Chapter 4

Responding to Conflict

It's important to recognize that communication is not simply saying what's on one's mind.  Communication (and, by extension, conflict) isn't something we do *to* the other person, but something we do *with* one another (like teamwork of like a dance).

In addition, this chapter introduces you to one of the most important tools in conflict management - the S-TLC system.  The S-TLC system teaches us to stop, think, listen, and then communicate with the other person.   By following these four steps, we can often resolve interpersonal conflicts through basic communication skills.

"Stop" means not reacting blindly and responding habitually to the other person.  When we take time out, we can then consider our options and try to exercise them rationally.  After we have stopped, we need to think, or analyze the situation to try to know what is really happening within it and the range of possibilities it presents.  Rather than taking the conflict personally, we need to think about the consequences of doing nothing or about changing the other person, the situation, or ourselves.  We need to consider the conflicting parties' instrumental, identity, relational, and process goals.

After stopping and thinking, it is important to listen to the other person.  Listening to the other does not mean we have to agree with the other.  It simply means that we consider the others opinion important, and that we try to hear and understand it before we make a point or saying what's on our mind.  Although our tendency is to become defensive when we hear a critical remark, listening without immediately defending oneself can make the difference between a productive and destructive conflict.

To help students create assertive messages for expressing their feelings, wants, and needs during the fourth step of the confrontation process, we encourage them to use personalized communication - language using I-statements (i.e., I think, I feel) versus "you" or depersonalized statements (i.e., "you always", "most people think").  These I-statements consist of four parts:

\*I feel (feeling statement)

\*when I (problematic behavior statement)

\*because I (consequences statement)

\*I'd like (goals statement)

**Learning Objectives**

At the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

● Briefly explain the S-TLC system for dealing with conflict situations

● Define assertiveness and explain its role in the confrontation process.

● List the six steps in constructive confrontation

● Correctly create a four part I-statement

● Explain what it means to take a creative approach to resolving conflicts

● Apply at least two different creative methods to the analysis of a particular conflict

you are experiencing.

**Chapter Outline**

**[Objective #1: Briefly explain the S-TLC system for dealing with conflict situations]**

I. The S-TLC System (Stop-Think-Listen-Communicate)

A. Stopping: Taking Time Out

1. Exit temporarily to calm yourself. It is helpful to let the other person know that you are not abandoning the situation and will return.

2. Get a glass of water or some other beverage and take sips of the beverage before you respond to the other person.

3. Count backward from 100.

4. Change the problematic topic for a while to allow time for the air to clear.

B. Thinking about the Conflict: Analyzing Conflict Situations

1. Outcomes to consider

a. Do nothing

b. Change the other person

c. Change the situation

d. Change oneself

2. Thinking about Your Goals

a. Instrumental goals are those that require the opponent to “remove a specific obstacle blocking completion of a task”

b. Relational goals involve attempts to gain power and to establish trust as the relationship between those in the conflict is established

c. Identity goals concern how those in the conflict situation view each other

d. Process goals concern alternative ways to manage communication and conflict

C. Listening in Conflict Situations

1. Avoid defensiveness by clarifying what the other intends

2. Listening skills

a. Shift all attention to the speaker

b. Look at the speaker

c. Try to understand the other person’s feelings rather than focusing on arguing with the other person

**[Objective #2: Define assertiveness and explain its role in the confrontation process.]**

D. Communicating in Conflict Situations: Asserting Yourself

1. Your basic communication rights, which derive from those rights, concerns, or interests common to all communicators

a. be listened to and taken seriously,

b. say no, refuse requests, and turn down invitations without feeling guilty or being accused of selfishness,

c. be treated as an adult with respect and consideration,

d. expect that others will not talk to you in a condescending way,

e. not feel what others want you to feel, to not see the world as they would have you perceive it, and to not adopt their values as your own,

f. your own feelings and opinions as long as you express them in a way that doesn’t violate the rights of others,

g. have and express your interests, needs, and concerns as long as you do so in a responsible manner,

h. change your opinions, feelings, needs, and behaviors,

i. meet other people and talk to them,

j. privacy—to keep confidential or personal matters to yourself,

k. have others leave you alone if you wish,

l. ask others to listen to your ideas,

m. ask for help or information from experts and professionals, especially when you are paying for it,

n. not assert yourself, confront someone, or resolve a conflict, and

o. ask others to change their behavior when it continues to violate your rights.

**[Objective #3: List the six steps in constructive confrontation]**

2. The Confrontation Process: Six Steps to Successful Interpersonal Conflict Resolution

a. Preparation: Identify your problem/needs/issues.

b. Tell the person “We need to talk.”

c. Interpersonal confrontation: Talk to the other person about your problem.

d. Consider your partner’s point of view: Listen, empathize, and respond with understanding.

e. Resolve the problem: Make a mutually satisfying agreement.

f. Follow up on the solution: Set a time limit for reevaluation.

**[Objective #4 Correctly create a four part I-statement]**

3. Using I-Statements: Components of I-Statements

a. Feelings statement: A description of your feelings (e.g., feeling angry, neglected, offended, surprised, depressed, or unhappy)

b. Problematic behavior statement: A description of the offensive, upsetting, incorrect, selfish, problem-producing behavior

c. Consequences statement: A description of the consequences the problematic behavior has for you or others (e.g., wastes your time, you have to expend the effort, you could lose friends, or your parents may get angry). The statement contains the word because.

d. Goal statement: A description of what you want specifically (e.g., one may want the other to appear on time in the future or call if delayed). It states what you want, would like, prefer, hope for, expect, or ask (avoid using words like demand, require, and or else).

4. Advantages of Using I-Statements

a. Provides necessary information because the other person doesn’t need to “read your mind” to determine what you are thinking, feeling, and wanting.

b. Reveals your honesty by telling others what is on your mind, what you prefer, or what is upsetting you.

c. Reduces defensiveness in others because you are not assigning blame or blurting out accusations.

5. Challenges Associated with I-Statements

a. “I get too mad to be nice.”

b. “It doesn’t sound right or normal for me to talk that way.”

**[Objective #5 : Explain what it means to take a creative approach to resolving conflicts]**

II. Creativity as it relates to conflict

A. Creativity is a process of making sense of some problem in a new way. Most authors identify four stages of the creative process:

1. The preparation stage includes all your previous learning as well as any

information you gather to address the problem at hand.

2. The incubation stage is a period of thinking about the problem—giving it time to take shape and form.

3. The illumination stage occurs when a particular idea finally appears in response to the problem.

4. The verification stage allows you to test whether the creative response you have come upon will truly work.

B. Traits of Creative People

1. Not a lot of innate differences

2. Courage allows us to take the risk of failing. We don’t necessarily expect to get the right answer the first time.

3. Expressiveness leads us to be ourselves and not fear what others may think of us.

4. Humor permits us to put incongruous ideas together and see new relationships between them.

5. Intuition involves having faith in what you think is a good idea and how you feel about your ideas. Intuition is a part of our personalities—some of us listen to our “inner voices” more than other people do.

C. Why is Creativity Important?

1. You are more likely to develop mutually satisfying outcomes in conflict situations when you and the other party approach your conflicts creatively.

2. The use of creative methods in problem solving is also associated with higher levels of health: People who have more chances to utilize creative problem solving in their jobs are physically younger than their years would suggest

D. Misassumptions preventing creativity

1. Being success orientated, due to a fear of failure;

2. Peer pressure and conformity being valued

3. There are sanctions against critical exploration—too much curiosity is felt to be disruptive and is discouraged

4. There is an overemphasis on sex roles—some attitudes and behaviors are reserved for one sex only

5. The equation of divergent behavior with “abnormality” in its popular sense—a throwback to the genius/madness equation;

6. The work/play dichotomy—work is a burden; play is an end in itself, unrelated to work

E. Barriers to creativity as trained Incapacities

1. task oriented/goal centeredness

2. redefinition

3. critical thinking

4. using standards

**[Objective #6: Apply at least two different creative methods to the analysis of a**

**particular conflict you are experiencing.]**

F. Creativity as Thinking Differently

1. In vertical thinking, we move through a series of steps, making sure that one is completed before the next one is started

2. Lateral thinking is concerned with restructuring patterns (insights) and provoking new ones (creativity)

3. Reversal, or working backwards from the goal or end result. What would it take to get there?

4. Entry vs. Attention point—entry point is the part of the problem or situation that

is first examined, the attention point is the part of the problem that is then focused on

5. Six Hats approach—requires one to ask questions from different vantage points. In so doing, it pulls together a variety of ways to more creatively manage conflicts in one’s life.

G. Creativity as Seeing Differently

1. Mind-mapping uses ideas to generate others. By looking at them together and linking them, you can often think of a better way to deal with a problem than you would have otherwise. There is always a central image or graphic representation of a problem, which is always placed in the center (of the page).

2. Visual Journaling

a. Visual journaling is a way of making sense of things without using large amounts of text.

b. Generally, it puts incongruent images together and looks for patterns and possibilities among them.

c. Just as a journal is a written record of what we experience, a visual journal is an image-filled response to events that are happening in your life