**Chapter Nine**

**Managing Conflict Through Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is one of the most important steps in effective conflict management. We can

properly analyze a serious conflict involving relational transgressions, choose the right strategy, say all the right words, and come to an agreement without actually letting go of hurt associated with the conflict. If we cannot forgive the hurt and perhaps reconcile with the other person, and if we cannot transform the meaning of the event we have experienced, we tend to repeat our mistakes in ways that often become increasingly more destructive.

Critical to our understanding of both forgiveness and reconciliation is the understanding that they are not one-time events. Often, we return to an event cognitively and emotionally, but we deal with different parts of it. Like the ability to analyze conflicts and the ability to effectively communicate feelings and desires, the effective use of forgiveness and reconciliation strategies

to cope with difficult conflicts characterizes the competent conflict manager. Through the processes of forgiveness and reconciliation, we can forge new relationships or repair former ones and move forward by letting go of the past. We must understand the kind of response

necessitated by various transgressions and develop a repertoire of responses designed to remediate problematic situations. Of all the skills in conflict, we must learn how to put a conflict into perspective and move forward, otherwise our relationships become unstable; without forgiveness, our relationships eventually come to an end.

**Learning Objectives**

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

 Distinguish relational transgressions from other types of problematic situations.

 Explain the advantages of forgiveness and reconciliation following relational transgressions.

 Distinguish forgiveness from forgetting and reconciliation.

 Explain which relational transgressions are hardest to forgive.

 Describe the steps one must take to forgive.

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**Chapter Outline**

**[Objective 1. Distinguish relational transgressions from other types of problematic situations.]**

I. Relational Transgressions

A. Transgressions concern core relational rules define our expectations about the way we should behave toward others as well as the way they should behave toward us

**[Objective 2. Explain which relational transgressions are hardest to forgive.]**

B. We assume a truth bias toward friends and lovers.

C. Deception is generally classified as deliberately altering information to change a person’s perceptions about an issue—transgression

D. We assume a helping orientation toward friends and lovers, transgression violates

E. Violations leave emotional residues

II. Why Study Forgiveness and Reconciliation?

Cyclical nature of conflict means that without them, we will continue to repeat the same conflicts.

**[Objective 3. Distinguish forgiveness from forgetting and reconciliation.]**

III. Defining Forgiveness and Reconciliation

A. Forgiveness is a cognitive process that consists of letting go of feelings of revenge and desires to retaliate.

B. Forgives aids in transforming the meaning of the event, or changing the way we view the event in light of other events in our lives

C. Unforgiveness is a cognitive process in which one doesn’t let go of feeling of revenge and maintains a desire to retaliate.

D. Revenge is a behavior based on the notion of “an eye for an eye.”

E. Reconciliation is a behavioral process in which we take actions to restore a relationship or create a new one following forgiveness. It is a process distinct from forgiveness.

**[Objective 4. Explain the advantages of forgiveness and reconciliation following relational transgressions.]**

IV. Advantages Of Forgiveness

A. Forgiveness Benefits Our Mental Health

1. Raise in self-esteem

2. Generally lowers depression

B. Forgiveness Benefits Our Physical Health

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1. | Unforgiveness creates stress; long-term effects of stress are harsh. |
| 2. | Higher levels of pain for trait unforgiveness |
| 3. | Trait-like forgiveness or unforgiveness has some widely demonstrated links to |
|  | cardiovascular health |
| C. | Wh | y Don’t People Forgive. |
|  | 1. | Other hasn’t admitted wrongdoing |
|  | 2. | Apology insincere |
|  | 3. | Want to be a victim |
|  | 4. | Empathy  higher levels of forgiveness |
|  | 5. | Age—younger = harder |
|  | 5. | Don’t know how, no support |

**[Objective 5. Describe the steps one must take to forgive.]**

V, Working through Forgiveness

A. Learning to Forgive—can be taught

B. Levels of Forgiveness

1. Forgiveness for own sake

2. Forgiveness because of empathy for the other, understanding that the other needs forgiveness

3. Forgiveness for the sake of the relationship

4. Forgiveness because the person begins to see the offender as “like me.”

5. Forgiveness because the victim is able to say, “I am like the offender

VI. Working Through Reconciliation

A. Levels of Reconciliation

1. No reconciliation

2. Possible reconciliation

3. Conditional reconciliation

4. Processual reconciliation

5. Restoration

B. Levels of Reconciliation

1. The Account and the Apology

2. Acceptance of Account and Apology or its Absence

3. Forgiveness May or May Not Be Communicated

4. Transforming the Relationship, if Desired

5. Actions Confirm Forgiveness and Reconciliation

C. Steps toward forgiveness and reconciliation

1. Step One: The Account and the Apology Step Two: Acceptance of Account and Apology or Its Absence

3. Step Three: Forgiveness May or May Not Be Communicated

4. Step Four: Transforming the Relationship, if Desired

5. Step Five: Actions Confirm Forgiveness and Reconciliation

VII. Moving Beyond Victimization

VIII.Seeking Forgiveness

A. The offender experiences feelings of shame and guilt for the offense

B. The offender makes a decision to seek forgiveness

C. The offender expresses remorse and repentance

D. The final stage of seeking forgiveness is waiting