# Conflict

*A short primer on causes of human conflict and their resolution*

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RESOLVING CONFLICTS ISN’T THAT HARD

COMMON CONFLICTS WITH SOLUTIONS

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

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# RESOLVING CONFLICTS ISN’T THAT HARD

Whenever we think of the word ‘conflict’ most of us have a tendency to think of it as something we don’t want in our lives and, undoubtedly, there are lots of conflicts that are hurtful and even devastating. Yet, based on the nature of the universe and humankind, conflict is inevitable, and without it we would be unable to survive. Our forefathers existed only because they fought to exist. They were at one with nature and in conflict with her at the same time. It is no different with us today, only we are no longer in conflict with wild animals. For us, the conflict is between our lifestyles and the very nature of the universe itself. It appears that if we are to survive, we must resolve this conflict.

 No two people are exactly the same and this is why such differences enable us to exist and thrive. I’m an architect and you’re a carpenter; I’m a man and you’re a woman; I’m white and you’re of color. But the very differences that cause us to grow, enjoy, and succeed are equally the causes of our conflicts. I’m drawn to you because you are different and because you are different I don’t understand you. I love you and fear you at the same time.

It goes deeper, much deeper. Within me is both harmony and conflict. I actually reflect the natural world. I’m at peace with my family and I’m in conflict at work, or, I am absolutely thrilled beholding an exquisite winter wonderland, and equally absolutely devastated by the news that my friend was crushed to death by an avalanche in the mountains. Snow is beautiful one minute and ugly the next.

I know conflict. “The good that I would, I do not; and the evil that I would not, that I do” St. Paul.

*How can we think about conflict?*

Perhaps we should begin with the word “acceptance.” Conflict is within us and around us. The nature of the universe and who and what we are, demands that we accept it. Accepting inevitability isn’t defeat; it’s wise. Maybe we don’t see eye to eye and because of this, we part, and because we part, I have pain. Acceptance looks at it and says, “O.K. It is as it is.”

Another consideration; conflict is the stuff we are made of. Look over your life with me for a moment and view conflicts that you went through, which, if you hadn’t had them you would be a lesser person. Maybe it was the inner struggle between faith and fear or the outer struggle with a parent. Yes, it was torturous, but, on hindsight, it was both necessary and strengthening. It contributed to growth.

Along this line, I’m thinking of the Second World War perhaps because I experienced it as a child. What if Britain, then America and other nations had not fought the Nazis? We can only imagine. No, on second thoughts, we can’t imagine, can we? The devastation to lives and properties were unimaginable. We still can’t take in the enormity of it all. What we do understand is that the world rose from the ashes.

**Conflict can have unexpected positive results**. Paul and Mary have been married for 10 years and the relation is so-so. The communication is mundane and their love life is more of a ritual than a thrill. You get the picture. One day, in a moment of agitation, Mary tells Paul he’s a useless husband and Paul joins this unforeseen drama with more of the same. “Huh, you think, I’m useless. Just listen to what I have to say about you.” At least conflict gets the adrenaline going. Of course, had Paul and Mary practiced listening skills and revealed what was going on with each through “I” messages, they would have done much better. Conflict can clear the air but it’s painful and risky. Please note that Paul and Mary have to have a basic love and care for each other to weather the conflict. Without this they will split sooner or later

So it goes. The creating of conflict gets the adrenaline flowing along with the insults. In this instance, after it’s all over, they sit down with each other and talk about how each has taken the other for granted. They are forced to do something. What is important to note is that there are times when creating conflict has positive results but it needs to be a last resort. I’ll share with you how to do this later on.

**Creating conflict can be a way of handling the fear of intimacy.**One morning before starting a seminar, a student arrived and blurted out “Well, I just had my 3 month blow up with my wife last night.” On asking him to expand, he proceeded to tell me that after a blow up, they go their separate ways for a while and then they both realize that they both need each other so they come back together and make up, which is quite emotional, but gradually over the next three months they get on each other’s nerves which leads to the next blow-up.

Instead of sitting down and redefining their relationship in terms of giving each other needed space, they use conflict to do it the hard way. Closeness can be both fulfilling and suffocating at the same time. The same dynamics happen in the workplace. We are with each other a lot and the constant interplay can create tension. One day, you snap and there is an exchange of accusations with others. Note that it happens only now and again. You smooth things over but the cause of these build up in tensions isn’t being addressed.

**Creating conflict can be used to avoid blame.** People who live lives according to “Crime and Punishment” are centered in who is right and who is wrong. They hate to be wrong because being wrong triggers fear and guilt. The best form of defense is offence. “I would have finished the project on time if Finance had given me their figures earlier.” This is arguable, but everyone around knows that it is a ploy.

How else can we look at conflict? It’s dreadful and should be avoided like the plague! Most of the rest of this book will concentrate on resolving unwanted conflicts. They create stress, lead to break-ups in relationships, and can result in suicides and murders. We need two parts to deal with such conflicts. One is a strong desire to live a happy and peaceful life and the other is a set of communication skills. Having a positive attitude isn’t enough. I had a friend some years ago who had a great zest for life, and to her consternation, she got herself into all sorts of conflicts with people just because she had an uncanny knack of using poor forms of expressing herself. Her language learned in the past hadn’t undergone sufficient change to match her new found positive-ness.

Lastly, we need to recognize that there are some who thrive on creating conflict. Internally they are full of conflicts but they are largely ignored. To have a good look at themselves would be a devastating exercise. Usually such people blame everyone and anything around them for their troubles. They accuse, justify that they are always right, and display loud and aggressive forms of behavior. However, the more subtle lovers of conflict might come over as calm and unruffled. They create conflicts between others and then sit back to watch the show.

# COMMON CONFLICTS WITH SOLUTIONS

Let’s begin with the easy ones. They are fairly easy to deal with because they don’t involve resentments and power-plays and hidden agendas. Sometimes it’s hard to see the wood for the trees; the solutions are in front of us but we aren’t standing back sufficiently to see them. It’s obvious what’s going on..

*Setting ground rules*

A new team is formed in your workplace and is so anxious to get on with the task at hand that it plunges into dialogue only to result in confusion and arguing. If the team took time to discuss how they would proceed with their business, they would have created a context in which to operate. An agenda would be a tool. First of all, we brainstorm, etc. Also a simple agreement to refrain from interrupting eliminates everyone talking over each other at the same time.

Children need ground rules. Parents who don’t provide them will find themselves in endless squabbles. “You didn’t tell me I couldn’t do that!” yells eight year old Alice. “I shouldn’t have to tell you. It’s obvious” her mother screams back.

You can’t cover all bases with ground rules because there are unexpected happenings that aren’t covered. If the team or the family can arrive at ground rules that cover 80% of the issues, that’s pretty good. The 20% that aren’t covered will be easier to handle.

*Making things clear*

 “Did you call our new client in San Francisco?” asks the boss. “Was I supposed to?” replies the salesperson. “Of course, you’re supposed to. New clients must know that they are important from the git-go.” The salesperson, looking bewildered, continues, “I wish you would be clear. On the one hand you tell me to handle my work as the professional salesperson that I am, and on the other hand you want to micro-manage me.”

Question: Has the boss delegated authority to the salesperson or not? It’s not clear.

“I’ll be back early, honey.” He arrives at 10.30 p.m. “This is what you call early?” his wife asks disapprovingly. “It’s not all that late” he retorts. “Then what exactly do you consider late?”

Oh dear, it’s going to be a long night. We don’t know the health of this relationship; it might not be good but it’s not going to be helped by the intrusion of indefinite arrangements which get interpreted differently.”

*A goal is needed*

Two associates are working assiduously to promote their new product. “I think we’re doing pretty well” says one whilst the other declares, “No we’re not. We’ve been working hard for almost a year and we’re barely breaking even.”

They both might be right but the conflict that might ensue will be due to the lack of a goal. “Break even at the end of first year” might be part of a goal that they set a year ago. In this case, they are on course. The conflict is avoided. It doesn’t preclude the second associate being dissatisfied with the progress, in which case they can sit down a revise the goal for the next year.

A goal can be assumed which ought not to be assumed. A softball team joins a league that’s been around for a while. There’s an assumption that the goal is to win the league in the first year. The coach will accept nothing less so when they end up fifth in the league they are disappointed. Blame gets thrown around. But why should winning in the first year be the assumed goal?If the goal is too high and unrealistic then we are setting ourselves up for failure. I’m a football enthusiast and I follow the English Premier league. I was listening to a coach of a team that had just gained entrance to the league from the division below. He was talking about a five year period to build the team. The goal for the first year was to stay in the league and not to be relegated! Knowing the league as I do, I would say that would be a positive goal.

*Look at the process*

I learned a very important lesson during my 25 years working in various businesses and it was this; when something goes wrong, check the process before you blame the person who made a mistake. “Why did you do that?” is met with “It wasn’t my fault.” Blame and counter blame ensue. First look at the process or the regulation or the standard. What does it say? Is it clear? I used to do contract work for the U.S. government. Payments were erratically made to contractors, so a bunch of government lawyers designed a document that said that the contractor would be paid within 30 days of the bill being received by the receiving office in the government. The difficulty surrounded the term “receiving office.” Sometimes a bill was received by an office that didn’t authorize payments so it was sent, maybe 15 days later, to the person responsible. He/she pointed to the regulation justifying that 30 days began from when he/she received it. The contractor would receive payment 45 days after billing. The intention of the regulation was good but the process wasn’t precise. It caused a lot of finger pointing and blaming until the document was clarified.

*Look for compromise*

The year 2012 was one of the worst years in U.S. history for gridlock within the U.S. Congress. For reasons ranging from ideology to plain hatred, bill after bill was stymied resulting with little being done. That year Congress was given an approval rating of 9% by the American people. Compromising basic values such as honesty or fairness has given the idea of compromise as being a practice that is unacceptable. But there is a difference between ethical or moral values and items involving practicality. Differences of opinion abound and that’s why we have systems and laws to contain and manage these differences (# 4 above). However, laws and regulations cannot be made to determine every item or eventuality. We need discussion and ultimately give and take that leads to decisions. This is compromise.

The more people are involved in making decisions (as in the European Union), the harder it is to arrive at a unified decision. Without compromise nothing would happen and this would put the European Union into disarray.(Some would argue that it’s already in disarray!)

But even between two parties compromise is often needed. Jill wants to go on vacation to the beach. Donald dislikes beaches and he wants to go to the mountains. Here, compromise isn’t so bad. They could go to the beach for a week and to the mountains on the second week. They could choose Virginia Beach and then drive three or four hours inland to the Appalachian Mountains. Compromise can actually have good results. While in Virginia Beach, Donald takes time to go next door to Norfolk and, as an old navy man, finds it interesting. And Jill actually has a good time hiking the Appalachian Trail.

*Personality differences*

It’s more evident than ever before that we humans and animals are born with personality traits. Some of us are extroverts while others are introverts. Some are deliberate and cautious while others are carefree and disorganized, and so on. We are attracted to opposites because they possess qualities that we either don’t have or don’t have enough of. By the same token, we can be irritated by them. Peter, a quiet man, is constantly bothered by Philip who is a loud mouthed braggart. Also, people with similar personalities can be competitive. One can seek to outdo the other.

What is interesting, according to various studies, when we marry or develop close friends we consciously, but more often, unconsciously, choose to be with a person who has a mixture of personality traits in relation to ourselves; some the same and some different. We need the comfort of similarity and the challenge of difference.

What to do? The more we can appreciate each other for who we are, the better. It’s important to understand when you have a conflict based on personality (as opposed to behavior). For example, two very driven salespeople can create tension between them solely based on their similarities so this needs each other’s acceptance. But we enter the behavioral area if, for example, one of them uses dirty tricks to outdo the other.

*Bring the similarities or differences to the surface.*

“Bill, have you ever noticed that we are really similar in how we approach work? Sometimes I can read your mind but I have to be careful because I differed with you in the meeting this morning. Have you noticed?” What he/she is doing here is to raise awareness with Bill. Hopefully the reply from Bill will enable them to exchange thoughts that make for understanding.

 “Irene, we’re cousins but yet we seem to be so unlike each other. Sometime it’s refreshing and at other times, I want to run away from you. Isn’t that odd? When I have sharp difference, you know it isn’t personal. It’s just that we see the world differently. What do you think?”

“That’s interesting, Bess. I think you’re right. Perhaps we should sit down and see how we think of the world differently. Understanding each other might help when we have these heated arguments.”

Nature has liberally endowed us with differences. We need to remind ourselves that whilst these differences can and do cause conflicts, life would be impossible without them.

*Resolution through mediation*

Mediation has become a more common vehicle of conflict resolution than, say, 50 years ago. There used to be a philosophy which said that two parties should be able to work things out without help from the outside. Yes, and if they can, then it’s better that way because they will form an understanding that bodes good for the future. However, that same philosophy dictated that an individual should be strong enough to deal with any difficulty that comes along. This form of Stoicism has waned as life continues to be complex and, thankfully, we have learned more about ourselves. We are limited in our understanding of ourselves and others and consequently we have a hundred and one blind spots. Others have experienced and learned what we haven’t. Failure to listen to the vast world of insight outside of ourselves is the height of being pig-headed. Another way of putting it is to say that we fear what we might learn.

So, we have mediation between, for example, unions and management in the business world. More often than not this process is hard but it usually produces results, nearly always in the form of compromise. Without this process we would be witnessing more violent demonstrations. Words are better than clubs.

During my years as a management developer I mediated between different parties who had problems with each other. Most of the time it helped but there was one situation where I mediated between a president and vice-president which resulted in the vice president leaving. I was satisfied with the result because it seemed that the union between these two men wasn’t going to get any better. Going on our different ways isn’t the equivalent to failure.

Likewise, if a couple split after going through counseling (which is in part a form of mediation), it is better than if they had split up without counseling. At least they would have had more insight through the help of a third party.

Family counseling and personal therapy have lost the stigma that used to prevent people from going for help. If two or more members of a family are having serious conflicts, I would advocate counseling but with this caution; most counselors/therapists are very good but not all are suitable for you. After about three sessions you should know if you are receiving help or not, and if not, seek a different counselor. But refrain from going on Jerry Springer or the like!

By the way, don’t use a friend as a counselor. You need someone who has no personal interest in you in order to be objective. Besides, you want to keep your friends as friends, don’t you?

*Arbitration*

The MacDougal’s and the MacDonald’s are neighbors. The MacDougal’s keep a well ordered and tidy garden whereas the MacDonald’s couldn’t care less about how their garden looks. The MacDougal’s have talked with the MacDonald’s several times about fixing their garden but to no avail. At last, the MacDougal’s take the issue to the Community Council in order to resolve the problem. This means, if the law says there has to be a certain standard of tidiness, the Council will then be the arbitrator and the MacDonald’s will need to comply but the relationship between the neighbors won’t likely be good. If the law is weak or lacking, the MacDougal’s can ask the Council to mediate.

There’s one T.V. in this house. Louisa and Betty are fighting over which channel to watch. Mother is nearby, and noticing the squabble, tells them if they can’t work things out, then the T.V. will be turned off. But Louisa and Betty know that for them this would be a lose-lose scenario so they ask their mother to make the choice. Mother knows that her choice would mean that the loser will think that mother has a preference of daughter rather than program. What to do?? “I don’t know who was watching the program yesterday, so whoever it was, please allow your sister to choose today” That might work unless the girls have an argument about who was watching yesterday.

Most conflicts don’t reach arbitration but it’s good to have. In fact, some people manage to find a way to resolve a conflict so as to avoid either mediation or arbitration.

*Let the other win*

The MacDougal’s could certainly let the MacDonald’s win by simply dropping their objection. What is important is that you know whether you have it within you to let the other party win. Some of us don’t; we have to win or at least fight! In cards isn’t it important to know when to play and when to fold? Could I win this battle, but lose the war? Is it not better to choose my possible conflicts?

Most of us would say ‘yes’ because some issues aren’t worth fighting over. “Honey, I think the trashcan should be there where you are standing.” Hmm, could be misinterpreted but let’s leave that aside. As “honey” you might think the trash can is better where it is, but you decide to let the other “honey” win.

Unless……this relationship is characterized by my always giving into my partner. The desire to keep the peace can have unintended negative consequences. By always saying yes for the sake of peace and tranquility, I can easily harbor resentment. A pattern forms in which one begins to assume to be the decision-maker, because the other is always agreeable. Ultimately the other isn’t consulted. Now it’s a non-relationship.

Assuming we don’t have this kind of relationship, it’s beneficial to let the other win when you can, and particularly if you have more power or position.

“Boss I think we should change carriers when sending items abroad. I hear the A To Z Carry Service is quicker and just the same price.”

“OK Alex. Let’s try it.”

The boss wants to encourage Alex even though he has doubts about changing carrier. He’ll allow Alex to have his way and in a week’s time get him to report on the difference, if there is one.

Remember, when you let the other person win, you must also have a win.

*Be participative*

The more people are allowed to participate without fear of giving opposite opinions, the less conflict is likely to take place. Therefore having forums where everyone can speak up are important. Free speech for some people comes at a cost. (Look at what has happened in the Middle East recently. Speaking freely can be dangerous to a protester’s health). “What do you think?” is a handy question for the team leader to have at all times.

# DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

Years ago I went with my family to the Smokey Mountains. At a rest area I was drawn to a sign that said, “Ever seen a litterbug? Look here.” Of course, in my naivety I looked only to see a reflection of myself. We tend to think of difficult people as others than ourselves but a close look in the mirror will likely tell us that no matter how nice we think we are, there are folks who find us in the category of difficult. Just being “nice” can give the impression that you’re hiding something. “Why is she always so nice all the time? I don’t trust people like that.”

But there’s a difference between those of us who can be difficult on occasions and those who are difficult 24/7. Let’s think about the latter.

Always bear in mind that our external behavior is an expression of what’s going on inside of us. Bill is an office manager who is demanding, impatient, critical of just about everything, never gives praise to others and is otherwise downright nasty. In other words, John internally is very much like as he seems on the surface. We can be pretty sure that he does all he can to protect himself so that people don’t get to know him. Now and again I’d see a ‘Bill’ dragged to counseling by his wife. He would do all he could not to reveal himself, creating a shield, usually of laughter as he insinuated that it was his poor helpless wife that had the problems. He would show himself as strong and self-assured, always avoiding whatever subject where he thought he might be vulnerable.

Who you are today didn’t just happen; each of us is at a point in the journey of life based on all that is in our history. So what happened to Bill that he should arrive on today’s scene so unattractive to the world? Of course, we don’t know but we can be sure that a lot of it wasn’t good. A high percentage of abusers were themselves abused and domineering people were domineered. Life doesn’t happen in a vacuum. Am I making an excuse for Bill’s behavior? In my mind, blame and excuse don’t even enter the picture. We are dealing with what ‘is’ and that means we need to forget all forms of judgment. If you work with, or are in any way associated with a Bill you need to get out of yourself and concentrate on him. The more you dwell on how he makes you feel, the less chance you will have to deal with him successfully. My guess is you will not change him; success is in handling him so that you’re O.K. around him. If he (or, of course, she) is your boss and you like your job, you will want to handle him so that you aren’t compelled to leave.

Here are some items to consider.

*Adjust your self image*

A difficult person often looms large in our eyes. By this I mean that he or she elicits a response from us that is disproportionate to others. So-called normal people do not demand so much from us because we do not need to muster a lot of energy in dealing with them. Just to hear the name of a difficult person can be enough to make us feel resentful or even fearful. As long as this is the case we are in a weak position to handle him/her effectively.

The reality is that this person is quite weak. His/her show of strength in raising his voice, looking ferocious, or conversely, standing in silence with a look of disdain, are all cover-ups to hide the feelings of inadequacy, hurt and fear. For example, those who insist on knowing everything and being right are scared of being wrong. If they are proved to be wrong, they seek a way out by saying they were misinformed or that it was the fault of others.

See yourself as an equal and even beyond this to being a helper to the difficult person. He/she is trapped within a narrow view of how he/she should be and act. You can be a catalyst of change. Don’t be intimidated. Difficult people only appear strong when, in fact, they are vulnerable. No sane person would choose to be difficult all the time because it creates turmoil. In some respects you can see him/her as a hurt child who hasn’t got over the hurt.

*Match energy*

Assess the energy of the difficult person. Is he/she loud? In this case, you should be loud but less so. This is a kind of Pacing with the aim of Changing. If you meet a loud voice with a soft one that the difference is so great,the aggressor will likely think you are creating the difference to be manipulative. If someone is demonstrative through tone of voice and/or body language, then match this energy with a similar response, only less. To stand there motionless when someone is showing a lot of energy is a way of creating so much difference that the other will feel discounted. Always be engaged but not in a threatening manner.

*See the parts that can be complemented*

When people are difficult they keep seeing the negatives around them. They are in conflict with themselves and they aren’t good at getting people to like them. This means few want to look for the parts in this person that are worthy of recognition. For example, I knew a man who was very difficult with everyone. He had a high opinion of himself and a low opinion of everyone else. He spoke to others condescendingly which caused a lot of resentment. Such a difficult person rarely hears anything positive from others and the lack of positive reinforcement is part of the reason he ‘strokes’ himself by showing his superiority. My example was recently hired because of his technical expertise but nobody around him wanted to acknowledge this; they were more intent on opposing and resisting him. The result was, I believe that he never heard someone say to him “You’re O.K.” Difficult people are stroke-starved. In this case if a co-worker could say to him, “You have so much more technical knowledge than I, would you mind if I picked your brain on some issues when you have time?” This is likely to feed the starved ego of the difficult person. Note that we tend to stroke those whom we like and not to stroke people we don’t like.

 A ‘P.S.’ to this was that he was fired within two months based on his behavioral incompatibility with company standards of conduct.

Consider what the difficult person is saying. Separate content from conduct. Remember that someone like this lacks inner positive strength and needs your help more than judgment.

*Show your limitations*

Some people border on being abusive. All forms of abuse are destructive and need to be stopped. “Difficult” is one thing and “Abuse” is another. Confront with a strong “I” message so that the other understands how you feel and what you want or don’t want.

Discussion

·         How do you know when you have accepted conflict as part of a way of life?

·         The counterpart to Intimacy in relationships is ‘authenticity’ at work. How does fear of authenticity reveal itself?

·         Think of one skill that you use or see others using that helps to reduce conflict.

·         What behavior in others do you find difficult to deal with and why?

# PSYCHOLOGICAL GAMES

Dr. Eric Berne was a psychoanalyst situated in California in the middle of last century. He is the designer of Transactional Analysis (T.A.), a layman’s guide to analyzing communications which was extremely popular until around 1980 but continues to be used as a way of understanding human behavior.

A ‘game’ describes a form of communications in which people dialogue to produce a negative result, while, on the surface, appears to be legitimate. There is always a “con” or alternative motive in a game and the objective is to have power over the person being targeted. All games are destructive.

Berne’s Time Structuring puts Games into context. It starts with non- involvement and ends in positive relating. Follow the sequence with a game of tennis as an example.

Withdrawal. I go to play tennis by myself by hitting the ball against a practice wall. I am withdrawn from all others. I prefer to have no relationships with others.

Ritual.  Every Saturday at 10 a.m., I play tennis with you but my involvement with you is minimal. It’s good exercise but I’m not playing because I have any real relationship with you.

Pastime. You and I decide to have a game of tennis because it might be fun. I don’t yet know you and perhaps never will. After the game we have an ice cream together, talk about our kids and say, “We have to do this again some day.”

Activity. We know each other and we both love tennis. We plan a game to see who is the better player. After I beat you (of course), we shake hands and you tell me you want to have your revenge next week.

Game. I know you’re pretty good at tennis and I ask if we can play and you agree. I make it a point to tell you that I’m no match against you and I haven’t played for years. However, I beat you 6 – 0, 6 – 0, 6-1. On leaving the court, I tell you, “that was fun, but I really need to practice my serve. By the way, you had a couple of really good serves……maybe three”

Intimacy. You and I are becoming good friends and I value time with you. Doing things together provides bonding experiences which enriches the relationship. It could be dating someone or just good friendship. The game of tennis is less important than what the sport does as a means to deepening our experience of each other. Intimacy points to honesty, trust, respect, and comfort.

It’s easy to see the ascending scale from Withdrawal to Intimacy. (By the way, there is a difference of opinion as to whether Activities should be number 3 and Pastimes should be 4. What do you think?) Withdrawal is a behavior. Don’t confuse it with Introversion which is a personality trait which is probably genetic.  Games will be explained below but what is interesting to note is that Berne places Games one notch down from Intimacy. The reason is significant. Intimacy is hard to achieve because it demands an honest relationship. Intimacy can be frightening and honesty is often seen as not a way to get what you want. **Playing Games is therefore a substitute for Intimacy and in Games excitement gives way to drama.** Soap Operas (Novelas) are full of Games. In other words, we resort to Games when our insight into authentic living is lacking.

So, to summarize Games……

·         Games are used to get what we want in ways that aren’t honest

·         All Games have a ‘con’ in them.

·         The Games we play with others so well is because we play them with ourselves. The internal is externalized.

·         There are no good Games; they are all destructive.

·         All Games involve power over the other(s).

·         The payoff from a game is Win-Lose although it ultimately results in Lose-Lose.

·         Games are normally played from a feeling of resentment.

·         Games can be stopped by withholding the payoff sought by the Game-player.

The Drama Triangle is an excellent diagram to explain Games. It was designed by Stephen Karpman in 1968 after Berne’s death. The two men are linked in the Transactional Analysis organization that resulted from Berne’s work. See the Drama Triangle visually and audibly on the internet. There are a variety of good demonstrations.

Briefly, the Drama Triangle helps us to understand Games by presenting 3 positions from which to play a Game, namely, Persecutor (P), Rescuer (R) and Victim. The positions can change extremely quickly in a dialogue which causes you to say, “What, on earth is going on here?” We humans know and play from all 3 positions but one is dominant and that is the position from which we experience our greatest sense of power. (For a thorough explanation of various Games, you can read Berne’s book entitled, Games People Play. However, it is so analytical that it will make your head spin!)

*Example of (P) called, “Now I’ve Got You.”*

Donald: Maria, do you have the Johnston file?

Maria: Oh, it’s somewhere here. (She shuffles some papers) Oh, I can’t find it but give me a few minutes.

Donald: By the way, did you eat in the cafeteria today?

Maria: Yes, why do you ask?

Donald: Well, I went there to relax with a soda and cake, and lo and behold, I saw this paper lying on the table. I thought I recognized it, and, yes, it was the Johnston file (which he produces), complete with a tomato ketchup stain on the part for my signature.

Maria: I’m sorry. I remember now because I wanted to talk with Tom about it.

Donald: “Whatever!” he says with a tone of disgust.

We don’t know why Donald would play this Game. The reasons are multiple, but he gets his payoff in humiliating Maria and in reinforcing his superiority. It’s a win for him and a loss for Maria but the story hasn’t ended. Maria has many options. The best is not to play into the game. This might go like this…

Maria: I’m embarrassed, Donald, and I need to be more careful. Next time, if there is a next time, please just tell me plainly about my mistake. Will you do that for me?

Otherwise, Maria will seek to get the S.O.B. She might take a document from his desk when he’s not looking and destroy it. She will then enjoy the show when he searches frantically for it and can’t find it.

*Question:* What do you think of how Maria dealt with Donald? How might this leave their relationship?

*Example of (R) called “I was only trying to help you”*

Susan: Sylvia (who is a new assistant). How is everything going?

Sylvia: Just fine, thanks.

Susan: You know, if you make a list each day of what to do it will help.

Sylvia: Is there some items I’m not doing because I don’t make a list?

Susan: No, it’s just that I think it will help you. You, know, I like to be a friendly supervisor.

Sylvia: (Beginning to feel a bit suffocated) O.K., Susan, I appreciate what you have done for me. I would like to work according to my own style but please tell me when my work is not satisfactory.

Susan: (changing to (P)) Oh well, that’s fine but I was only trying to help you. If you don’t want it, that’s O.K. with me.

*Questions:*

What pay-off is Susan looking for?

How might Sylvia deal with Susan after this dialogue?

 Susan started with (R) and went to (P) but did she end up in the (V) position?

*Example of (V) with (P) and (R) called “Poor Me”*

Jose: (16 years old). Mom, I need the car today. (She is actually his step-mother)

Mom: No way! You can’t expect to take the car any time you want. There are other people in this house, you know.

Jose: That’s not fair. I never get to use the car. I can only use it when nobody else wants it.

Mom: You got that right! Your Dad and I need the car much more than you do. In fact, you never really need it. Do you think you can catch a cuter girl having a car?

Jose: Sometimes you are so mean! What have I done to deserve this? Hey, Dad, can you do something about this situation?

Dad: (to Mom) Maybe he can take the car and drop us off at the mall and pick us up later.

Mom: No, he forgot to pick us up last time. Remember? You are too soft on him

Dad: Jose, I know you don’t get to use the car much but today is difficult. What about tomorrow?

Jose: This sucks. Take your precious car. I’ll just do fine without it. She never did like me, and Dad, you don’t stand up to her. Do you ever think where that leaves me?

*Questions:*

·         Is Jose powerful? What kind of power does (V) have?

·         How could either Jose’s Mom or Dad have avoided playing into Jose’s Game?

·         What kind of relationships do you think already existed before this incident that made it easy for all of them to act as they did? What would have made for relationships that would have avoided this dialogue?

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