



***the***  
**Group Decision Making Handbook**

**Communication Styles**  
**Meeting Roles**  
**Meeting Process**  
**Facilitation**  
**Conflict Resolution**

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## What do **YOU** do when a dispute arises?

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Avoid it altogether	Cry of sulk
Speak directly to the person	Get indignant or sigh a lot
Hint at the problem	Just give in
Arrange for a meeting	Suggest a compromise
Apologize	Change the subject
Get visibly angry	Use put downs and labels
Take it out on someone else	Smile no matter what
Go to an authority	Use the silent treatment
Use a go-between	Agree on how to talk about the problem (ie: no yelling)
Write a note	Hate yourself
Ignore the problem	Bring up other conflicts from the past
Complain to a third person	
Try to be reasonable	Take a deep breath
Think of changing yourself	Pretend nothing's wrong
Punch a pillow	Make jokes and kid around
Leave or walk out	Deny that you really meant it
Use your position of authority	Expect this to go nowhere
Make excuses	Don't listen
	Try to understand their side of it

## Communication Styles

	NON-ASSERTIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
<b>VERBAL</b>	~ apologetic words ~ veiled meanings ~ hedging: failure to come to the point ~ rambling, disconnected ~ at a loss for words ~ failure to say what you really mean ~ "I mean..." "You know..." ~ self defeating ~ shifts responsibility to others ~ devalues self	~ statement of want ~ honest statement of feelings ~ objective words ~ direct statements that say what you mean ~ "I" messages ~ accepts responsibility for self ~ negotiates, likes "win-win"	~ "loaded" words ~ accusations ~ description, subjective ~ superior wording ~ "You" messages that blame or label ~ puts others down ~ dictator ~ gives no recognition
<b>NONVERBAL</b>			
<b>A. General</b>	~ actions instead of words, hoping someone will guess what you want ~ looking as if you don't mean what you say ~ nervous gestures, stress	~ Attentive listening behavior ~ an assured manner communicating caring and strength ~ relaxed, alert	~ exaggerated show of strength ~ flippant, sarcastic style ~ air of superiority
<b>B. Specific</b>			
<b>Voice</b>	~ weak, hesitant, soft, sometimes wavering	~ firm, warm, well-modulated, relaxed	~ tense, shrill, loud, shaking, demanding, superior
<b>Eyes</b>	~ averted, downcast, teary, pleading	~ open, frank, direct ~ eye contact, but not staring	~ expressionless, cold, narrowed, staring, not really "seeing" you
<b>Stance and Posture</b>	~ lean for support, stooped, excessive head-nodding	~ well-balanced, straight, relaxed	~ hands on hips, feet apart, stiff and rigid, rude
<b>Hands</b>	~ fidgety, fluttery, clammy	~ relaxed motions	~ clenched, abrupt gestures, finger-pointing, fist-pounding

## Active Listening

Active listening implies a whole orientation toward life and people. It implies that the listener is trying to understand how it would make sense to say, feel, or act as the other person. It implies that the other person is important and worth giving your attention, energy and time.

By withholding judgment and showing another that we are attempting to understand her feelings, we communicate that we respect her, and that she does not run the risk of an immediate "put-down," of being judged stupid or silly. This helps to build a climate in which people feel safe to discuss beliefs and values without attacking each other. Attempting empathy builds trust and closeness.

## Listening Habits

Less-skilled Listeners	Skilled Listeners
1. Immediately evaluate what is being said	1. Suspend judgment and listen.
2. Spend time rehearsing what they will say next.	2. Focus on what the other is saying
3. Try to steer the conversation towards the direction they want.	3. Let the other person direct the conversation.
4. Hear everything through their own frame of reference.	4. Try to enter the other's frame of reference.
5. Only ask questions when the other seems to need help.	5. Ask questions to satisfy their own curiosity or interests.
6. Disagree with other's point of view.	6. Seek to understand other's perspective.
7. Try to take in and respond to everything.	7. Sort for main ideas.
8. Allow their mind to wander to other things.	8. Keep focused on the other and what they are saying.
9. Parrot back exactly what they heard.	9. Reflect back the essence and feeling of what was said.
10. Give little verbal and non-verbal response.	10. Actively encourage speaker through verbal and non-verbal cues.

*Borrowed from the Icarus Project's Group Facilitation Resources. [www.icarusproject.net](http://www.icarusproject.net)*

# FEEDBACK GUIDELINES

## GIVING FEEDBACK

1. Focus on the behavior of the individual, not the personality.
  2. Make it specific (what, when, where, etc.).
  3. *Describe* the person's behavior, do not *judge* it.
  4. Direct it at behavior that can be changed, not at permanent characteristics of an individual.
  5. Make it timely, either at the moment the behavior is occurring or as soon afterward as possible.
  6. Remember that people are often uncomfortable receiving feedback, even if you are handling it in the best way possible.
  7. Whether the person agrees to continue the behavior or change the behavior, express your appreciation for listening to your concern.
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## RECEIVING FEEDBACK

1. Actively listen to the person's description of your behavior and recommendations for improvement.
2. Do not get defensive; trust that the intent of the feedback is to help, not hurt you.
3. Paraphrase or summarize the feedback to make sure you heard it correctly.
4. Give the feedback serious consideration. Do not dismiss it as irrelevant or unimportant.
5. Communicate to the person changes in his/her behavior that may be needed to help *you* change.
6. Whether or not you use this feedback, express appreciation to the other person for caring enough about the relationship to give you the feedback and request that he/she continue to do so.

## **Positive Group Roles**

### Task Focusing

- Give clear direction and purpose to the group.
- Help group in stating its goals and keeping group focused on achieving its goals.
- Propose goals & tasks, define problems, suggest procedures for achieving goals.

### Information Giving and Clarifying

- Show group which information is relevant to its work and eliminate confusion.
- Request relevant facts, define terms, interpret ideas, indicate issues and alternatives.

### Elaborating and Summarizing

- Try to show consequences of plans and positions, and show how ideas in the group are relating to each other.
- Give examples, explain, pull together related ideas, show contradictions, and offer conclusions.

### Decision Focusing

- Help group move toward and make decisions.
- Initiate discussion on and agreement about how decisions are made, propose tentative solutions to problems, initiate examination of workability of proposed solutions.

### Communication and Information Focusing

- Maintain open communication.
- Suggest procedures for discussion, ask for information and opinions from others and listen to other.

### Encouraging

- Bring out others' opinions, give recognition to others.
- Be friendly, warm, responsive to others.
- Accept others' opinions.
- Seek full identification and use of all members' resources.

### Feeling Expressing

- Call group's attention to feeling reactions of members to ideas, suggestions, course of discussion, individuals, etc.
- Express your own feelings and restate others' feelings and opinions.

### Conflict Resolving

- Identify, acknowledge and reconcile differences.
- Identify differences that you detect, get people to explore differences, make relaxing comments to reduce tension, suggest common ground and basis of integration/synthesis of differences.

### Process Commenting

- Make group aware of how it is working on its task.
- Call attention to group process, identify recurring interactional patterns and unmet group needs being blocked by attention to the task.
- Initiate evaluation of group's emotional climate, members' satisfaction, etc.

## **Negative Group Roles**

### Agreeing and Acceptance Seeking

- Be quick to agree with the ideas of others and provide uncritical agreement.
- Use your agreement to gain acceptance from members of the group who you want to think well of you.

### Disagreeing and Fighting

- Be quick to disagree with the ideas of others; struggle aggressively for your ideas and your place in the group.
- Everyone has their own needs and unless you fight for yours, you will lose.

### Domineering and Recognition Seeking

- Actively and continually assert yourself in the group.
- Take charge by imposing a set of ideas in molding all other ideas to these focal ideas.
- Draw attention to yourself by using jokes, making funny comments in relation to others' ideas, and by sitting and moving in ways which draw attention to yourself.

### Blocking

- Slow down group process by preventing group decision-making.
- Draw attention to every detail of unclarity and every unexplored source of conflict.
- Encourage people not to compromise and not to give assent to group procedures and ideas.

### Cynicism and Pessimism

- Point out all difficulties and indicate suspicion of the motives of others.
- Indicate the likelihood of error in failure and the difficulty groups have in successfully solving problems.
- Greet changes in positions and feelings as evidence of mindless compliance or attempted manipulation.

### Drifting and Pulling Out

- Let your attention wander; look out the window, draw doodles, rearrange papers, write a letter, etc.
- If given the opportunity, indicate you are bored and wish the meeting to be over so you can do something else.
- When your attention is on the group, indicate directly or indirectly your low level of commitment to ideas, decisions, and the group itself.

### Personalizing Issues

- Whatever the topic being discussed, relate it to your own personal experience.
- Insist on group members relating their ideas, suggestions, decision alternatives, and concerns to examples from your personal experience.
- Insist that the group get away from abstractions and generalizations and deal instead with the concrete and the specific.



## Designated Meeting Roles

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### The Facilitator

A facilitator is more like a coordinator than a leader or a chairperson. Facilitators accept responsibility to help the group accomplish a common task, to move through the agenda in the time available and to make necessary decisions and plans for implementation. A facilitator has three major responsibilities:

- 1) get the task done;
- 2) give people equal air time; and
- 3) distribute the power in the group.

A facilitator makes no decisions for the group but suggests ways that will help the group to move forward. They work in such a way that those present at the meeting are aware that they are in charge, that it is their business that is being conducted, and that each person has a role to play.

It is important to emphasize that the responsibility of the facilitator is to the group and its work rather than in the individuals within the group. A person with a high stake in the issues discussed will seldom be able to function as a good facilitator.

### Co-Facilitator

In groups of 8-15 people instead of the usual practice of having one facilitator it is often wise to have two facilitators. Here are some of the reasons and circumstances for team facilitation:

1. More information and ideas are available during the planning.
2. More energy (physical and emotional) is available to the group – especially during times of conflict or when handling complicated matters.
3. If a facilitator becomes personally involved in the discussions, it is easy to hand the job over to the co-facilitator for the time being.
4. Co-facilitation is a way for more people to gain experience and become skilled facilitators.
5. It is less exhausting, demanding, and scary.

Sometimes it is helpful to divide responsibility between the two facilitators (though this responsibility may switch during the meeting.) One facilitator can concentrate on moving through the agenda, responding to the group members, etc., while the other facilitator can keep time and records. In evaluating their work together, people who work as co-facilitators can help each other by giving feed back and support.

### Process Observer

From time to time, any group can benefit from having somebody observe how it works. During periods of conflict or transition (changing consciousness about sexism, figuring out what to do in response to difficult criticism, etc) a process observer may be of special value.

Process observers need to be careful not to get involved in the task of the group. A notepad for short notations will help with accuracy. Here are some specific things you might look for:

1. What was the general atmosphere in which the group worked?
2. How were decisions made?
3. If there was conflict, how was it handled?
4. Did everybody participate? Were there procedures that encouraged participation?
5. How well did the group members relate to each other?
6. Were there recognized leaders within the group?
7. How did the group interact with the facilitator?
8. Were there differences between male and female participation?

When paying specific attention to patterns of participation, keep score on paper can help you keep track. In a small group a mark can be made next to a person's name every time they speak. If you are looking for differences in participation patterns between categories of people, such as gender, race, new member/old member, etc., keeping track of number of contributions in each category is enough.

In giving feed back to the group, try to be matter-of-fact and specific so that people do not get defensive and can know exactly what you are talking about. Remember to mention the strengths you observe in the group.

### **“Vibes Watcher”**

At times when the discussion is expected to be particularly controversial or when there are more people than the facilitator can be attentive to, it may make sense to appoint a 'vibes watcher,' a person who pays attention to the emotional climate and energy level of the attendees. Such a person is encouraged to interrupt the process when necessary with an observation of how things are going and to suggest remedies when there is a problem.

As "vibes watcher" you pay most attention to the non-verbal communication, such as:

1. Body language: are people yawning, dozing, sagging, fidgeting, leaving?
2. Facial expressions: are people "not there," looking upset, staring off into space?
3. Side conversations: are people distracting to the facilitator or to the group?
4. People interrupting each other.

It is often difficult to interpret such behavior correctly. Therefore it may be wise to report what you have observed and possibly suggest something to do about it. If energy is low a quick game, stretch, or a rousing song may wake people up. If tension or conflict level is preventing people from hearing each other, a simple getting up and finding new places to sit might help. A period of silence might also be helpful when people may have a chance to relax a bit and look for new insights.

It is important for the vibes watcher to keep a light touch – don't make people feel guilty or defensive. Also, be confident in your role -- there is no reason for apologizing when you have an observation or a suggestion for the group. You are doing them a favor.

# Influence in Groups

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Influence and participation are not the same. Some people may speak very little, yet they capture the attention of the whole group. Others may talk a lot but are generally not listened to by other members.

1. Which members are high in influence? That is, when they talk others seem to listen.
2. Which members are low in influence? Others do not listen to or follow them. Is there any shifting in influence? Who shifts?
3. Do you see any rivalry in the group? Is there a struggle for leadership? What effect does it have on the group members?

## Styles of Influence

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Influence can take many forms. It can be positive or negative; it can enlist the support or cooperation of others or alienate them. How a person attempts to influence may be the crucial factor in determining how open or closed the other will be toward being influenced. The following are 4 styles of influence that frequently emerge in groups.

1. **AUTOCRATIC:** Does anyone attempt to impose his or her will or values on other group members or try to push them to support his or her decisions? Who evaluates or passes judgement on other group members? Do any members block action when it is not moving in the direction they desire? Who pushes to "get" the group organized?
2. **PEACEMAKER:** Who eagerly supports other members' decisions? Does anyone consistently try to avoid conflict of unpleasant feelings from being expressed by pouring oil on troubled waters? Is any member typically deferential toward other group members--gives them power? Do any members appear to avoid giving negative feedback, i.e. who will level only when they have positive feedback to give?
3. **LAISSEZ FAIRE:** Are any group members getting attention by their apparent lack of involvement in the group? Does any group member go along with group decisions without seeming to commit himself or herself one way or another? Who seems to be withdrawn and uninvolved; who does not initiate activity, participates mechanically and in response to another member's question?
4. **DEMOCRATIC:** Does anyone try to include everyone in a group decision or discussion? Who expresses his or her feelings and opinions openly and directly without evaluating or judging others? Who appears open to feedback and criticism from others? When feelings run high and tensions mount, which member attempts to deal with the conflict in a problem-solving way?

# Sample Agenda

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## (How to Use Agenda Tactics)

Time	Agenda Item	Action	Sponsor/Facilitator
5	Introductions/Check-in	Call Meeting to Order Certify Quorum	Chair
	<i>[Establish sense of group, mutual recognition and respect... Establish common framework for approaching problems.]</i>		
5	Agenda Review	Approve Agenda Minutes Approval	Novice Facilitator
	<i>[Ensure there is a timekeeper, recorder, minutes taker, process watcher, and so on... Get the group to agree upon goals for the meeting and to focus on matters at hand... Empower group.. Provide ethic for participation]</i>		
15	Proposal I	Consider/Adopt Proposal	Int. Facilitator
	<i>[First REAL business item... Focussing time ... An "easy" proposal will give the group a sense of accomplishment... Allows for some group participation]</i>		
25	Proposal II (or a Report)	Consider/Adopt Proposal	Experienced Facilitator
	<i>[A more difficult proposal or discussion is in order now; people should be warmed up... Trust should be established so that differences of opinion can be resolved amicably... Move to the next agenda item for a break if time runs out and no resolution appears in sight... Use break to caucus over differences.]</i>		
10	Reports	Review/Adopt Report	Novice Facilitator
	<i>[Let-down time... Keep this item short since people will want to move to a break... Strategize so that this agenda item might lead to a caucus or other business during break.]</i>		
10	Break	--	--
	<i>[Allow participants to articulate positive/negative attitudes.]</i>		
15	Reports/Training Program	Review/Adopt report	Novice Facilitator
	<i>[Focussing time... Bring the group together.]</i>		
25	Proposal III/Discussion	Review/Adopt Proposal	Experienced Facilitator
	<i>[Time for more "heavy" business... Be careful people are not getting sleepy or irritable.]</i>		
10	Evaluation & Recap.	Recap decisions of the mtg.	Minutes Taker

## Rating Scale -- Board Meeting Productivity

	Check Quality that Best Describes				
Item	5 Fully adequate	4 Needs some improvement	3 Needs much improvement	2 Practically absent	1 Does not exist
Agenda					
Reports					
Proposals and presentations					
Reference materials					
Time, place and equipment					
Attendance					
Leadership:					
Use of meeting space					
Guidance in discussion and problem solving					
Setting of stage for discussion					
Maintaining freedom of expression					
Managing time -- avoids digressions					
Maintaining wholesome group discipline					
Avoidance of domination by any one person					
Participation					
Asking discerning questions					
Reasoning logically					
Making sound decisions					
Communicating clearly and appropriately					
Acting cooperatively					
Counseling with manager/staff					
Feeling of achievement, over-all effectiveness					
<b>Column totals</b>					
<b>Total score</b>					

Source:

Adapted by NASCO from Directors Management Institute No. II for the Production Credit Associations of Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina, conducted by Federal Intermediate Credit Bank of Columbia, S.C.

# SELF-FACILITATION

Be on time.

Come informed and ready.

**No interrupting!** If the discussion gets involved we will keep a stack of speakers organized by short factual points of information first, questions second – (this does not include rhetorical questions, and should only be direct answers to the questions, not opinion-based responses), and then a regular stack of talking points including opinions, responses, etc.

**Listen well.** Good listening is as important as good speaking. It's important not to withdraw when not speaking; good listening is active participating. Take notes, nod your head in agreement, watch the person who is speaking, etc.

**Twinkle frequently.** This helps other get a sense of how the house is feeling, and may encourage others to not repeat what has already been said, or to keep their speaking time short in a futile situation where most others feel differently.

**Stay on topic.** Focus on the issue at hand. Ask for clarification if you're lost in the process or discussion. If you get a great idea, or have a strong concern, but it doesn't quite fit in the current discussion, make a note to yourself. Mention the issue at an open point in the meeting (announcements, resident concerns, evaluation, etc.) or bring it up as an agenda item in a future meeting.

**Choose your issues.** Especially in large meetings, we need not share every idea that we have with the whole group.

**Speak for yourself, not others.** Saying “A lot of us think that we should ...” or “what she really meant was ...” takes away from others' chances to speak and clarify issues for themselves.

**Respect your own opinions.** Teach yourself not to include: “I don't know”, “never mind”, or “this may sound dumb, but” in your statement. Your ideas are valid!

**Respect others' right to their opinions.** Being critical is different from putting others down. Common examples of putting others down are: “I used to believe that, but now ...”, “How can you possibly say that ...”, etc. We need to check ourselves when we are about to “attack” or “one up” another member.

**Name issues, not people.** Call something “the idea that ...” instead of “Jane's idea.” It helps people focus on creating solutions instead of choosing sides.

Participating in group meetings is always a learning experience. If every person focuses on learning, meetings become easier and more fun. Each person needs to see what he/she needs to learn. One person may be shy or uncertain of her opinions. Another person may dominate meetings. Obviously these people have different skills to develop to become a more responsible participant. At every meeting, think about the skills you want to work on.

# The Four Roles of a Facilitator

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1. Insures that a group follows its own **process**.
  - Make sure maintenance functions are filled.
  - Make sure each agenda item has a sponsor at the meeting.
  - Clarify status and desired outcome for each agenda item.
  - Clarify motions before they are voted/consented upon. Have the minutes taker read a motion before the group takes action on it.
2. Keeps group conscious of **time**-factors.
  - Periodically summarize the discussion.
  - Take responsibility for keeping a discussion relevant.
  - Take responsibility for making process suggestions for the group to reject or accept.
3. Assists the group in analysis; lends **direction** where possible.
  - Always seek to maintain a positive atmosphere at the meeting.
  - Show appreciation to group and to individuals for progress or accomplishments.
  - Keep group from focusing entirely on details.
4. **Empowers** the group as a whole; works to circumvent any attempts to overpower the group.
  - Draw reticent people into the meeting.
  - Check in with the group often; be sensitive to group dynamics.
  - Learn to recognize hidden comments as proposals.

## Miscellaneous...

- Prepare for a meeting in advance.
- Review Agenda at the beginning of the meeting.
- Know the personalities of the group.

## Facilitation Tools

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### Techniques for Problem Solving in a Meeting

#### Traditional Problem-solving Process:

*Procedure:*

1. A problem is presented to the group.
2. Time is set aside for clarifying questions.
3. The nature of the problem is explored through discussion and alternative solutions are explored.
4. One of the alternative solutions is accepted by the group and is delegated to a group or individual for implementation.
5. The group is periodically appraised on the status of implementation and, once implemented, the solution is evaluated in the context of the problem it was designed to solve.

#### Brainstorming:

*Purpose:* To generate ideas in as creative a meeting environment as possible and allow participants to tap into the creative energy of the group as a whole.

*Procedure:*

1. A presentation of a problem or issue is made to the group.
2. After a time for questions and clarification, each member of the group presents an idea or two. Ideas should be spontaneous, so avoid using stacks (speakers' lists) unless you have to.
3. A recorder list all the ideas together.
4. Initially, every idea is accepted, no evaluation of any kind is allowed.
5. Typically, the group will go through a spurt of ideas, a lag, and then another spurt before exhausting its creative power. After going through this process, review the list and eliminate those ideas which are clearly unworkable. The remaining list should represent a fairly complete options available to the group.



## **Feedback:**

*Purpose:* To provide groups or individuals with personal reactions in a non-threatening manner.

*Procedure:*

1. A presentation is made to the group.
2. After a time for questions and clarification, each member of the group presents his/her reactions to the presentation. Every effort is made to make the reactions as honest and as tactful as possible, using the following guidelines:
  - Be specific, rather than general.
  - Be tentative, rather than absolute (You seem to assume...)
  - Be informing, rather than commanding.
  - Be suggesting, rather than directing.

The above criteria should allow those receiving feedback as much latitude as possible and prevents them from feeling attacked or cornered by the group.

## **Solipsists' Meeting:**

*Purpose:* To provide a meeting environment which is low in confrontation and allows individuals to think on their own (opposite of a brainstorm).

*Procedure:*

1. A presentation is made to the group, ending with a question to be explored.
2. Members of the group are asked to write their responses to the question anonymously.
3. After a sufficient time, the responses are collected and read aloud.
4. A follow-up question may be in order and the process is repeated.

## **Statement Polls/Round Robins:**

*Purpose:* To allow every member of the group to speak and to give the group an idea of where it stands collectively.

*Procedure:*

1. After a presentation and a brief discussion, each member of the group is asked to state his/her views on a topic.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

*"I know you believe you understood what you thought you heard me say,  
but I am not sure you realize that what you hear is not what I said."*

1. The more emotionally invested one becomes in a discussion, the easier it is to stop trying to communicate.
2. Mis-hearing occurs when what one person thinks s/he heard is not what the other person said.
3. Empathize and validate, try to step into the other person's shoes so that you can get a better understanding of what they are feeling. Then let them know what you understand by saying things such as "it sounds as though you are very angry" or "I hear you saying ...".
4. Let the other person know that you not only understand what they are saying, but you have felt similar emotions before - "I know I get very angry when I think someone isn't listening to me." When doing this you must make sure that you DO NOT agree or disagree with the person. You are not an advocate for either party.
5. Clarify what is going on by asking for more information that allows the speaker to tell his or her story. "What bothers you most about this situation?" or "What do you want people to understand that they don't understand right now?"
6. Summarize what you have heard to let the person know that you really have been listening and understanding. "So far what you have been saying to me is ... " or "The three main points you have been making are ... Is there anything that I have missed?"

### Do Not:

- Blame
- Interrupt
- Think of what you are going to say while the other person is talking
- Change the subject
- Ignore
- Jump to solutions

### More Effective Listening Techniques:

- Stop Talking.
- Ask questions when you don't understand.
- Be patient, give the other person time to say what they have to say.
- Concentrate, focus your ideas on the words, ideas, and feelings related to the subject.
- Look at the other person.
- Leave your emotions behind if you can.
- Get rid of distractions.
- Get the main points.
- Share responsibility for communication, only part of the responsibility rests with the speaker.
- React to ideas, not to the person. Don't let your feelings about the person influence your interpretation of what s/he says.
- Don't argue mentally, this sets up a barrier between you and the speaker and keeps you from really listening.
- Listen to. how something is said, attitudes and emotions may be more important than words.
- Don't antagonize the speaker, be aware of what effect you are having on the other person and adapt to it.
- Don't classify the speaker, too often we classify people as certain types and then try to fit everything they say into pigeonholes.
- Recognize your own prejudices.
- Keep in mind that the initial issues brought up, are not the issues really involved in a dispute.

# CONFLICT RESOLUTION TECHNIQUES

## Necessary Assumptions

1. A strong belief that a mutually acceptable solution is possible. This means that you feel optimistic, not pessimistic.
2. An equally strong belief in the desirability of a mutually acceptable solution.
3. A belief that cooperation and collaboration are far more important than one person winning; beating another.
4. A belief that everyone is of equal value, and therefore, each person's version of what is happening, each person's needs, each person's feelings are of equal value.
5. A belief that differences of opinion and disagreements are often helpful in discovering the truth, accuracy, increased information, a better solution.
6. A belief that disagreements do not -mean that one person must. win and one person must lose, and that the winner is better than the loser.
7. A belief that each person really wants to get along with others, regardless of how they are behaving right now.
8. A trust that we all could compete, but can and will choose to cooperate.

## Communication Guidelines

1. Speak only for yourself. Describe your issues, or the way their behavior makes you feel. Do not tell the other person how he or she feels, or what their underlying reasons and needs are.
2. Let the other person know that you heard and understood them and that you respect their point of view. It does not mean you have to agree or submit. If you are not sure you understand, ask them to clarify.
3. Refrain from becoming defensive if you are criticized, attacked, spoken for, or any other style that you find offensive.
4. Show the other person that you have regard for them and their issues and their perceptions. It does not mean that you are stopped from disagreeing; you just don't belittle or dismiss the other person's views.
5. Listen without interrupting. If they have been speaking for a very long time, gently intervene to say that you would like to respond.
6. Do not get sidetracked into tangential issues and arguments. Bring it back gently to the primary issues causing conflict. If the discussion. is relevant but heading nowhere, acknowledge this together.
7. Do not 'react in kind to emotional or argumentative tones. Remember, you have a commitment to a mutually satisfying solution, not to coming out on top.
8. State your views in a calm, clear, non-accusatory tone.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION TECHNIQUES

### Communication Skills to Use:

- Describe facts or behaviors
- Identify your observations as your opinions
- Listen attentively and respectfully
- Listen for how the other person feels and what he/she wants
- Concentrate on solutions, not who did what
- Suggest, not demand
- Criticize the issue and its effects, not the person
- Be specific; stick with details, not generalizations
- Deal with things that can't be changed

### Communication Elements to Avoid:

- Loaded words
- Not really listening
- Character assassination
- Blaming - "You"
- Judging and criticizing
- Moralizing
- Being patronizing
- A hostile tone
- "Why did you?"
- Advice-giving

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 1. Defender   | Justifies and defends position.  |
| 2. Soldier    | Fights back, threatens, punishes, seeks revenge, insults, or berates other person.   |
| 3. God        | Dictates the resolution, uses power of established authority.  |
| 4. Diverter   | Diverts discussion entirely or focuses on superficial issues, postpones conflict, complains to a third party.  |
| 5. Avoider    | Avoids at all costs, ignores, doesn't become involved in situations that are conflict-prone.   |
| 6. Harmonizer | Smooths over conflict; emphasizes harmony, peace, and warmth ... disregards the validity of people's concerns in the predominating need to maintain peace. |
| 7. Apologizer | Expresses regret.  |
| 8. Abdicator  | Agrees with other person, takes blame, feels it is hopeless, and gives up.   |
| 9. Negotiator | Tries to find a compromise and bargains.   |

# **CANBRIDGE**

*a process collective*

(Consensus And Network Building Resolving Impasse and  
Developing Group Effectiveness)

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Excerpt from: **Conflict: Fight, Flight or Opportunity?**

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## **6. Method for working with conflict**

### **Step 1. What are the feelings?**

- Acknowledge the emotional experience of everyone who is a major player in the conflict. Stay with it until everyone feels heard (as opposed to agreed with). **Hint:** you may need to ask each player what “feeling heard” looks like to them; answers may vary.
- Focus on one person at a time until everyone has had their say. Other things being equal, start with the person in the greatest distress and work toward the person least triggered.
- Summarize the common ground and note the differences. Resist the temptation to try to fix it, or talk anyone into changing their feelings.

### **Step 2. What’s the story?**

- Give each person the chance to tell their version of what happened and what their reaction was. Discourage attempts at solutions at this stage; that comes later.
- As with the prior step, summarize the common ground and note the differences.

**Top Secret:** Groups often get hung up (or even polarized) by the efforts of protagonists to get group members to take sides and decide who was “right.” Resist the temptation to determine Truth and seek Relationship instead, emphasizing the ties among protagonists and building a bridge between them.

- Steps One and Two can generally be done simultaneously, just be sure not to let someone slide over naming their feelings as they get engrossed in their story.

### **Step 3. What’s at stake?**

- Let the answers here be wide open: it could be as grandiose as “world peace” or as mundane as “second helpings of dessert.”
- Sometimes a major element in conflict is a gross misperception of what another wants, and that can be revealed at this stage. The objective here is to find out why this conflict matters for all the players.

### **Step 4. What do you want to do about it?**

- While similar to the last question, this is an action statement, and only comes after the prior three questions have been addressed. Now, finally, we are getting to problem solving.

**Top Secret:** If the responses here are still coming out with emotional charge then it’s a sure sign that you went through the previous steps too quickly and someone didn’t feel heard or respected; go back and do them again.

- Note that the framework here is what do *you* want to do, not what you want *others* to do. It generally works better if each person starts with what they can unilaterally contribute to forward progress, and build from there.
- Unlike Step 3, here you are looking for measurable commitments. Thus, don’t settle for, “To feel better about what we’re each doing to help the group.” Insist instead on something like, “To meet every Wed evening at 7 pm, right before the group meeting, to share what we’ve each done in the prior week to follow through on our group commitments and to talk about anything extra we’ve done.”

**Top Secret:** By making the answers to Step 4 measurable, it gives each protagonist concrete information with which they can contradict negative feelings about the other protagonists (that is, despite a tendency to indulge in bad feelings about the other person, they have the chance to resist going there by reminding themselves that the other person actually did the thing they said they’d do).

## 7. Hints for facilitating conflict

- It is easy to get stuck looking only at positions. Yet positions are derivative, not fundamental. Look for the interests and values that underlie positions and try to put together different positions that take into account everyone's interests.
- Look for misunderstandings about what one person is saying to another, and spend time clearing those up. Look for ways to recast a statement into a frame of reference that may be more accessible to the listener.

**Top Secret:** Information is concentrated in the resistance. Understanding all you can about someone's resistance is often the key to getting the conversation unstuck.

- When stuck, try shifting formats. If open discussion isn't working, try a sharing circle. Or perhaps breaking into small discussions groups before returning to plenary. Occasional use of guided visualizations can be startlingly effective at transcending energy blocks.

**Top Secret:** If facilitating a session where conflict is expected, come prepared with different options for engaging the topic, so you are ready with an alternative if blockage occurs.

Keep in mind that there is a wide range of formats, and what may be comfortable to one party may not be to another. Try to offer choices so everyone has something that feels familiar—or at least non-threatening.

- Consider if family of origin or cultural differences are gumming up the works. For example, among Afro-American, Hispanic, Italian, or Jewish families, normal conversation may be high-spirited, with many talking at once. Among families from northern European cultures, normal conversation means one person speaking at a time, in well-modulated voices. In the former, speaking calmly and slowly means you're not feeling well. In the latter, interrupting with animation means you're angry or out of control. There is no right or wrong here, but your group may unwittingly be favoring one style over another, effectively (though unintentionally) shutting down a chunk of your group. Pretty expensive.

Think about how you can mix up meeting styles to allow everyone in the group at least some of what they're comfortable with.

- When conflict is stubborn to resolve, there are multiple possible explanations, including:
  - not having looked deeply enough into underlying factors
  - a shift in underlying values such that all parties no longer belong in the same group
  - mental or emotional instability among one or more protagonists (careful here: this happens much less often than amateur psychologists diagnose it!)