

Discipline #9 – Framework for Creative Conflict Resolution

Injunction [What to do]:

Remembering that you cannot change anyone but yourself, identify something which is arising in your life that is so troublesome to you that you are willing to change what you do in order to create what you need.

1. Identify the Significant Relationship. There may be several relationships which are implicated in this troublesome circumstance. Pick one. We can't address them all, all at once.
2. Identify the Pattern of Conflict. There is something about this circumstance which keeps happening over and over. There may even be several patterns. Again, pick one. We are trying to take something very complex and tease out a part of it which will be simple enough to resolve.
3. Clarify the Event. Describe the event in such a way that all parties to the event will agree that this is what happened. If you can't agree on the event that already happened, you will never come to an agreement with yourself about what you hope to have happen.
4. Feel the effects of the event. Notice the impact the event has on you. What are your sensations, emotions, thoughts, and wishes? When have you had these feelings before?
5. Identify the qualities that you need when this event occurs. Yes, you want others to be different; but if they were as you want them to be, what qualities would arise in the relationship?
6. Choose and action. Nothing will change until we change our behavior. What can you do which will move you toward what you need without expecting or depending on the other to change.

Rationale [Why do it]:

The reason for steps #1-5 is to get to #6. We can't count on anything changing until we change. But we are often in a hurry to get to *what we are going to do* before we know *what we need*. We put step #6 ahead of the others. We risk making a choice that will get us the opposite of what we need if we choose an action before we are clear about what we need. We can't know what we need until we know how we are being affected. And there are many events causing many effects, so which one are we addressing first? Each of these steps is essential to discovering what we need so we can act to create it.

Conflicts can be very complicated. Sometimes the complexity of the conflict leaves us certain that it can't be resolved. When we go to the trouble to tease the complexity apart and only address one part of it at a time, we discover that it is manageable in small pieces. The only way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time.

Promises [What it will get you]:

We imagine that we can't resolve conflicts unless the other changes. By consistently using this discipline to change how we are choosing to show up in the conflicted relationship, we not only discover what we need and thus what we might do, we discover how powerful we really are and how effective we can be at constructing what we need.

The truth is we can only change ourselves. It turns out this is an immensely powerful thing to do when the transformation we create for ourselves is one which moves us closer to our own center. This discipline is designed to help us become more Self aware at those very times when we are going to be most inclined to focus on the other.

If you resist the temptation to try to manipulate the other into changing but instead pay keen attention to how the conflict is affecting you, what you are feeling, what you are making these events mean, what they remind you of from your past, then you will draw yourself closer to your Self. As a figure skater in a spin gains speed when she draws her arms in, so will you gain power when you move more of yourself towards your own center. When you focus only on others and how you want them to change or what your judgment of the them is, then you move away from your own center and you pull yourself out of balance.

Suggestions [How to do it better]:

Be patient with yourself as you work at mastering this discipline. The first few times you try it you will almost certainly feel as though it isn't working. Check to see how you know it isn't working. What do you look to as evidence that it isn't working? Are you waiting to see if the other is going to change? If so, you are trying to change them. If instead you are looking to see if you have been able to change your own behavior and you find that you can't yet, then you are not yet able to see some of the motivators for your own behavior. You may have decided what you want to do but can't get yourself to act the way you decided. That is fine. Just focus your attention on the part of you that doesn't want to do what the rest of you decided was the best thing to do. As long as you are moving to greater self awareness you are making progress in addressing the conflict.

Only very rarely are we able to make a shift in our behavior and be able to sustain the shift in a way that fully resolves a conflict. When we are able to do so, we have reason to celebrate. But more commonly we find we have only been able to address a part of the problem or we find that we were able to show up differently for a while and then slipped back into old habits. Be gentle with yourself. You have been doing what you have been doing for a very long time and it is hard to change our habits, especially when we are under pressure.

For that reason it is especially important that you notice any small success you have at shifting what you are able to do and to enjoy how it opens things up for you. Give yourself praise for your successes, no matter how small. This will help you gain momentum in your transformation.

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