

From Conflict to Connection

How to Navigate Difficult Conversations in the Workplace

SCORE Los Angeles



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My Life's Passion:

Helping individuals understand and work well across differences



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CULTURAL DIFFERENCES



Agenda

- Activity: My Conflict Resolution Style
- Understanding the Different Conflict Resolution Styles
- Traits of an Effective Facilitator
- Questions to Ask to Help Individuals Process the Situation
- How to Be an Effective Listener
- How to Respond When Conflict Comes Your Way
- Illustrative Examples
- Conclusion | Key Takeaways | Q&A



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Eliminate Distractions



LET'S
DO
THIS



How I Approach Conflict

Introductory Activity

In a **Conflict Situation** I Tend to:

1. Remove myself from the situation.
2. Give in to maintain the relationship.
3. Find a workable solution, even though it may not be the best solution.
4. Keep defending my position until my goal is achieved.
5. Keep working until both of us get what we want.

1. Remove myself from the situation

Avoider

- Would rather not address the conflict at all.
- More comfortable ignoring or delaying issues; even repressing their own feelings and needs.
- Avoidance is a **lose-lose style** because the conflict goes unaddressed.
- In the end, teamwork and productivity are negatively affected.

Avoidance Example

Two staff members at one of the food shelves disagree on how to manage the growing number of clients needing assistance.

One believes in stricter guidelines to prioritize families with children, while the other wants to maintain a first-come, first-served policy.

Instead of discussing their concerns, they avoid the conversation altogether and continue working as usual.

The Result of **Avoidance**



- Because the conflict is ignored, resentment can build between parties.
- They begin avoiding collaboration, which slows down productivity and harms team cohesion.
- **Over time, the unaddressed issue can lead to misunderstandings in future projects—reflecting the lose-lose nature of avoidance, where both parties and the team suffer.**

2. Give in to maintain the relationship

Accommodator

- More comfortable giving in to the other person's needs, sacrificing their own goals.
- Considered a ***lose-win style***.
- Appears cooperative but can be detrimental in the long run because it does not produce a win for all parties.



Accommodation Example



During a board meeting, members discuss how to distribute additional funding.

One board member, Mary, suggests using it to expand services at *Lewis House*, while Peter proposes investing in job-readiness programs for clients at the resource centers.

Although Mary strongly believes in prioritizing domestic violence survivors, she decides to step back and agrees to fund the job-readiness program to avoid tension.

The Result of **Accommodation**



- In the end, Mary decided to **step back and agree to Peter's proposal**, despite her concerns.
- **Accommodators value team harmony** and for them, team cohesion is more important.
- While this is a "**lose-win**" **outcome** for Mary, it maintains positive team dynamics and fosters goodwill—**something Mary values more than winning the argument.**

3. Find a workable solution, even though it may not be the best solution

Compromiser

- The goal is to find a quick solution.
- You know you can't get all, but at least, you win some.
- Considered a ***semi-win/semi-lose style***.
- Go-to approach for situations “*when all else fails.*”

Compromising Example

Two program directors—one overseeing school success programs and another managing the food shelves—disagree on how to use a new community partnership grant.

The school success director wants to expand tutoring services, while the food shelf director argues for more funding to purchase fresh produce for families.

Instead of prolonging the debate, they agree to split the funding evenly, ensuring both programs receive support.

The Result of **Compromising**



- Instead of endlessly debating, the two program directors agree to **split the grant money 50/50**.
- This allows the **school success director** to expand some of the tutoring services, while the **food shelf director** can allocate some funds to the purchasing of fresh produce.
- While neither gets everything they wanted, **both directors gain something** they can apply toward their goal.

4. Keep defending their position until the goal is achieved

Competitor

- Tries to win the argument at all costs – usually at the expense of the other person.
- Considered a ***win-lose style*** – one person gets what they want while the other loses.
- Tends to produce short-term victories.
- In the end, it damages productivity because it hurts people’s relationships.

Competition Example

During a team meeting, an Advocate at the *Lewis House* and a Case Manager from a resource center argue about how to best support a survivor of domestic violence.

The Advocate insists that housing stability is the priority, while the Case Manager argues that employment assistance is more urgent.

The Advocate dominates the conversation, dismissing the Case Manager's viewpoint and keeps pushing forward with the housing-first increased support.

The Result of **Competition**

- Because the Advocate is a **competitor**, they dominate the conversation, dismissing the Case Manager's points without fully listening to the arguments.
- By **winning the argument at all costs**, the Advocate does make housing stability a priority. But the Case Manager now feels unheard and frustrated.
- **Long-term Impact?** While there are some gains toward housing stability, the Case Manager's motivation and trust are damaged.
- Over time, this ends up being a **win-lose approach**

5. Keep working until both parties get what they want.

Cooperator

- They try to find a solution that meets everyone's needs.
- This is a true ***win-win style***.
- The issues are fully explored, everyone states their needs, and people work together to find creative solutions in which **everyone benefits**.

Cooperation Example

A crisis response Volunteer and a Case Manager disagree on how to handle a situation where a family experiencing homelessness needs immediate assistance, but the shelters are at full capacity.

The Volunteer believes in directing them to a nearby faith-based shelter, while the Case Manager suggests reaching out to a local motel for short-term housing.

The team leader organizes a quick strategy session with both individuals. Together, they weigh the pros and cons and agree on a hybrid approach—placing the family in a motel for a few nights while working to secure a long-term solution.

The Result of Cooperation

- As a **cooperator**, the team leader found a way for both parties to share their concerns and needs.
- Only after **the issues were explored thoroughly** that they agreed to a solution.
- In the end, both individuals felt heard, and the solution addressed their key needs.
- This **win-win style** ensures productivity remains on track while fostering stronger collaboration and trust between individuals and departments.

Please Note

Depending on the situation, individuals can adopt different conflict resolution styles even if they have a preferred approach.

Context is Key

- A **compromising style** might be better when a **QUICK RESOLUTION** is necessary.
- In situations where one party has more authority, adopting an **accommodating** style might foster goodwill or de-escalate tension.
- If preserving the relationship is the primary goal, you might prioritize an **accommodating or avoiding style** over competition.



Traits of an Effective Facilitator

1) Are Self-Aware



- They know how they approach conflict.
- They understand what values and attitudes they bring to the situation.
- They recognize how their own cultural orientation impacts how they handle conflict.

2) Have Good Observational Skills



- They can see the individual's current state of mind.
- They recognize what is not being said.
- **They understand the importance of paying attention to the nonverbal behavior.**

3) Distinguish Between **Intent** and **Impact**



- Yes, they may have been offended.
- But they always consider: Was that the speaker's intent?
- **They understand that many individuals are not aware their comments are offensive.**

4) Listen and Respond Compassionately



- Even when someone has an adversarial or defensive posture.
- **They always respond in a way that builds community and invites a dialogue.**

5) Aim to Learn What Individuals Have Gone Through



- How did they get to their current situation?
- How does their past affect who they are today?
- What have they experienced?
- **They understand they are not seeing the entire video. They only see snippets and there is a lot that is missing.**

6) Stay in the Situation



They have the emotional intelligence to stay in the situation even if they are scared, angry, or hurt.

Which of These 6 Key Facilitation Traits Do You Need to Strengthen?"

1. Being self-aware.
2. Having good observational skills.
3. Distinguishing between **intent** and **impact**.
4. Responding with compassion.
5. Learning what individuals have gone through.
6. Staying in the situation even if I am angry or hurt.



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Helping Individuals Process the Situation



Observational Questions

- *What I heard you say was....*

Questions about
what you observed

- *What I just heard is that.....*

Reflective Questions



Questions to help individuals reflect/share their situation

- *What hurt you about what happened?*
- *How did it affect you when it happened?*
- *How did it feel?*
- *How does it affect you now? In the workplace? In your relationship?*

CTA Questions



Questions about what needs to happen for the situation to be resolved

- If you could say something to **Mary**, what would you say?
- If you could tell **Mary** what you need to be able to **move forward with this project**, what would you say?

***Listening is the most useful tool in
interpersonal and intercultural conflict
resolution.***

Stella Ting-Toomey and Tenzin Dorjee
Institute of Intercultural Communication



Listen with your ears

To hear the words, the tone, and the pitch



Listen with your mind

To understand
To analyze, and
To broaden your perspective



Listen with your eyes

To see the facial expression
To read the body language, and
To look at the “window of the soul”



Listen with your heart

To feel the emotions
To empathize
To respond accurately

To Be an Effective
Listener, you Need
to *Listen with Ting*



How to Respond Calmly When Conflict Comes Your Way

Strategies for an Effective Resolution

1)






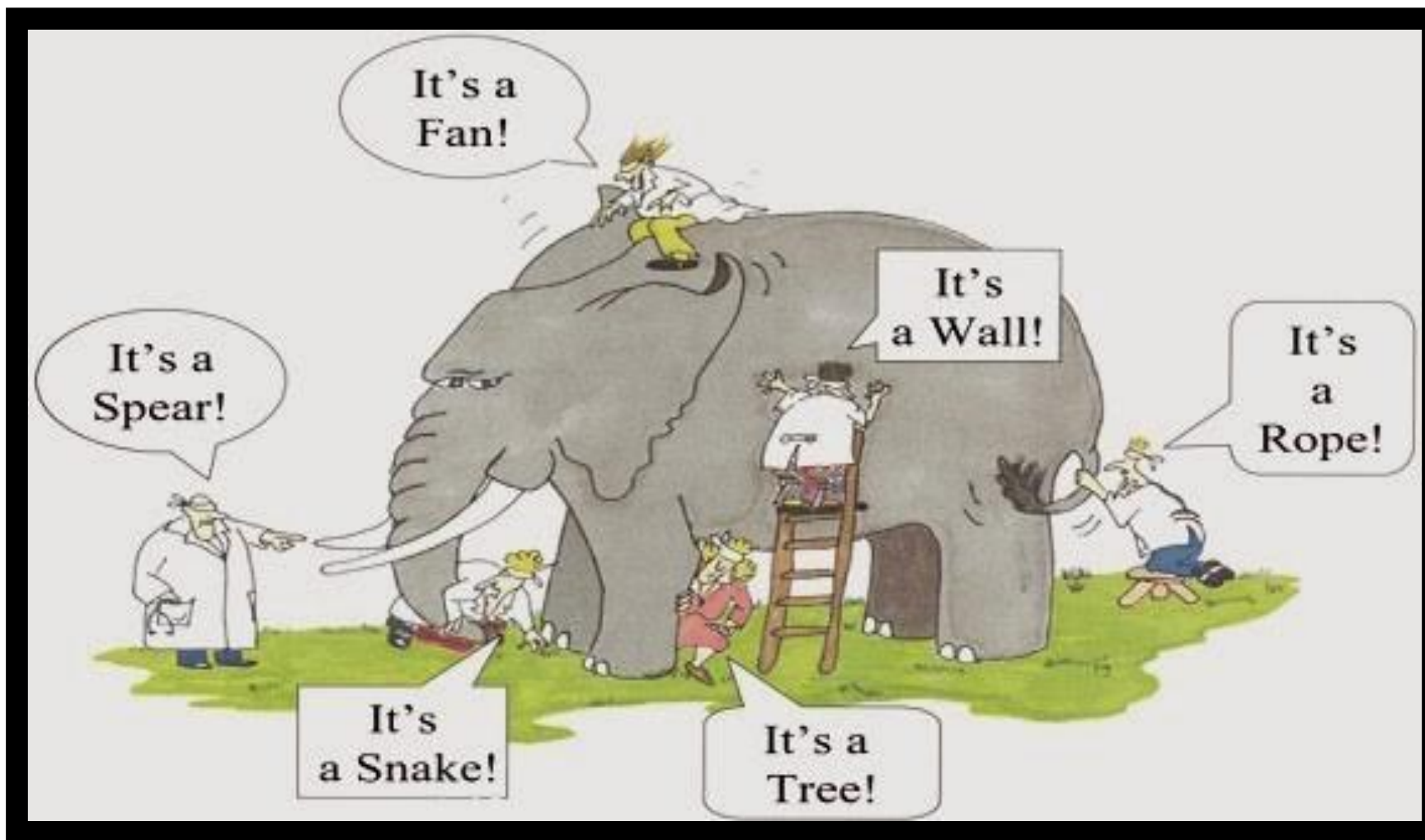
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2)
Remind Yourself:
This is Not About Me





3)
Understand You May Be
Experiencing the “Last-
Drop-In-The-Bucket
Syndrome”



4) Think of the “*Blind Men and the Elephant*” Parable



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5)
Get Out of **Debate**
Mode And Get Ready
to **Dialogue**



6) Follow the Principles of Facilitating Difficult Conversations





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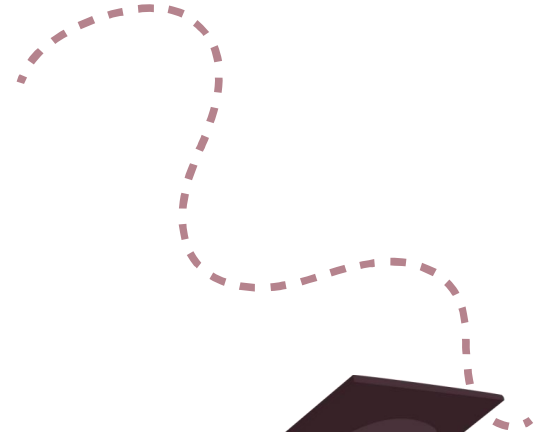
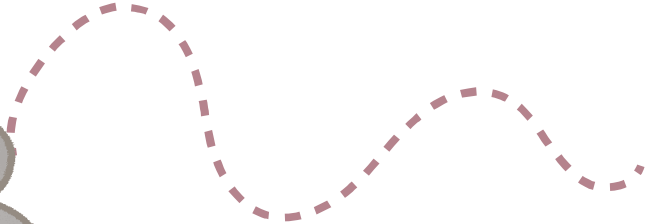
7) Take Steps to Address the Inequities That Still Exist – In Your Organizations and Beyond



Pathway to Facilitating a Difficult Conversation



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Pathway to Facilitating a Difficult Conversation



Client, Colleague, Customer, etc.



Angry
Hurt
Upset

Pathway to Facilitating a Difficult Conversation



Center Yourself

- Take a deep breath
- Not about me
- I don't know the whole story
- Get ready to engage in a dialogue and not a debate
- Listen with TING

Pathway to Facilitating a Difficult Conversation



**Spend Time Understanding
the Situation – from their perspective**



3 Types of Questions
Observational
Reflective
CTA

Pathway to Facilitating a Difficult Conversation



3 Rs

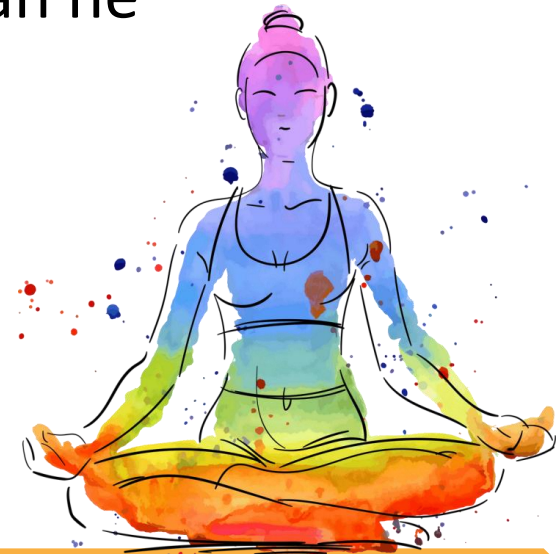
- **Resolution**
- **Referral**
- **Resources**

Example

Upset Client

YOU ARE A RACIST!!!!

(after learning he won't receive the loan he expects).



Example

I can see you are _____ (upset, angry, hurt...)

First of all, I am sorry for that. My intent was not to _____ (upset, anger, hurt) you.

*I would like to **learn more** about your situation to see if I am able to come up with a viable solution for you.*

*For that to happen I need to **gather some additional information** from you.*

*Can you **provide me with additional details** about your situation?*



Example



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This is the fourth financial institution I have contacted this week to apply for a loan and I keep getting denied.

My wife is seven months pregnant, and my little boy is turning three next week.

I really don't want to celebrate his birthday as a homeless family.

My wife has just been diagnosed with gestational diabetes.

This stress is too much for her.....

Example



What I heard you say is that _____.

Did I leave anything out?

Or Is this accurate?

Keep asking questions. This is an opportunity for you to gain a deeper understanding of what the individual has had to face. Everyone has a story.

Example



This is correct!

Or

Not quite.....



***CTA Questions -- After You
Ascertained the Situation***

*What would you like to see
happen?*

What do you need?

Example



I am in need of some financial assistance so I can make my mortgage payments.

Example

Now That You Fully Understand the Situation

Resolution Referral Resources

If a loan is a possibility, great!

If a loan is NOT a possibility:

- Is there a different type of financial assistance he would qualify for?
- Are there any community resources, programs, or partnerships you could refer him to?
- Is there anything else you can think of to provide some hope and restore his dignity?

Always aim for providing hope and restoring dignity.



Connect with Me



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A vertical business card for Luiza Dreasher. The top half has a blue background with a white wave-like border. The bottom half is white with a blue header. The card contains contact information for Luiza Dreasher, President and CEO of Mastering Cultural Differences. It lists the website, email, LinkedIn profile, YouTube channel, a 30-minute video, and a newsletter link.


Luiza Dreasher
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-  30-min
-  www.masteringculturaldifferences.com/dei-plus-newsletter





Biggest Takeaway

Q/A