



GERRI KING Ph.D.
HUMAN DYNAMICS ASSOCIATES, INC.

Effective Communication & Conflict Resolution

respectful
& constructive
conversations

© Gerri King, Ph.D.

Gerri King, Ph.D. - social psychologist and internationally recognized speaker and seminar presenter - consults to corporate, manufacturing, educational, health care, non-profit, and governmental clients throughout the US and abroad. Gerri also keynotes at national conferences throughout the year.

Dr. King presents on a wide range of topics including team building, resolving conflicts, effective communication, motivating employees, the dynamics of change, reducing stress, why people avoid success,

and the changing role of leadership. She facilitates strategic planning, mergers and acquisitions, staff and administrative retreats, collaborative efforts, and mission & vision development.

Gerri is the author of "**The Duh! Book of Management & Supervision: Dispelling Common Leadership Myths**" and the founding partner and President of the 30 year old Human Dynamics Associates in Concord NH. www.gerricking.com.

Conflict Management

The Dynamics of Conflict

Conflict can be:

- Scary, due to issues of abandonment, danger and fear of the unknown.
- Threatening for both sides with regard to self-perception and identity.
- Gender, peer and sub-culturally specific in terms of process and style.
- Productive rather than destructive.
- Very useful for encouraging growth in individuals and groups.
- Very complex.



“You kidding? Of course we can work it out.”

Myths Associated With Negotiations:

- There just shouldn't be any conflicts!
- Conflict is inherently negative.
- You can force people to change their values — or at least to adopt yours!
- Compromise is win/win or lose/lose.
- Resolution styles are usually compatible.
- People who are close to each other know what each other is experiencing.
- We know our own body language intimately.
- It's essential that those in charge present a united front!
- What is being discussed is always the predominant issue.
- Little things are too petty to spend time addressing.
- We have far too much to do to spend the time negotiating every issue and disagreement that arises.

Conflicts can move very quickly from the issue at hand to the way it is being handled. We then have conflict about the conflict, which is much more apt to linger in our minds, hearts and memories as it produces emotional stress. Learning increased listening and responding skills can reduce miscommunication.

Prior to potential conflicts, it is extremely helpful to share the styles of communicating and resolving issues that we use when we're under stress.

"When I'm stressed, I don't hear nuttin, I don't see nuttin. I'm outta here!"



"I gotta talk it out."

When we're reminded how other people respond, we're less likely to:

- take responses personally,
- project what *we* would be thinking if *we* used that style,
- hang on to the conflict in a way that affects future interaction.

Exercise

Finding Your Conflict Management Style

Select the response you would be more likely to use and circle the corresponding letter (A or B).

- A** There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving the problem.

B Rather than negotiate the things on which we disagree, I try to stress those things upon which we both agree.
- A** I try to find a compromise solution.

B I attempt to deal with the other person's concern.
- A** I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.

B I might try to soothe the other person's feelings and preserve our association.
- A** I try to find a solution that meets both/all our needs.

B I sometimes sacrifice my own wishes for the wishes of the other person.
- A** I consistently seek the other's help in working out a solution.

B I try to do what is necessary to avoid tension.
- A** I try to avoid creating unpleasantness for myself.

B I try to win my position whenever possible.
- A** I try to postpone the issue until I have had time to think it over.

B I give up some points in exchange for others.
- A** I am uncomfortable giving up my goals.

B I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.

please go on to next page

Finding Your Conflict Management Style continued

- 9** **A** I feel that differences are not usually worth worrying about.
 B I make an effort to get my way.
- 10** **A** I enter a situation prepared to defend and retain my stance.
 B I enter a situation prepared to give in a number of areas.
- 11** **A** I allow time for everyone to get their concerns out in the open.
 B I might try to soothe another person's feelings and preserve our association.
- 12** **A** I sometimes avoid taking positions which would create controversy.
 B I will concede some of another's position if he/she lets me have some of mine.
- 13** **A** I propose a middle ground.
 B I press to get my points made.
- 14** **A** I tell him/her my ideas and ask him/her for his /her opinion.
 B I work hard to show him/her the logic of my position.
- 15** **A** I have a tendency to put others feelings above my own.
 B I try to do what is necessary to avoid tensions.
- 16** **A** I do everything possible not to hurt the other's feelings.
 B I try hard to convince the other person of the merits of my position.
- 17** **A** I really like to win.
 B If I see a tension-producing situation building, I leave or change the subject.
- 18** **A** If it makes the other person happy, I might let him/her maintain his/her views.
 B I believe time is less important than working things out.
- 19** **A** I like being with people with diverse opinions.
 B If things get difficult, I'd just as soon put the discussion off until another time.
- 20** **A** I attempt to immediately work through our differences.
 B I try to find a fair combination of gains and losses for both of us.
- 21** **A** In approaching negotiations, I consider the other person's wishes before my own.
 B I always lean toward a direct discussion of the problem.
- 22** **A** I try to find a position that is intermediate.
 B I assert my wishes as quickly as possible.

Finding Your Conflict Management Style continued

- 23** **A** I am very often concerned with satisfying all our wishes.
B I would prefer to let others take responsibility for solving the problem.
- 24** **A** If the other's position seems very important to him/her, I would try to meet his/her wishes and put aside my own.
B I try to get him/her to settle for a compromise.
- 25** **A** I try to show him/her the logic and benefits of my position.
B In approaching negotiations, I try to be considerate of the other person's wishes.
- 26** **A** I propose the middle ground.
B I am equally aware of others' concerns, as well as my own.
- 27** **A** I have a tendency to avoid taking positions that would create controversy.
B If it makes the other person happy, I don't need to hold on to my concerns.
- 28** **A** I do think in terms of winning and losing.
B I believe there can usually be a win/win solution.
- 29** **A** I propose the middle ground.
B I feel that differences are not usually worth addressing.
- 30** **A** I won't share my problem if it's going to upset the other person.
B I tend to share the problem with the other person so that we can work it out.

Next page for scoring!

Scoring

	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating
1				A	B
2		B	A		
3	A	B			
4			A		B
5		A		B	
6	B			A	
7			B	A	
8	A	B			
9	B			A	
10	A		B		
11		A			B
12			B	A	
13	B		A		
14	B	A			
15				B	A
16	B			A	
17	A			B	
18			B		A
19		A		B	
20		A	B		
21		B			A
22	B		A		
23		A		B	
24			B		A
25	A				B
26		B	A		
27				A	B
28	A	B			
29			A	B	
30		B			A

Add up total number of letters in each column and put in boxes below

Total	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating

The style which received the highest score is your most frequently used mode for managing conflict.

Keep in mind, any of these might be appropriate in certain situations.

On the next page, you'll get an idea of what it is to be "competing" or "collaborating" or . . .

Description of Conflict Management Modes

(See previous page)

Competing can lead to aggressive and uncooperative behavior and is best illustrated when an individual pursues his/her own concerns at the other person's expense. It creates an environment conducive to overpowering opponents because it is a win/lose approach. Winning may give a person a sense of pride and achievement, while losing gives her/him a sense of weakness, inadequacy and failure. Being in a competitive frame of mind may seem appropriate when quick, decisive action is needed or where unpopular issues such as cost-cutting, firing or disciplining an employee exist. Even then, however, long-term relationships and progress may be sacrificed.

Collaborating is both assertive and cooperative and involves an attempt to work with a person to arrive at a mutual, fully satisfactory solution. It can eliminate competition. Collaboration results in situations where both/all parties WIN. Though it takes time in the short-run, it can save time in the long-run. As desirable as collaboration is, however, it is not always the most appropriate or possible style under some circumstances.

Compromising is intermediate in assertiveness and cooperativeness and results in a solution which partially satisfies both parties. It often results in "splitting the difference". When they compromise, people give up part of their goals and persuade the other person to do the same. They seek solutions in which both sides gain something; they reach a middle ground between two extreme positions. The common good becomes more important than individual satisfaction.

Avoiding leads to unassertive and uncooperative behavior which means the conflict and/or issues do not get addressed. People give up their personal goals and needs and often have a sense of hopelessness because they feel that resolution is impossible. They also may feel helpless and so find it easier to withdraw rather than confront. However, it may be an appropriate response when an issue is trivial, when the issue simply cannot be won or when it may cause extreme discomfort or danger.

Accommodating is unassertive but *cooperative*. It's the opposite of competing. It's used when relationships are of greater importance than one's own goals and rights, and when harmony takes precedence at all cost. It's also used when yielding to another point of view is simply generous and kind and the trade-off is not enormous. If it happens continually, however, the person may experience powerlessness.

A Creative Conflict Resolution Process

We've often been taught to deal with conflict in two ways:

1. Avoid it, at all costs!
2. Punish or otherwise force others to do what we want!

Why doesn't this work?

1. Both are short-term solutions, at best.
2. You can't force a change in values.
3. The person being forced (or attacked) has only three alternatives
 - Attack back • Flee • Succumb

So what should we do

First, everyone has to agree they want to find a mutually satisfactory resolution and to use a process and setting that's comfortable for all.

Second, everyone has to acknowledge that conflicts usually inspire both emotional and logical reactions. Problems arise when trying to solve the emotional aspect logically and the logical aspect emotionally. It works best if we are all in an emotional place together and then move to a logical place. To remain connected emotionally, we don't have to

understand the other's emotions, nor do we have to share them. We merely have to acknowledge that the other person is experiencing them.

Third, everyone must have a chance to tell her/his story. It's important that everyone else works very hard to understand each of the perspectives (through "active listening" and "shared meaning") because that is what provides the frame of reference for the conflict.

Fourth, everyone then cooperatively develops and implements solutions.

Effective Communication As The Basis For Empowered Interaction

One of life's most crucial skills is the ability to clearly communicate. Communication, is a two-way street requiring the ability to listen as well as to talk. Being assertive and making sure your ideas are heard are certainly goals, but unless there can be a meaningful interchange the end result will be less than satisfactory.

This following section covers some of the basics for effective communication.

Listening Techniques

Good Listening Requires:

- A desire to listen
 - Preparation for listening
 - A show of interest and being interested
 - Being respectful and maintaining appropriate boundaries
 - Focusing attention
 - Waiting—thinking—responding when ready and/or appropriate
 - Repeating or paraphrasing: checking out
 - Giving advice only when appropriate
 - Giving hope truthfully
 - Being honest
 - Observing physical energy, body language
 - Observing incongruency
 - Suspending one's frame of reference or judgment
- Sharing of self but only when appropriate
 - Empathizing and showing warmth
 - Offering a calm response
 - Listening carefully: **Active Listening**





Non-helpful Listening Habits

(Try to avoid
doing these!)

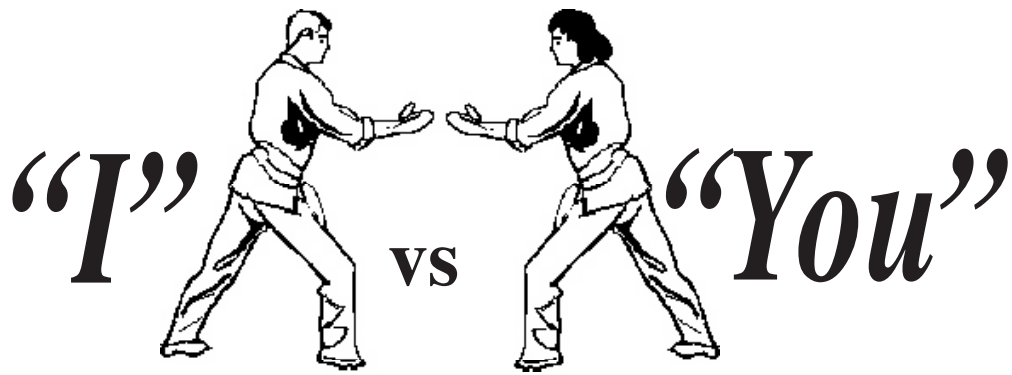
- Not paying attention.
- Pseudo-listening or Pre-tending.
- Listening but not Hearing.
- Rehearsing own response.
- Interrupting.
- Hearing what is expected.
- Being defensive.
- Listening for a point of disagreement.

Try doing
these instead!



Active Listening!

- **Show understanding** and acceptance by verbal and nonverbal behavior, tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, eye contact and posture.
- **Put yourself** in the other person's place to understand what the person is saying and how s/he feels.
- **Restate** the person's most important thoughts and feelings.
- **Do not interrupt**, offer advice, or give suggestions. Do not bring up similar feelings and problems from your own experience.
- **Clarify and check out** communication.
- **Be supportive.**
- **Summarize** by highlighting the main points, feelings and ideas.



Using “I” versus “You” Messages

- *“I” messages express opinions, thoughts, beliefs and assertions in a way that maximizes the possibilities for creative collaborative problem-solving.*
- *“I” messages give the other person information that is necessary to enable her or him to participate in the problem-solving process.*
- *“You” messages put people on the defensive because they are a form of attack.*

“I” Messages Describe three things while being unthreatening:

- 1** • *Background. Your best sense of*
 - *what happened.*
 - *who did what, when and where.*
 - *how often.*
 - *other background factors that may be influencing the situation.*
- 2** • *Feelings. How you feel*
 - *as you’re talking to the person now.*
 - *about the situation you’re describing.*
 - *how you felt at the time of the original event.*
- 3** • *Tangible Effects and Consequences. They explain*
 - *why you believe the situation is important.*
 - *tangible outcomes and later implications of the situation that the other person might not be aware of.*
 - *general impact.*

Some Criteria For Giving Feedback In Respectful Ways



"Whaddya mean you won't take my feed back?"

Feedback should be descriptive rather than evaluative. By describing one's own reaction in terms of "I messages", the individual is free to use feedback or not use it as s/he sees fit. By avoiding evaluative language, the need for the individual to react defensively is reduced.

Feedback should be specific rather than general. To be told that one has to "shape up" is not helpful. It's more helpful to be told that *"Yesterday, when you raised your voice, I missed a lot of what you said because I tend to tune out in the presence of yelling. I respond better when told in a softer voice."*

Feedback should take into account the needs of both the receiver *and* giver.

Feedback should be directed toward behavior which the receiver can do something about. Frustration is only increased when a person is reminded of some short-coming over which s/he has no control.

Feedback works better when it's solicited, rather than imposed. If it must come unsolicited, it best be put in terms of a partnership, i.e. not *"You have a problem"* but *"We have a problem."*

Feedback is more often heard when it is well-timed. In general, feedback is most useful at the earliest opportunity after the given behavior (depending, of course, on the person's readiness to hear it, the support available from others, etc.)

Feedback is better understood when a "checking-out process" occurs. Everyone involved needs to know that they were heard and understood correctly.

Feedback is far more useful when it is not given as a form of control. There is a difference between being "in control" and being "controlling." Unfortunately, when we are feeling out of control, we have a tendency to be more controlling.

Self-Assessment

Communicating

- I would rather communicate through the written word.
- I would rather communicate through speaking.
- If I need to communicate with more than one person,
- I prefer talking with the group.
- I prefer talking to people one-to-one.
- If I give instructions, I check back periodically to see how it's going.
- Most of the time I sound confident when I talk.
- I am confident when I talk.
- I generally know what information to share, what not to share and with whom.
- I am quite persuasive.
- If I have something difficult or negative to say, I usually take the risk and say it (though it may be hard).
- I compliment others easily.
- I am able to communicate on
 - an emotional level.
 - a logical level.
- I believe I'm usually open and honest.
- I watch for indications that I'm understood and pay attention to other people's nonverbal signals (body language) when I'm communicating with them.
- I use "I" messages rather than "You" messages (meaning I am more likely to say "I'm reacting this way" rather than "You are doing this to me").
- I am brief and to the point most of the time.
- I try to use vocabulary understood by the listener.
- I may make assumptions about the listener that are not true.
- I recognize that how I say something is just as important as what I say.

Communication

Self-Assessment

Listening

- If I hear something that is troubling, I have a tendency to tune out.
- I am able to concentrate on what is being said even if it isn't my area of interest.
- I pay attention to the speaker's nonverbal communication as well as verbal.
- I am usually able to focus on the speaker(s) completely.
- I begin planning my response before the speaker(s) is finished.
- I tend to check out what I've heard to be sure I understand.
- I'm generally open to the viewpoints of others even if it's different from mine.
- I'm "into" learning from others.
- I find it easy to ask what is meant by certain words or concepts.
- I may give the appearance of listening even when I'm not.
- I often daydream while people are talking to me.
- I listen for underlying ideas as well as facts.
- I usually keep eye contact or otherwise give the message that I'm paying attention.
- I respond on an emotional level when appropriate rather than concentrating on logical responses.
- I can usually allow someone to share negative feelings with me without getting defensive.
- I am able to suspend judgment and criticism while listening.
- I can overcome distractions for the most part.