Chapter Seven

Managing Face

Chapter Summary

Some other cultures more openly discuss face and face-saving techniques than we do here in the United States. However, the concept is no less important for Americans. One of the primary reasons conflicts escalate or get out of hand is due to face threats. The truth is that people everywhere are motivated to create and maintain favorable impressions of themselves. Once engaged in conversation with another, an effective conflict manager can employ general ways and specific techniques to support another’s face in conflict situations. In a conflict situation in which we lose face, we can employ a repair sequence to regain it.

Learning Objectives

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

● Explain the role of face and face saving in conflict.

● Explain the difference between positive face and autonomous face.

● Identify at least three preventative strategies you can use to avoid threatening the other person’s face in a conflict situation.

● List three general ways and three specific techniques you can use to support another’s face during interaction in a conflict situation.

● Compare and contrast three conflict situations using the repair sequence: one where you offer an account, one where you make a concession, and another where you offer an apology.

**Chapter Outline**

**[Objective #1: Explain the role of face and face saving in conflict.]**

I. A fundamental assumption that underlies our approach to interpersonal conflict is that people are motivated to create and maintain impressions of themselves

II. Understanding the Demands of Face

A. Being able to create and sustain an identity for oneself, as well as helping the other person to create and maintain an identity for himself or herself, is a fundamental component of communication competence

B. When people lose face, they may experience shame (self-focused) or guilt (behavior focused)

C. When people lose face they may also seek retaliation.

**[Objective #2: Explain the difference between positive face and autonomous face.]**

III. Two Types Of Face: Positive And Autonomous Face

A. Positive face means that people want others important to them to like and respect them. A person’s positive face is managed when it is supported by others who appear to value what the person values, express admiration for the person, or show acceptance of the person as a competent individual.

B. Autonomous face is that part of us that longs for some independence, privacy, recognition for our contributions, or time alone. Autonomous face is managed when people recognize, encourage, support, and approve the activity.

**[Objective #3: Identify at least three preventative strategies you can use to avoid threatening the other person’s face in a conflict situation.]**

IV. Face management: Face management is a process by which people establish and maintain their impressions of themselves to others, as well as supporting or denying the impressions that others are making

A. Preventive face management—tactics

1. See the situation from the other’s perspective—how the issue affects the other and the other’s self-image

2. Accept what the other person says at face value (no pun intended).

3. Accept the other person’s right to change his or her mind.

4. Avoid face-threatening topics or employ communication practices that minimize threats to face.

5. Politeness and disclaimers

a. Hedging: indicating uncertainty and receptivity to suggestions. “

b. Cognitive disclaimer: asserting that the behavior is reasonable and under control, despite appearances.

c. Credentialing: indicating you have good reasons and appropriate qualifications for the statement you intend to make.

d. Sin license: indicating that this is an appropriate occasion to violate the rule and one should not take the violation as a character defect.

e. Appeal for suspended judgment: asking the other to withhold judgment for a possibly offensive action until it is explained.

**[Objective #4: List three general ways and three specific techniques you can use to support another’s face during interaction in a conflict situation.]**

B. Supportive Face management helps reinforce the way the other is presenting himself or herself

1. Do I try to make the other feel important?

2. Do I try to make the other look good to other people?

3. Do I try to make the other think that they are winning?

4. Do I try to make the other feel secure?

5. Do I try to make the other believe that I am honest and trustworthy?

C. Corrective Face management is statements meant to ameliorate the effect of face threatening messages

1. People overestimate their own level of cooperation and underestimate the other person’s level of cooperation.

2. Scanning, or checking out the perceptions being created. We can question the other to confirm that we are “on the same page.”

3. Explaining is used when we perceive that the other has not taken our message in the way we meant it.

**[Objective #5: Compare and contrast three conflict situations using the repair sequence: one where you offer an account, one where you make a concession, and another where you offer an apology.]**

D. Repair Sequence

1. Offending situation: the other’s behavior is seen as intentionally hurtful, whether or not that person did intend it

2. Reproach: request for an explanation of an offense from the one offended

3. Remedy:

a. account (excuse or justification)

b. concessions admit the offender’s guilt and offer restitution

c. apologies are admissions of blameworthiness and regret on the part of the offender supplied by an offender

4. Acknowledgment: evaluation of the account supplied by the one offended

V. Responding to Others. The results indicated, not surprisingly, that apologies and offering some corrective action were seen as the most appropriate and effective ways to restore one’s image in this kind of circumstance

VI. Conflict and Impression Management in Cyberspace

A. In their study of online conflict, Smith, McLaughlin, and Osborne found that few people replied to reproaches and seldom completed the traditional repair sequence

B. Negative conflict behaviors were more frequent in CMC than FTF

C. Higher levels of avoidance and lower levels of forcing in computer-mediated negotiation

D. The attractiveness of the friends who leave messages on person’s wall in *Facebook* affects impressions of that person’s attractiveness

E. The comments made by others about a person on his or her profile are more influential in creating impressions than statements one makes about oneself

F. Facebook is used more by socially adept people to strengthen relationships than by socially anxious people to create them.