**Confident Communication:**

**Strategies for Communicating with the Disagreeable**

**Presented by**

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**Dr. Steven A. Beebe** is Regents’ and University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Communication Studies at Texas State University. He served as Chair of his department at Texas State for 28 years and concurrently as Associate Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communication for 25 years. He was a tenured faculty member at the University of Miami for 10 years prior to his 33 years of teaching at Texas State University.

**Scholarship**: He is author, co-author, and co-editor of 15 books (with editions totaling more than 85 books) that have been used at hundreds of colleges and universities throughout the world (including international, Canadian, Russian, and Chinese editions) by several million students. He has authored or co-authored more than 75 articles and chapters, plus more than 230 papers and presentations at professional conferences.

**International Recognition**: Dr. Beebe has been a Visiting Scholar at both Oxford University and Cambridge University and was elected a permanent member of the Common Room of Wolfson College, Oxford University. Steve has given lectures, conference presentations, and webinars throughout Europe, Asia, and Central America and made fifteen visits to Russia between 1993-2015 where he has helped to establish the first communication studies programs there.

**C. S. Lewis Research:** He made international headlines when conducting research at Oxford University when he discovered an unpublished manuscript written by C. S. Lewis that was the partial opening chapter of a book that was to be co-authored with J. R. R. Tolkien called *Language and Human Nature.* Steve’s research about C. S. Lewis is summarized in his well-received book, *C. S. Lewis and the Craft of Communication*. In 2022 he was named *Scholar of the Year* by the Religious Communication Association.

**Professional Leadership:** Dr. Beebe served as President of the National Communication Association, the largest professional academic communication association in the world. He also served as President of the Florida Communication Association and is a founding member of the Russian Communication Association.

**Training, Speaking and Consulting Expertise**: He is in demand as a consultant, trainer, teacher, and speaker listing such clients as IBM, 3M, American Express, Knight-Ridder Publishing, U. S. Air Force, Pearson, U.S. Department of Education, U. S. Department of Defense, the Governor of Texas Executive Development Program, and many other organizations, colleges, universities and state agencies.

**Honors**: He was in the first class of *Regents’ Professors,* the highest faculty recognition bestowed by the Texas State University System. He received the *Lifetime Achievement Award* from the National Communication Association Training and Development Division. In 2020 Steve and Sue, received the *Order of Attainment* from the national debate/forensics honorary *Pi Kappa Delta*; previous inductees include President Lyndon B. Johnson and Governor Ann Richards. His alma mater, the University of Central Missouri, selected him, along with his wife, Sue, as *Distinguished Alumni for 2010*. While at Texas State he received the *top presidential and faculty senate awards* for teaching, research, and service.

He has received teaching awards at each university where he has taught. In 2018 Dr. Beebe was named *Piper Professor* by the Minnie Stevens Piper Foundation recognizing him as one of the top ten professors in Texas among all academic disciplines. In 2024 Dr. Beebe received the *Wallace A Bacon Lifetime Excellence in Teaching Award* from the National Communication Association. The National Speaker’s Association has named him *Outstanding Communication Professor* in America.

**What Do You Want to Learn?**

1. What are the characteristics of someone who is a confident communicator who manages conflict well? What do they do to help manage conflict and tension effectively and confidently?
2. What are the characteristics of someone who manages conflict and difficult conversations poorly? What do they do that increases conflict and tension?
3. **What would you like to learn** about managing conflict, more effectively responding to others during difficult conversations that would increase your confidence as a communicator?

What Is Conflict?

Conflict is: (1) an expressed struggle (2) between at least two interdependent people (3) who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others (4) to achieve specific goals. (Hocker, Berry and Wilmont)

■ **Expressed struggle**: A disagreement expressed nonverbally and then verbally.

■ **Between at least two interdependent people:**What happens to one person affects others.

■ **Incompatible goals, scarce resources, interference:**Two or more people want the same thing, yet they can’t have it.

■ **Achieving a goal:** It is important to figure out what each person wants.

**Myths About Conflict**

Myth 1: Conflict Should Be Avoided at All Costs.

 Conflict is a natural byproduct of communication.

**Myth 2: Conflict Is a Sign of a Poor Relationship.**

 Conflict is an element in every relationship.

Myth 3: Conflict Occurs Because Misunderstandings.

Conflict may occur because you have communicated clearly.

Myth 4: All Conflict Can Be Resolved.

 Sometimes we simply must agree to disagree.

**How to Push Someone’s “Hot Buttons”**

■ **Evaluate them:**

Criticize something personal about them.

■ **Control them:**

Try to manipulate them.

■ **Act superior:**

Tell them you know more than they do.

■ **Tell them they are wrong:**

You have the truth, they don’t.

**Draw Your Listening Energy Cycle**

**Highest**

**Energy**

**Level**

**Sleep**

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6 am 8 10 12 2 4 6 8 10 12 2 4 am

**NOON**

6

5

4

3

2

1

0

**MIDNIGHT**

**Gottman’s Four Horses of the Apocalypse**

**When these four “horses of the Apocalypse” are consistently present in conversations there is more than 90% likelihood of separation.**

■ **Criticism: Leveling Personal Attacks**

■ **Defensiveness: Erecting Barriers**

■ **Contempt: Assuming Superiority**

■ **Stonewalling: Withdrawing**

***Gottman & Gottman. Fight Right: How Successful Couples Turn Conflict into Connection (2024).***

**Five Conflict Management Styles**

**Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Styles**

**Competing:**

 **High Concern for Self Low Concern for Others**

**Avoiding:**

 **Low Concern for Self Low Concern for Others**

**Accommodating:**

 **Low Concern for Self High Concern for Others**

**Compromising:**

 **Medium Concern for Self Medium Concern for Others**

**Collaborating:**

 **High Concern for Self High Concern for Others**



**Assessing Your Conflict Management Style**

 Think of a specific person close to you with whom you have had a conflict or disagreement. Write the initials of the person in the blank: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Now, look at the following questions and fill in the number from the responses below that best describes how you handle conflict with this person:

1 = never 2 = seldom 3 = sometimes 4 = often 5 = always

1. \_\_\_\_\_I avoid being “put on the spot”; I keep conflicts to myself.
2. \_\_\_\_\_I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.
3. \_\_\_\_\_I usually try to “split the difference” to resolve an issue.
4. \_\_\_\_\_I try to satisfy the other person’s needs.
5. \_\_\_\_\_I try to investigate an issue to find a solution acceptable to us.
6. \_\_\_\_\_I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with this person.
7. \_\_\_\_\_I use my power and authority to decide in my favor.
8. \_\_\_\_\_I try to find some middle ground when we are stuck with no resolution.
9. \_\_\_\_\_I usually accommodate this person’s wishes.
10. \_\_\_\_\_I try to integrate my ideas with this person to come up with a joint decision.
11. \_\_\_\_\_I try to stay away from disagreement with this person.
12. \_\_\_\_\_I use my expertise to decide in my favor.
13. \_\_\_\_\_I propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.
14. \_\_\_\_\_I give in to this person’s wishes.
15. \_\_\_\_\_I try to work with this person to find solutions that satisfy both our expectations.
16. \_\_\_\_\_I try to keep my disagreement to myself to avoid hard feelings.
17. \_\_\_\_\_I generally pursue my side of an issue.
18. \_\_\_\_\_I negotiate with this person to reach a compromise.
19. \_\_\_\_\_I often go with the other person’s suggestions.
20. \_\_\_\_\_I exchange accurate information with this person so we can solve the problem together.
21. \_\_\_\_\_I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with this person.
22. \_\_\_\_\_I sometimes use my power to win.
23. \_\_\_\_\_I use “give and take” so that a compromise can be made.
24. \_\_\_\_\_I try to satisfy the other person’s expectations.
25. \_\_\_\_\_I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved.

**SCORING:** Add up your scores to the following questions to determine your conflict style with this person.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_ 5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_ 7. \_\_\_\_\_ 8. \_\_\_\_\_ 9. \_\_\_\_\_ 10. \_\_\_\_\_

11. \_\_\_\_\_ 12. \_\_\_\_\_ 13. \_\_\_\_\_ 14. \_\_\_\_\_ 15. \_\_\_\_\_

16. \_\_\_\_\_ 17. \_\_\_\_\_ 18. \_\_\_\_\_ 19. \_\_\_\_\_ 20. \_\_\_\_\_

21. \_\_\_\_\_ 22. \_\_\_\_\_ 23. \_\_\_\_\_ 24. \_\_\_\_\_ 25. \_\_\_\_\_

**Avoidance Competition Compromise Accommodation Collaboration**

 Total \_\_\_\_\_ Total \_\_\_\_\_ Total \_\_\_\_\_ Total \_\_\_\_ Total \_\_\_\_\_

 \_

Interpreting Your Score: Determine which category received the highest numbered score. One or two conflict styles are common.

Adapted from: Rahim, M. A., & Magner, N. R. (1995). Confirmatory factor analysis of the styles of handling interpersonal conflict: First-order factor model and its invariance across groups. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 80,* 122-132.

**Brief Description of Conflict Styles**

**Competing: I try to get my way most of the time.**

This style is assertive and uncooperative—an individual pursues their own concerns at the other person’s expense. If you use this style you use whatever power seems appropriate to win your own position.

LOW 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 HIGH

**Accommodating: I tend to agree and give in so the other person wins.**

The accommodating style is unassertive and cooperative—the opposite of competing. When accommodating, an individual often neglects their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person—you give in to make peace.

LOW 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 HIGH

**Avoiding: I don’t like conflict; I try to avoid it if possible.**

If you use the avoiding style you are often unassertive and uncooperative—you do not immediately pursue your own concerns or those of the other person. You seek to sidestep conflict. You do not like conflict and you try to avoid it if at all possible.

LOW 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 HIGH

**Compromising: I will give in a little, but not completely get what I want.**

The objective of compromising is to find an acceptable solution that partially satisfies those in conflict. It falls on a middle ground between competing and accommodating. Compromising may take less time than expending the time and energy to collaborate.

LOW 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 HIGH

**Collaborating: I work to find a good solution so we both win.**

Collaborating involves actively communicating with the other person to find a solution that fully satisfies the concerns of both persons in the conflict. To collaborate is to dig into an issue

to identify underlying concerns and to find a solution that meets both person’s needs.

LOW 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 HIGH

**Describe a Recent Conflict**

Think of a recent conflict or difficult conversation you had with another person in which you felt defensive and the conflict escalated.

1. What did your partner say or do that made the conversation difficult or created conflict?
2. How did you respond? How did you feel?
3. How satisfied were you in managing the difficult conversation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Very Satisfied Very Satisfied

Overview of Skills for

Managing Difficult Conversations

Focus on People First, the Problem Second

Manage Emotions:

* + Be aware of your emotions and the emotions of others.
	+ Use productive strategies to better manage emotions.

Manage Communication:

* + Express your ideas clearly and appropriately.
	+ Listen and confirm understanding of the ideas of others.

Manage the Goal:

* + Identify your interests and positions.
	+ Identify other’s interests and positions.
	+ Identify overlap between interests and positions.

Manage the Problem:

* + Use an agenda to structure the conversation.
	+ Define and analyze issues, positions and interests before proposing solutions.

**Step One: Manage Emotions**

* Recognize that you are involved in a difficult conversation.
* If possible, select a mutually acceptable time and place to discuss the issue.
* Start soft: Establish rapport: Avoid the “bomb drop” or “door in the face” start.
* Be aware of and manage “flooding”—“fight/flight” intense emotions.
* Don’t express intense, “over-the-top” emotions:

 Monitor your vocal volume and speed.

 Monitor your facial expressions.

 Monitor your posture and gestures.

* Breathe.
* Avoid “pushing hot buttons” (personal attacks and name calling).
* Use self-talk.

 Use your name during self-talk to get your attention.

Be aware that you are becoming emotional, especially flooding.

 Understand why you are upset.

 Name the emotion: anger, frustration, disappointment, etc.

 Consciously decide whether to express your anger.

Remember: “*Life is 10% what happens to you and*

 *90% how you respond to what happens to you*.”

Decide: What can I change/not change?[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Emotion Management Skills**

■ **Body: Physical Emotion Management Strategies**

* + Identify and manage sources of stress.
	+ Act calm to feel calm.
	+ Eat well.
	+ Rest well.
	+ Exercise well.
	+ Play well.
	+ Breathe.

■ **Mind: Mental Emotion Management Strategies**

* + Recognize that you control how you react and respond.
	+ Recognize the emotion you are feeling.
	+ Identify the cause of the emotion.
	+ Use self-talk: Be mindful and aware.
	+ Visualize effective interpersonal relationships.

■ **Spirit: Spiritual Emotion Management Strategies**

* + Identify and practice what keeps you spiritually centered and in a “good place” (e.g. reading, music, meditation, exercise).
	+ Frequently talk with a supportive friend, partner, or spiritual advisor who will listen.
	+ Make time to meditate. (See: *10% Happier* by Dan Harris)
	+ Find a time and place to be still/quiet.

**Step Two: Manage Communication**

* **Listen: Stop, Look, Listen.**

**Stop:** You are either on task or off task.

**Look:** Nonverbal messages:

 Play a major role in all communication

 The primary role in expressing emotions/feelings

 **Listen**: Listen for key points and details as you adapt

 your listening style: people, action, content, time.

* Check your understanding by appropriately paraphrasing.
* Clearly describe the sequence of conflict-producing events.
* Describe your emotions but don’t exaggerate or escalate.
* Use “I” language or extended “I” language.

 **“I” Language:** “I feel X when I see Y. I would prefer Z.”

 **Extended “I” Language:**

 “I care about you and our relationship.

 I value our positive relationship.

 I feel X when I see Y. I would prefer Z.”

* Take turns talking.
* Don’t interrupt. Use the power of the pause.
* Find the answer to this question:

 *What does the other person know that I don’t know?*

* Be Positive: Remember the 5:1 ratio.

Adapted from: Steven A. Beebe, Susan J. Beebe and Mark V. Redmond, *Interpersonal Communication: Relating to Others* 10th edition (New York: Pearson, 2025).

**Positive Messages to Use During Conflict**

* Apologize when appropriate: Admit when you made or are making a mistake; own responsibility for your part of the problem.
* Get credit for being a good listener.

 Display an affirming nod in agreement.

 Empathize: “So you are feeling . . .”

 Paraphrase appropriately.

* Use appropriately affirming nonverbal messages.

 Smile appropriately and monitor your expression.

 Monitor your fingers and toes.

 Have appropriate eye contact.

 Offer a reassuring yet appropriate touch.

* Find something to say “yes” to such as “I agree this is a problem.”
* Note what you have in common: common goals, interests
* Look for opportunities to say something positive about what someone said.

 “Good point.”

 “Fair enough.”

 “I can agree with that.”

* Note what you are both doing right.
* Recall a past success or when you both agreed or solved a problem.
* Use humor appropriately; recall a funny story that the other person will find funny.

Adapted from: Gottman & Gottman *Fight Right* (Harmony: New York, 2024).

**Using “I” language & Extended “I” Language**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **“You” Language** | **“I” Language** | **Extended “I” Language** |
| You are doing it again. Your idea to continue this meeting makes us late for the next meeting. You add to our workload. | I feel frustrated and stress when our meetings go beyond the announced time limit. It adds to my stress when I am late to my next appointment. I’d like our meetings to end at the announced time. | I do care about our friendship. Our working relationship is important to me. That’s why I share that I feel frustrated and stress when our meetings are prolonged. I would rather continue our discussions when we are more relaxed and refreshed. I don’t like feeling embarrassed if I’m late for my next meeting. I’d like our meetings to end at the announced time. |
| You always interrupt me. You never let me finish what I am saying. |  |  |
| You are constantly criticizing me. You always tell me “You’re wrong!” |  |  |

**How to Paraphrase**

1. **Listen** to what your partner said.

 **Stop:** Stay on task, reduce your internal message, pause.

 **Look:** Monitor nonverbal messages.

 **Listen:** Listen for the big ideas as well as the facts.

1. **Mentally summarize** what you think your partner said.
2. **Verbally paraphrase the content.** Share (without using the exact words) what you understood your partner to say.
3. **Verbally respond** by using such phrases as:
* “Are you saying . . . .”
* “You seem to be describing . . .”
* “So, the point you are making is . . .”
* “Here is what I think you said . . .”
1. **Ask** if what you said was what they meant.

 “Was that your point?”

 “Was that the key idea?”

1. **Mentally summarize** what you think your partner is feeling.
* Imagine how you would feel in a similar situation.
* Consider what you already know about your partner.
* Listen for words they used to describe their feelings.
1. **Paraphrase feelings** and emotions when appropriate.
* “Are you feeling . . .?”
* “You said you were feeling . . . is that right?”
* “So, this must be making you feel . . .”

Adapted from: Steven A. Beebe, Susan J. Beebe and Mark V. Redmond, *Interpersonal Communication: Relating to Others* 10th edition (New York: Pearson, 2025).

**Step Three: Manage Goals**

* Identify your interests and your positions.

 **Interest: The *general* outcome you seek to achieve;**

 **the overall goal.**

 “I want to relax and have fun.”

 “I want a proposal that is accepted by the client.”

 “I want our employees to be motivated to do their best.”

 “I want more time to myself.”

 **Position: What you *specifically* propose to happen;**

 **the specific request and proposal presented.**

 “I want to go to Washington D. C. for our vacation.”

 “I want the cover of our proposal to be red.”

 “I want the policy to include these punishments.”

 “I want to take a 30-minute walk when I come home from work.”

* Ask questions to identify your partner’s interests (general goals) and positions (specific proposals/requests)?
* Determine where your interests (general goals) and your partner’s interests overlap.
* Identify several positions that could help achieve the common interests.

**Step Four: Manage the Problem**

**Problem: Something (a position and/or interest) you want more or less of.**[[2]](#footnote-2)

* **Use principled negotiation strategies.**

**(*Getting to Yes!* Fisher and Ury):**

* + **Separate the people from the problem**.
	+ **Focus on shared interests (not positions**).
	+ **Generate** **many options**.
	+ **Base decisions on** **objective criteria**.
* **Use a problem-solving structure as a discussion agenda.**
	+ Define: What is the problem?

 (What do we want more of/less of)?

* + Analyze: What is the history? What are the causes?

 What are the symptoms?

* + Identify common interests.
	+ Identify criteria: Standards for a good outcome.
	+ Generate several options/positions to achieve interests.
	+ Expand the “pie” by identifying other resources.
	+ Evaluate options (pros and cons) based on criteria.
	+ Make a decision based on criteria, that satisfies the interests and is an acceptable position.

Steven A. Beebe and John T. Masterson, *Communicating in Small Groups: Principles and Practices* 13th edition (New York: Pearson, 2025).

**Three Types of Conflict**

|  | Pseudo-ConflictMisunderstanding | Simple ConflictDisagree on the Outcome | Ego ConflictConflict Is Personal |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Source of Conflict | **Individuals misunderstand each other’s perceptions of a problem** | **Disagreement over a course of action, idea, policy, or procedure**  | **Defense of ego: Individual believe they are being attacked personally** |
| Managing Conflict | 1. Ask for clarification of perceptions.2. Establish a supportive rather than a defensive climate. (No hot buttons pushed)3. Employ active listening:• Stop• Look• Listen• Question• Paraphrase content• Paraphrase feelings | 1. Listen and clarify perceptions.2. Make sure issues are clear to all group members.3. Use a problem-solving approach to manage differences of opinion.4. Keep the discussion focused on the issues and interests.5. Use agreed upon facts rather than opinions as evidence.6. Look for alternatives or compromise positions.7. Determine which conflicts are the most important to resolve.8. If necessary, postpone the decision while additional research is conducted. This delay also helps relieve tensions. | 1. Let members express their concerns, but do not permit personal attacks.2. Employ active listening.3. Call for a cooling-off period to manage emotions.4. Try to keep the discussion focused on issues (simple conflict).5. Encourage parties to be descriptive (“I” language) rather than evaluative and judgmental.6. Use a problem-solving approach to manage differences of opinion.7. Speak slowly and calmly.8. Agree to disagree. |

Skills for Difficult Conversations

Dealing with Prickly People

Some people just seem to rub us the wrong way. They generate both friction and heat when we try to negotiate with them. In his popular book Getting Past No, Harvard researcher William Ury suggests we try to change face-to-face confrontation into side-by-side problem solving.

■ **Go to the balcony.** “Going to the balcony” is a metaphor for taking a time out. Excuse yourself to cool off when someone pushes your buttons. Staying on the “main stage” to keep banging out a solution may be counterproductive.

■ **Step to the side**. Rather than continuing to debate and refute every argument, step to the side by just asking questions and listening. Change the dynamic of the relationship from a confrontation to a conversation.

■ **Change the frame.** Reframe by trying to see more than an either-or way of managing the conflict. Try to see it from a third, fourth, or fifth point of view. Change your overall perspective for viewing the conflict by considering how someone else may view the issue.

■ **Build a golden bridge**. To “build a golden bridge” is a metaphor for identifying ways to help the other person say yes by saving face. Find an alternative that allows the other person to maintain his or her dignity by using objective standards to find a solution.

■ **Make it hard to say no**. Use information to educate rather than pummel the other person. Bring people to their senses, not their knees. Help the other person understand the consequences of what he or she supports, as well as the benefits of your alternatives.

How to Empathize

■ **Stop:** Turn off your own competing internal chatter and set aside your own needs. Socially decenter by considering the other person’s thoughts, feelings, values, culture, and perspective. Stop making arguments and concentrate on your partner’s points.

■ **Look:** Maintain positive eye contact. Look for emotional cues in your partner’s face; observe posture and gestures to gauge the intensity of the feelings being expressed.

■ **Listen:** Pause. Just listen. Focus on the overall story your partner is telling. Listen both for the details and for the main points; also listen for tone of voice. Try to identify your partner’s goal or bottom line.

■ **Imagine:** Imagine how you would feel if you were in your partner’s place. Imagine how your partner has felt under similar circumstances.

■ **Question:** If you need more information about what your partner has experienced or more clarification about something you do not understand, gently ask appropriate questions.

■ **Paraphrase:** To confirm your understanding of your partner’s point of view, briefly summarize the essence of what you think your partner is thinking or feeling.

Adapted from: Steven A. Beebe, Susan J. Beebe and Mark V. Redmond, *Interpersonal Communication: Relating to Others* 10th edition (New York: Pearson, 2025).

Perceived Gender Differences in Responding to Conflict

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| People with Feminine Styles Tend to: | People with Masculine Styles Tend to: |
| Communicate to establish ***rapport*** (develop a personal relationship).Listen to Relate.Be concerned with equity and caring; they connect with and feel responsible to others. | Communicate to ***report*** (relayinformation, advice or recommendations). Listen to “fix it.”Be concerned with equality of rights and fairness; they adhere to principles and rules. |
| Seek closeness and interdependence. | Seek to achieve specific goals. |
| Attend to interpersonal dynamics to assess the relationship’s health. | Be less aware of interpersonal dynamics but focus on the goal. |
| Encourage mutual involvement. | Protect self-interest. |
| Respond to conflict by often focusing mainly on the relationship. | Respond to conflict by often focusing on rules and being evasive until a unilateral decision is reached. |

Summary: Skills for Managing Conflict

Focus on the Person

Manage Emotions

* Use self-talk
* Be mindful: Label the emotion
* Breathe
* Draw upon mental, physical & spiritual sources of support.

Manage Communication

* Use “I” messages or extended “I” messages
* Pause
* Consider: What do they know that I don’t know?
* Stop
* Look
* Listen
* Empathize
* Paraphrase

Focus on the Problem

Manage the Goal

* Identify the overall general outcome (interests).
* Identify what you/they want to have happen (specific position).
* Identify where goals/positions/interests overlap; Identify common ground.

Manage the Problem

* Use a problem-solving agenda (define, analyze, generate options)
* Use criteria: Identify standards for success.
* Generate many options.
* Evaluate options based on criteria.

Strategies for Managing Conflict Online

■ **Move to a Richer Medium**

If possible, talk to your communication partner in person; if talking face to face is not possible, reach for the phone to talk in real time rather than asynchronously.

■ **Make Sure You Understand the Issues Before Responding**

Before you write or say anything further, reread the previous messages. Are you sure you understand? Ask for clarification. Identify interests (the general outcome) and positions (the specific proposal).

■ **Paraphrase More**

Paraphrase first to yourself, and then to the other person, what you understand your partner to be communicating. Start a message by briefly summarizing what you understand their position is, and how their perceptions are different from yours. Ask if your perceptions are accurate.

■ **Increase Redundancy**

To ensure you are being “listened to,” repeat your key points and summarize what you’d like to have happen. Slow the process down.

■ **Use Caution When Trying to Lighten the Tone**

In face-to-face contexts, humor can help break the tension. But online, where there are limited non-verbal cues, what you think might reduce tension could escalate it.

■ **Avoid flaming (EXAGERATING! OVERSTATING!!! ATTACKING!!!) and Counterflaming; Take Time to Cool Off**

Your first impulse may be to respond immediately with a reciprocal flaming message. Don’t. Pause. Don’t respond or send a message immediately.

■ **Self-Reflect**

Take a “time out” to analyze your emotional reactions. Understanding why you have become upset can help you understand how to begin managing the conflict.

■ **Put Yourself in the Other Person’s Position**

After considering the other person’s thought process, empathize by asking yourself, “How would I feel if I perceived these same issues from my partner’s perspective?”

**What Will I Do To Increase My Communication Confidence?**

1. What will I do to better **manage emotions** during when someone pushes my “hot button”?

 (Review pages 14-15)

1. How will I **improve my ability to communicate** during difficult conversations?

 (Review pages 16-19)

1. How will I better **manage the goals** (interests/positions) during conflict and difficult conversations?

 (Review page 20)

1. How will I more skillfully **manage the problem** (what I want more of or less of) during conflict and difficult conversations?

(Review page 21)

1/27/25

1. Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I thank my friend and colleague Dr. Dennis Romig for the definition of a problem. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)