen as someone who tries to "do right" no matter what difficult situations we face.

- We become an influential role model for others.

- Our behavior influences those with whom we are in conflict, slowing or stopping destructive cycles of conflict interaction. Stability breeds stability, chaos breeds more chaos.

- We remove a primary focus on the final outcomes of conflict and focus instead on the way we act and react during conflict.

Which of these benefits is most meaningful to you?

Ending or Minimizing Relationships Relationally

Provide a specific example where you consciously decided to minimize or end a professional or personal relationship. Discuss your example by reflecting on the following questions:

1. What did you understand or realize about the other person that led to your decision to end the relationship?

2. How comfortable were you with the decision when you made it?

3. How did you end the relationship? What did you do?

4. Do you believe your behavior reflected a good balance of taking care of yourself and considering the other person? If so, how? If not, why not?

5. What were the consequences of your decision to end the relationship?

6. In general, what are greatest challenges to ending relationships relationally, i.e., balancing concern for yourself and the other person?

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is *not* simply "…having paused for thought from time to time—with no indication of analysis, no links to an underlying professional knowledge base, and no hint of being able to draw out learning or new knowledge from the experience" (Thompson & Pascal, 2012).

Reflective practice is:

- An integration of **theory** and **practice**
- A cyclic pattern of experience and the **conscious application of lessons learned** from experience.

The transformative framework gives you the theoretical foundation in order to engage in robust reflective practice about how you handle the conflicts in your own life as well as how you approach your work as a conflict coach.

What is the value in having a theoretical basis for your work?

Conflict coaching as human change work

Transformative Mediation	*Consulting*
Mentoring	*Psychotherapy/counselling*

Coaching: *Principles & Practice*

Definition

"…partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential."

Principles

"The International Coach Federation adheres to a form of coaching that honors the **client as the expert** in his/her life and work, and believes that every client is **creative, resourceful and whole.**"

Practice

"The coach's responsibility is to:
- Discover, clarify, and align with what the **client** wants to achieve
- Encourage **client** self-discovery
- Elicit **client-generated** solutions and strategies
- Hold the **client** responsible and accountable."

From the *International Coach Federation*

Transformative Premises

Relational worldview

- People have both the *motivation* and *capacity* to act with strength and connection.

- The most important outcome of conflict for people is regaining a sense of strength and responsiveness to other.

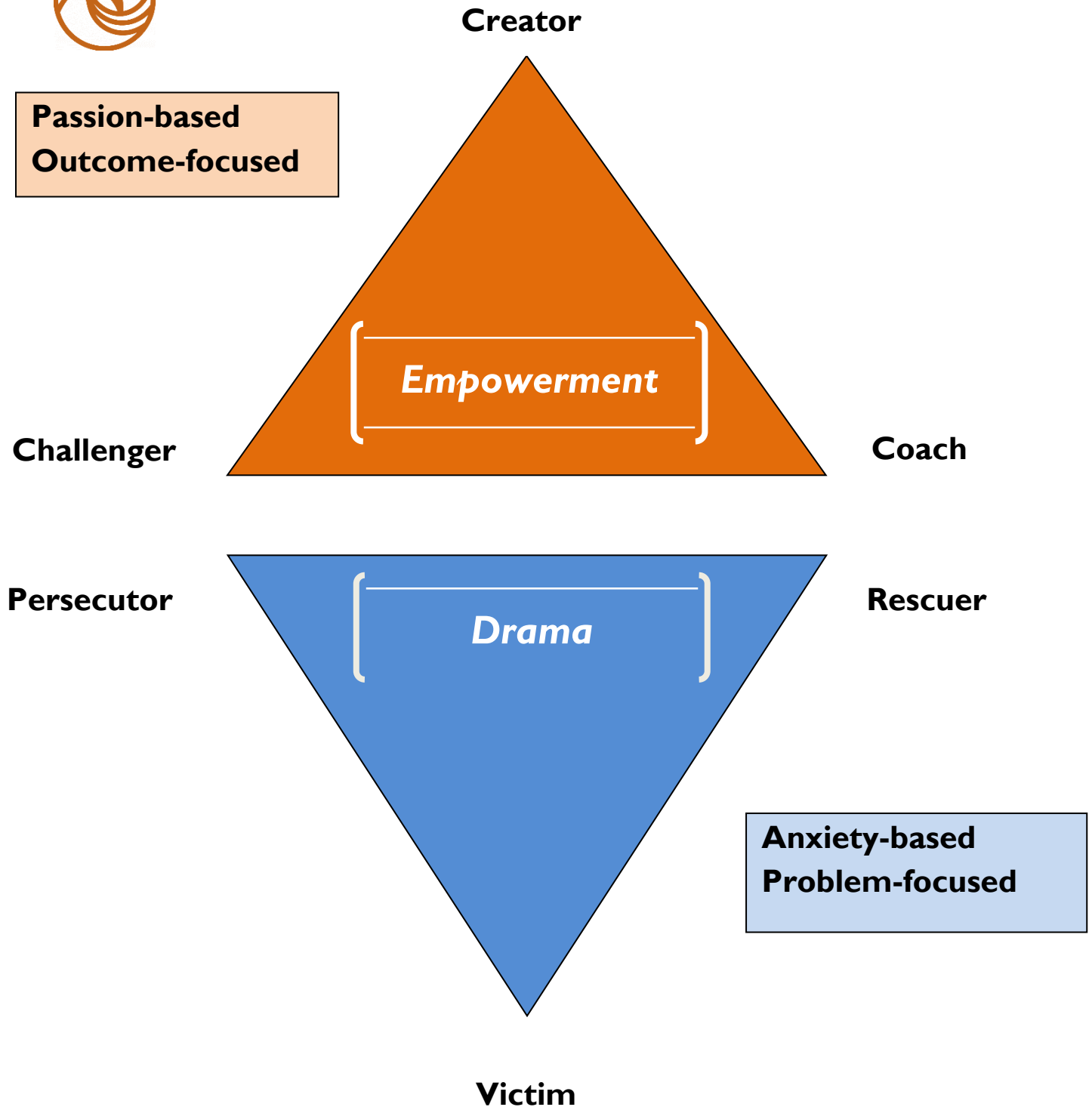| Transformative Premises & Practices	Co-active Coaching Principles and Practices
People have both the motivation and capacity to act with strength and connection.	Every client is creative, resourceful and whole and is the expert of their life.
Transformative practitioners honor people's self-determination by supporting opportunities for decision-making about such things as content, process, pace.	Coaches see clients as capable, responsible & accountable; Clients "design the alliance" with the coach, making decisions about goals, action steps (content), how the coach and client will work together (process, pace).
Outcomes: feeling heard; increased clarity; perspective-taking; identification of next steps; and/or making decisions; reconnecting with personal strength & responsiveness.	Outcomes: feeling heard; increased clarity; perspective-taking; identification of next steps; and/or making decisions; reconnecting with personal strength & responsiveness.

Helpful / Not Helpful

When you are in conflict, what do others (outside the conflict) do that you find helpful? What is helpful about it?

What do they do that is *not* helpful? What is not helpful about it?

Creator

Passion-based
Outcome-focused

Empowerment

Challenger

Coach

Persecutor

Rescuer

Drama

Anxiety-based
Problem-focused

Victim

David Emerald's "The Empowerment Triangle" (TED) as an alternative to Karpman's Drama Triangle.

Transformative Conflict Coaching

- Non-directive
- Empathetic without reinforcing weakness & self-absorption
- Do not force recognition

- Intention, goals
- Design the alliance
- Requests/challenges

Self-management

Accountability

Engage the whole person

Deepen the learning, Forward the action

- Metaphors
- Embodiment
- Images

- Listening
- Reflection
- Powerful questions
- Summary

Powerful Questions

Advisors and consultants *tell.* Coaches *ask.*

Powerful questions evoke clarity, action, discovery, and insight. Being open-ended, they do not elicit a "yes" or "no" response and instead, support people to see new possibilities and discover a fresh perspective.

Assessment
How does it look to you?
How do you feel about it?
What resonates for you?

Clarification
What do you mean?
What is the part that's not yet clear?

Elaboration
What other ideas/thoughts/feelings do you have about it?
Can you say more?

Evaluation
What is the opportunity here? What is the challenge?
What do you think that means?

Exploration
What part of the situation have you not yet explored?
What other angles/options can you think of?

Predictions
How do you suppose it will all work out?
How might that help you?
How might that (option, choice…) benefit this situation?
What are the chances of success?

Balancing concern for self & other/ Connecting with "Best Self"
What do you want?
What do you imagine the other person wants?
What do you want for your relationship, if anything?

What's the hardest part of this conflict for you?
What can you do, if anything, to shift this for both of you?
What does your "best self" have to say about this?

Barriers/Limitations
What seems to be the main obstacle?
What is stopping you?
What concerns you the most about . . . ?

Implementation
What is the next step for you?

Integration/Learning
What are you learning?
What are you taking away from this?
What are you learning about yourself?

Resources
How can you find out more?
What resources do you need to help you decide?
What resources are available to you?

Levels of Listening

Level 1: *Internal Listening*

Level 2: *Focused Listening*

Level 3: *Global Listening*

Transformative Conflict Coaches are Reflective Practitioners

Transformative conflict coaches are first and foremost **reflective practitioners**.

This means:

1. They have a personal, on-going commitment to growing their "best self"
2. They aspire to approach their own conflicts through the lens of the three transformative insights.
3. Their conflict coaching practiced is informed by the transformative theory.
   As a result:
   - They do not send clients down further down the *negative spiral* by reinforcing the client's conflict story, or joining them in demonizing others.
   - They do not force them up to move up the *positive spiral* by requiring clients to recognize the experience of the other before they have regained a sense of personal strength.
   - Are committed to people having "voice and choice". They use reflection, deep listening, and powerful questions.
4. They subscribe to the relational worldview so they are optimistic about people's motivation and capacity in conflict.

Stephen Brookfield (1998) offers a model of critically reflective practice:
- Lens 1: personal experience
- Lens 2: other's experience
- Lens 3: colleagues' experience (trusted peers)
- Lens 4: theory

Resources

CASE STUDY ACTIVITY

Directions: *Read the case study below and answer the discussion questions that follow.*

When people are in a negative conflict spiral, they experience deep feelings of personal weakness and alienation from others. For most people these feelings are very hard to cope with or change. They make all of us feel less like the person we want to be in most situations. As a result, people do their best to try to get out of a negative conflict spiral and restore their humanity.   How are we able to do that? The answer lies in trusting our human capabilities and our ability to make decisions with a balance of self and other in mind. We are capable of transforming negative and destructive behavior with other people into positive and constructive responses by relying on our strength (clarity, integrity, decisiveness) and responsiveness (perspective taking, appreciation for the other's situation, empathy).   In other words, we change our selves and the nature of our conflict by acting with a greater balance of empowerment and recognition.

I will provide an example of one of the prolonged conflicts I had in my work experience. This conflict affected me deeply and caused some significant emotional and psychological damage over the course of it.   The conflict involved a former supervisor and me. Although we got along at first, within a few months I felt she soon took any opportunity to pick on me and to tell me that everything was wrong no matter what I did. I felt very confused, not knowing what to expect from her or how to respond to her. And I felt fearful because I was becoming increasingly unsure of my future in the company because of her attitude toward me and her constant negative assessment of my work.   I was at a loss for what to do.   Because she was my boss, I felt I could not defend myself from her attacks and initially chose to stay in a purely self-protective and isolated state. I felt nothing but hostility towards her and it was easy for others in the office to see that we could not stand each other. All the signs of weakness and self-absorption were present for both of us. Our communication with each other seemed to get increasingly destructive with every passing day even though we both felt quite unhappy about this and were miserable most of the time at work. Neither of us did anything to improve the situation for quite some time.

At times, I would leave her office regretting what I had said to her and wishing I could have said something differently or not have been so defensive and accusatory.   I felt that this conflict transformed me into someone I did not want to be. As a result of feeling inadequate and being beside myself, I felt even more hostility toward her and alienation from her. I saw her as an enemy and as someone who was just out to get me. There was a negative downward spiral in

the conflict, and it seemed like there was nothing that could be done to help us get out of the vicious trap we seemed to keep ourselves in. *

At some point, I realized this situation had to change otherwise I would not be able to be at peace with myself.   I felt that something had to be done or I would just look for work elsewhere, even though I knew this would be difficult to do. I could not take it anymore. I also sensed that we both understood that our unproductive conflict had a negative impact on the working climate within our department overall. Other people could sense the tension and were affected by it. They felt they were beginning to have to choose sides, even though I tried not to talk to many people about how I felt out of fear that it would reach my supervisor's ears. It was clear, however, that we needed to somehow get through it for the sake of the workplace.   The consequences were just getting too big and noticeable.

I think my decision just to try to do something about the situation was my first empowerment shift.   It felt like I had got to the point where I had greater clarity and decisiveness.   I decided to go to my Human Resources representative and talk with her about the situation.   She said that it sounded like it was a situation that required an open conversation between the two of us.   Although I felt it was not my place to initiate such a conversation, talking with the Human Resources representative did get me thinking differently. I also had the feeling that she might tell my supervisor to initiate a conversation with me, but I did not know this for sure and my supervisor never did start such a conversation.

My first recognition shift involved my feeling that I wanted to try to figure out on my own why she behaved the way she did.   I could feel myself making a 'toss of the will' and telling myself I should try to see the problem from her perspective. In thinking about her role, I realized that even though she was my boss 'in name' she had less influence over me than I had really recognized. I actually received most of my work assignments from her supervisor -- not her. And I realized that this senior manager frequently did not keep my immediate boss in the loop. I began to recognize that many times my boss did not have full understanding of what I was doing and what instructions had been given to me by her supervisor. A lot of her questioning was about what I was doing and why I was doing it.   I began to see that this communication from the senior supervisor was probably making her feel quite uncertain about her role and whether she, herself, was supervising me adequately.   I sensed that she thought her authority was being undermined within our department because everyone in the department was aware of this situation, and the fact that, in actuality, I had direct access and accountability to the senior manager.

In addition, I thought about the fact that I knew she was a single mother and had been raising a difficult teenage son by herself. Although she did not disclose a lot of the details to me about her personal life, I knew that sometimes she had such difficulties with her son that she needed

to take some days off occasionally to see counselors and teachers.   Her single mom status meant that she desperately needed her job so that she would not be fearful of her future.   The fact that her manager was relating to me so much and at times ignoring her meant that she might have viewed me -- and the situation as a whole -- as a potential danger to her career. By being hostile and cold she probably was trying to protect herself from where this might head and could be sending me a message that I was a threat. She may have thought that I was initiating the skip-level relationship with her manager when in fact her manager was doing this on her own.

Just thinking her situation through on my own, changed me.   By stepping outside of my own frame of self-absorption and defensiveness, I was able to see things from her perspective, acknowledge her feelings of frustration, and even felt some empathy towards her. These thoughts about her resulted in a powerful recognition shift, which helped me immensely in creating more constructive interaction with my boss.   On my way towards greater clarity and recognition, I also took into account the fact that all people were different, and my reality did not automatically mean that it was her reality.   People have different backgrounds, circumstances, and experiences that affect how they see things. Keeping this in mind helped me to understand my boss better and I become more attentive to her point of view. I felt I showed a definite change in tone and was less reactive to her. *

Her behavior toward me did not change completely at first and I still found it hard to tolerate some of her behavior towards me, but at least I understood the reasons behind this behavior by trying to put myself "in her shoes."   This helped me feel, in a way, more connected to her and I became less defensive to things she would say to me.   Moreover, I think the fact that we both wanted to improve the working climate in our department (and not look bad to our co-workers) helped us achieve more constructive and positive interaction overall.   I remained true to my beliefs about the way she was acting, but at the same time I was able to find similar goals and a sense of where she was coming from.

I cannot say that everything went smoothly or that our interaction was always positive. There were situations when it seemed that no matter what we did, we were unable to get out of the negative conflict spiral.   But I felt that some of the edge had been taken off and I felt better because I was always more aware of how I wanted to act. I rarely walked away from an interaction with her and thought 'I wish had said something differently' – as I had in the past.   I was able to overcome many of the negative and destructive impacts of our interaction by acting with greater personal strength and understanding.   I knew I could not change her relationship with her supervisor or reduce her own insecurities about her role.   But whether or not my supervisor could change her feelings of threat and defensiveness, I felt that I could act in ways that were consistent with who I wanted to be as a professional and as a person.   This made all the difference day-to-day for me.

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The author of this conflict had studied the transformative view of conflict. How did viewing the conflict from this perspective help her to see why the conflict interaction was destructive and why it changed?

2. How did she get to a personally satisfying balance of empowerment and recognition in this conflict? What produced some of the shifts?

3. How did reaching this balance actually help her, despite some continuation of the conflict?

Welcome to Coaching!

As your coach, it's important for me to get a sense of how you view the world and yourself in the world.

Take your time answering these questions - they are meant to be pondered and to stimulate your thinking in a way that will make our work together productive and rich. I suggest you reflect on the questions for a few days before you compose your responses.

Why are you interested in working with a coach?

What is the most important thing I should know about you right now?

What I want more of in my life is…

What I want less of in my life is...

Where I want to make change in my life is…

What holds me back the most is...

What do you tolerate in your life that saps your energy?

Career Specific
The work I do now adds value to my life by…

If I could have any job in the world it would be…

Overall, I **love/like/dislike/HATE** my job (circle one)

Our Co-Active Relationship
What do you want to make sure you get from the coaching relationship?

How would you like me to be as your coach? What kinds of qualities/actions have you noticed in people with whom you have enjoyed a great working relationship?

What would be helpful for me to know about you as a coachee? Are there "pieces" of your life that you feel would be helpful for me to know?

Do I have your permission to:

•   …**intrude** or **interrupt** to offer direct communication in the service of your agenda?

•   …offer something from my **intuition**?

•   …ask you **"bottom-line,"** i.e., get to the essence of your communication rather than engaging in a long, descriptive story.

•   …use a variety of methods for learning and exploring such as guided imagery, embodiment, and metaphor/images?

•   …make **requests** of you and sometimes **challenge** you? You can always respond with a **yes, no,** or **counteroffer.**

Please come to each session with a topic

Coaching Focus

What are 1-3 key areas of your life that you'd like to focus on over the next 3 months? How would you like this area of your life to be different?

What will be the benefit of this?

> *For example: My focus area is my job.*
> *At the end of three months, I want to be able to look forward to going to work, get out of bed the first time the alarm goes off, be more cheerful with my colleagues and be more receptive to my supervisor.*
> *The benefit will be more joy, more peace, less stress, better mental and physical health.*

Focus area 1: _____

How would you like this area of your life to be different?

What will be the benefit of this?

Focus area 2:
_____

How would you like this area of your life to be different?

What will be the benefit of this?

Focus area 3:
_____

How would you like this area of your life to be different?

What will be the benefit of this?

Select Bibliography

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Additional Resources:

Click on the links below to learn more:

Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation and transformative practices, including coaching and dialogue.

Online training and events available through the ISCT Virtual Institute

Co-active coaching and the Coaches Training Institute

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