



*PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKBOOK*

*ASSERTIVENESS AND MANAGING CONFLICT*

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# ***ASSERTIVENESS & MANAGING CONFLICT***

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## **INTRODUCTION**

**"People are like a teabags, put them in hot water and they get stronger"**

**Eleanor Roosevelt**

Thinking about managing conflict may stimulate many different thoughts and feelings in all of us. Some may be filled with dread, others want to rise to the bait, and have a prepared list of what we want to say. In the short term it may be easier to ignore, yet if we don't face up to it and manage it appropriately, conflict can have far reaching effects. At work we often avoid conflict for fear of "rocking the boat" or because we don't know people so well. What we often don't realise or forget, is that conflict managed well creates stronger relationships and lines of communication that didn't exist before, so there are great benefits to the workplace and our personal lives for taking the plunge and facing up to it. As the quote above suggests, we also grow from the experience as well.

When we are in the heat of the moment what is often challenging is actually managing ourselves, whilst attempting to stand our ground and get our needs met.

This workbook provides you with an opportunity to explore firstly your attitude and current style to managing conflict and dealing with anger. It also will allow you to identify the long term consequences of not dealing with a situation that is causing you concern

We will then go on to consider how you behave with different people in different situations, how you monitor and stay in touch with your feelings, and increase your understanding of the causes of conflict. Part of the day will give you the chance to practice managing yourself in conflict situations, how to stay with what you need and not give in, and also how to reach a collaborative approach where both you and the other person reach a mutual conclusion.

If you can, find someone else who would like to develop their skills and work in partnership, supporting each other through the exercises, or alternatively contact Mary Gregory Associates for coaching that will ensure your progress in this area.

We will ask you to look at situations you have experienced and those you want to address in the future. You have taken the first constructive step to managing conflict by using this workbook, we hope by the end you will have worked out which is the best route for you to take.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT**

### ***How do I respond to conflict?***

We all have developed our own ways of responding to conflict, and these have been shaped over the years by our experiences. Patterns of behaviour are usually adopted from when we are quite young as survival strategies for ourselves, however as we mature these ways of coping may not always be the most helpful to us, and may need to be modified. As a way of recognising how you manage conflict, what you do well and what you may need to work on complete the grid on the next page.

Think of some example situations where you responded to conflict, and note it in the appropriate column.

Mark ✓ against any behaviours you know you can use when responding to conflict

Mark ✳ against those behaviours you think are most helpful in a conflict situation

Mark ↑ against those behaviours you'd like to develop in some way

After completing the grid on the next page, answer the following questions to help you identify your preferred style and areas for development.

- **Which type of reactions do you generally give, when faced with conflict?**
- **Would others who know you, agree with your perception of yourself?**
- **Which of your styles of reacting were most appropriate to the situation at the time?**
- **Which were inappropriate?**
- **Which type would you like to develop for the future?**

***How do I respond to conflict?***

<b>Type of Reaction</b>	<b>Behaviour</b>	<b>Says things like....</b>	<b>My Example situation</b>	✓	✘	↑
<b>Defensive</b>	Justifies & defends position	"Let me explain" "Yes, but.." "You don't understand"				
<b>Fighter</b>	Fights back, threatens, punishes, seeks revenge, insults	"Oh yeah?" "Says who?" "Prove it!"				
<b>Angry</b>	Quickly reacts with angry words	"That's stupid!" "Get Lost"				
<b>God</b>	Dictates resolutions; uses power of established authority	"Of course I'm right!" "Do it my way, because I'm the (boss, parent)"				
<b>Diverter</b>	Diverts discussion or focuses on shallow issues, complains to a 3 <sup>rd</sup> party	"That's not the real problem" "Let's discuss this later"				
<b>Avoider</b>	Avoids or ignores conflict, doesn't become involved in risky situations	"Let's forget it" "That doesn't bother me"				
<b>Harmonizer</b>	Smooths over the conflict, emphasises peace & warmth	"this isn't important enough to fight over" "Both of us are right" "We all need to work together"				
<b>Apologizer</b>	Expresses regret, assumes blame	"I'm sorry" "Its my fault"				
<b>Abdicator</b>	Agrees with the other person; feels its hopeless & gives in	"You're right" "Oh well, it's hopeless, no point in trying"				
<b>Crier</b>	Tears flow easily					
<b>Negotiator</b>	Tries to find a compromise; bargains with people in the conflict	"Let's talk this over so we can find a solution"				

***HOW DO I MANAGE MY ANGER?***

Anger is one of the commonest and strongly felt emotions. Yet it is often the least expressed, or is expressed in a way which is inappropriate and unhelpful in terms of resolving differences. Understanding more about what we think and believe around anger can help us begin to identify how we do or don't express it. Answer the questions below to find out more about your own attitude to anger.

**What words do you use to describe anger? (Remember anger can range from mild irritation to extreme rage)**

**Who or what makes you feel angry?**

**What sensations do you have in your body when angry feelings come up?**

**When do you actually express your anger?**

**Who do you feel safe enough with to show your anger to?**

**What messages did you hear in childhood, from the media, your own head about showing anger to others?**

**What fears do you have about expressing your anger? What do you think will happen if you allow yourself to get really angry?**

**How do you deal with angry feelings when they occur? Do you have any ways of letting off steam?**

**CONFLICT...IS IT GOOD OR BAD TO DEAL WITH IT**

What often stops us managing conflict is the thought of dealing with it and that "it'll only make matters worse". This is often short term thinking and if we considered the long term consequences, we might be able to see why it is important to face up to the issues that concern.

For example, I once had a boss whom I liked a lot, but she had the tendency to lose her temper and really go off at the deep end. The first few times this happened I was shocked and didn't know how to respond. Then I began to understand her better and because in those days I avoided conflict, I put up with it, or managed to keep out of her way when things were hot. The short term gains were that I kept out of trouble, didn't have to face the stress of having a showdown. The long-term consequences were that I became dissatisfied with my job and did not have the means to talk openly and honestly with my boss as we hadn't established this level of communication. I also was passed over for promotion, because I was considered too passive and not gutsy enough. By not standing up for and valuing my own needs, I therefore set up the situation where others didn't even notice what I had to offer.

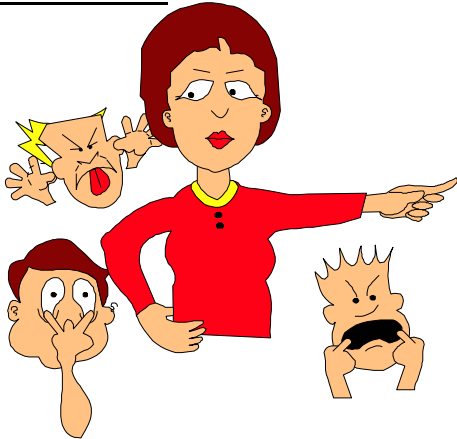
Think of 3 or 4 situations where you are not addressing the conflict, or are addressing it in a way that is not helpful.

Note down what the short term gains are for you.  
Next consider what the long term consequences of this are.  
Finally, what conclusions can you draw from this?

SITUATION	SHORT TERM GAINS	LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES

## Four Types of Behaviour

### AGGRESSIVE



#### Things we say:

"I always win"

"If I were you..."

"Get out of my way"

"I don't give a xx about you"

#### Ways we behave:

Bossy, arrogant, bulldozing, intolerant  
opinionated, overbearing

### INDIRECT AGGRESSIVE



#### Things we say:

"That's good for the likes of you"

"It's alright, I'll manage"

"I'll be ill if you do that"

"Can't you take a joke?"

#### Ways we behave:

Sarcastic, deceiving, ambiguous,  
insinuating, manipulating, guilt  
inducing

### PASSIVE



#### Things we say:

"Whatever you want it's OK by me"

"I'm wanting for my life to get better"

"I'm not important"

#### Ways we behave:

Waiting, moaning, helpless, apologetic  
Submissive, apologetic

### ASSERTIVE



#### Things we say:

"Lets talk about how what we can do"

"I'm responsible for myself"

"I feel..." "I'll take risks"

"I'm OK, you're OK"

#### Ways we behave:

Direct, honest, accepting, responsible  
spontaneous, values self & others

## ***Different Situations – How do you behave when:***

### **In your work & study:**

You are criticised legitimately by a superior

You are unjustly criticised

You have to confront a subordinate or colleague for continual lateness, sloppy work, or dishonesty

You feel your boss continually demands more from you than what you are paid to do

Nosy colleagues interfere in your personal life

You notice that someone has worked particularly hard or made an extra effort

You receive a compliment on your appearance, or someone praises you for your work.

### **In public:**

You are in a café and the food served to you is cold

Someone lights up a cigar at the next table, just as you start to eat

The market stall holder starts to serve you fruit from the box at the back of the stall which is inferior to that on display

Someone pushes in front of you in the bus queue

You take back an article which has broken

Your GP dismisses you with a vague comment when you ask for more information

A sales assistant has gone to considerable time and trouble to show you some merchandise, which is not quite what you are looking for

You are confronted with an unhelpful receptionist

### **Among friends:**

Someone compliments you on your appearance

A friend wants to borrow something which you need yourself

A friend persistently uses you as a shoulder to cry on

You feel angry about the way a friend has treated you

You want to ask for a repayment of a loan you have made

You are upset by a racist or sexist comment

Others are putting down someone you think a lot about

You feel put down or ignored by a friend

### **At home:**

Everyone leaves the cleaning and washing to you

You want to say "No" to a request made to you by one of your children

You want to say "No" to the proposed visit of a relative

You want to say "Yes" to an invitation but your partner has other plans

One of your parents criticises you

You want some privacy at home

You are irritated by a persistent habit in someone you love

You feel the family spend too much time watching TV

Anne Dickinson – A Woman in your own Right

## **GETTING IN TOUCH WITH OUR FEELINGS**

When considering how we manage conflict, it would be unrealistic not to look into how we understand and manage our emotions.

When we are faced with a major change, such as the end of a serious relationship, a bad accident, birth of a baby, we accept that feelings are associated with these situations. We tend to pay less attention to how we feel day to day in less impactful situations. Even in everyday situations, saying no to the boss, responding to an angry customer, our feelings impact greatly on us and affect how we behave.

How we feel relates very much to how our needs are being met, and our needs fall into three main categories:

The need to give and receive LOVE,  
The need to have a CHOICE,  
The need to UNDERSTAND and be UNDERSTOOD.

Depending on whether these needs are fulfilled or not will influence the type of emotions we experience, and are illustrated on the chart below.

Need	Experience	Emotion
To give & receive love	Fulfilled	Happiness & contentment
	Unfulfilled	Sadness
To have choice	Fulfilled	Strength & enthusiasm
	Unfulfilled	Anger
To understand and be understood	Fulfilled	Secure and valued
	Unfulfilled	Fear

### ***Feelings & our physical bodies***

How we feel can sometimes mystify us and we say things like “I don’t know what came over me” or “I wasn’t being myself”. As feelings are often hard for us to explain and difficult to understand, we often refer to them as being outside our bodies.

In fact how we feel emotionally has a very clear link with our bodies. Our emotions and feelings are not imagined, but are real physical internal responses. The brain stimulates different chemicals to be released into our organs and we may help us to identify the emotion, by noticing the type of physical response. For example, when feeling anxious and fearful, we may feel “sick with nerves” or need to go to the toilet more frequently.

### ***HOW DO YOU PHYSICALLY REPRESENT YOUR FEELINGS?***

By identifying what you physically feel when you experience different emotions, you will begin to fine tune your senses to what is happening for you in the “here and now”, and this will help you manage yourself and your emotions more effectively when responding to different situations.

On the chart on the next page, identify the last time you remember your needs being fulfilled or unfulfilled.

- Close your eyes and take yourself back to that situation
- Recall what sensation in your body you associated with that feeling.(Note: the examples are my own experience and will vary from one person to another)
- Where in your body did you experience this sensation?
- What effect did this have on you?

**HOW DO YOU PHYSICALLY REPRESENT YOUR FEELINGS**

Unfulfilled Situation	<b>LOVE</b>	Fulfilled Situation
Emotion : <b>Sadness</b>		Emotion : <b>Happiness</b>
Physical Sensation (e.g. lump in throat)		Physical Sensation (e.g. warm glow in our midriff)
Unfulfilled Situation	<b>CHOICE</b>	Fulfilled Situation
Emotion : <b>Anger</b>		Emotion : <b>Strength</b>
Physical Sensation (e.g. shaking, sickness in stomach)		Physical Sensation (e.g. centred body)
Unfulfilled Situation	<b>UNDER- STOOD</b>	Fulfilled Situation
Emotion : <b>Fear</b>		Emotion : <b>Secure</b>
Physical Sensation (e.g. breathlessness)		Physical Sensation (e.g. relaxed muscles)

***HOW DOES YOUR BODY RESPOND TO CONFLICT***

Consider some situations where you were managing conflict and reflect on how your body reacted to these.

Mark on the diagram below where and how your body responded.



## **Why Does Conflict Occur?**

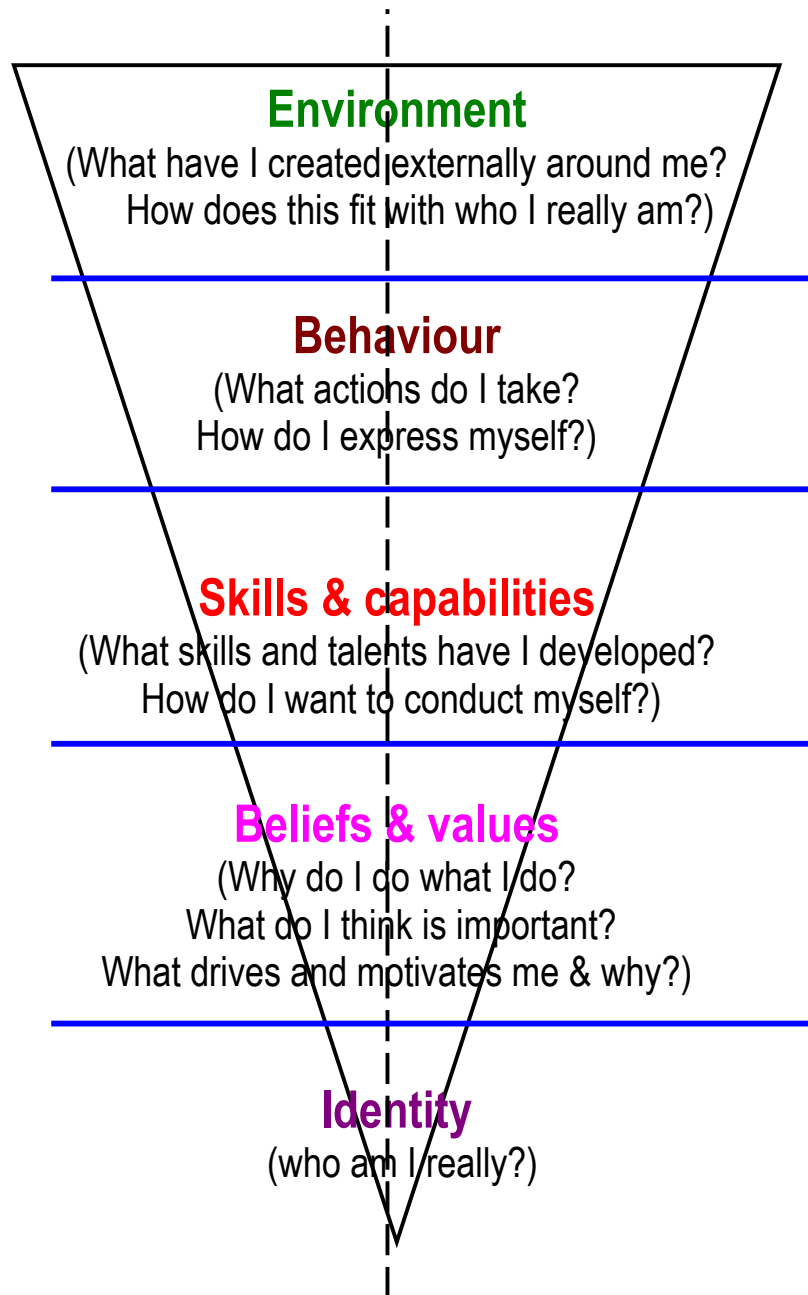
The first stage to looking at why conflict occurs is to begin with ourselves. A useful way of understanding ourselves further, is to imagine that each of us is made up of different layers – a bit like a cabbage or an onion. At the heart or core is our true selves, our identity, surrounded by other layers that include our beliefs and the things we think are important, our skills, our behaviour, and finally out to our environment. (See diagram on next page)

The goal of personal development, is to achieve a line of harmony or balance radiating through each layer. This means that our beliefs & values are a true reflection of our identity, the skills and behaviours we adopt comply with our beliefs and values, and in the environment we live and work, we represent the things that are important to us, from the way we choose to dress, the type of car we drive, the people we choose as our friends, the organisations we work in.

### **A Conflict of Values**

What often happens when we get into conflict with someone, is that there is a mis-match between our personal values and those of the other person. For example, when I first lived with my partner, we found we argued a lot about how things should be done around the house. My partner was much tidier than I and liked clearing up to be done immediately. He valued order and could only relax when there was a sense of space and tidiness around him. I on the other hand, valued time to relax and rest over and above keeping things neat and tidy, so I felt OK about leaving things in a mess, whilst I read a book or had a drink. Our values influenced our behaviour which in turn pushed against the values of each other. My partner found my approach sloppy and infuriating, I found his repressive and stressful. These differences which were demonstrated in our behaviour arose from our different values and how we prioritised them. Both of us had the right to live by our values, and yet the differences in these values caused conflict between us

## The Different Levels to each Person



Line of harmony & balance - being true to our real self

Taken from Robert Dilts' "Neurological Levels" (1991)  
Adapted by M. Gregory (1998)

## **Reviewing Your Own Priorities & Values**

Think about 3 or 4 situations at work or at home where you find yourself becoming angry, or getting into conflict and describe them below. Complete the second and third columns – think about the situation from your own perspective, then put yourself in the shoes of the other person.

<b>Description of Conflict Situation</b>	<b>What do you feel strongly about &amp; why? How are you demonstrating this in your behaviour? What value is underpinning this?</b>	<b>What do you think the other person feels strongly about and why? How are they demonstrating this? What value is underpinning this?</b>
<b>Situation 1</b>		
<b>Situation 2</b>		
<b>Situation 3</b>		
<b>Situation 4</b>		

## ***Reviewing Your Own Priorities & Values***

### ***Reaching a Resolution***

Now working with a partner take turns to discuss one situation each.

Consider the situation from a neutral/objective position and begin to identify how the differences can be resolved. Bear in mind resolution is all about finding a solution that keeps each party happy – a win-win solution. For example, my partner and I overcame our differences through me making more of an effort to do simple things such as hanging up wet towels, loading the dishwasher as I go, so keeping things tidier as we went along. My partner agreed notice what I was doing and not to make such a big fuss about smaller things being out of place.

Remember to identify what you can do differently. Although it might seem easier to say what others should do differently, we cannot be responsible for making them change. The only people we can truly change is ourselves.

**Step outside the situation and consider from a neutral viewpoint.  
What do you see happening in this situation?**

**What possibilities are there for a resolution?**

**What action or approach can you personally take?**

## **KEY ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOURS FOR MANAGING CONFLICT**

### **Clear & specific language**

When we are in a conflict situation, we often find it difficult to say what we mean. We may tip over our words or say things which may be taken by the other person as an attack and the result is that we become even more polarised in our views.

### **Describe as opposed to judging**

Keeping our language descriptive as opposed to evaluative and judgmental will not only help us get our point across, but also aid in the overall control of our emotions.

**For example**                    “You raised your voice three times when you spoke to me”

as opposed to

“You’re always shouting and bossing me about”

### **Use the “I” word**

It can be very easy in the heat of the moment to start pointing the finger and blaming the other person, it can also be easy to make global statements about something that is in fact your opinion or belief. To avoid confusion around this, use I at the beginning of your sentences

**For example**                    “I think that talking to people in that way is unproductive”

As opposed to

“The way you speak to people is really unhelpful to them”

### **Use Self Disclosure**

Saying how we feel about something can help the development of a common understanding, but be careful that this doesn’t fall into judging or blaming the other person

**For example**                    “When you didn’t turn up I felt really mad because we made an arrangement and I was left waiting”

As opposed to

“When you didn’t turn up I was really mad, because you always seem to forget anything that is important to me”

## Use Empathy

In resolving conflict, empathy is a valuable tool for narrowing the gap between two polarised positions. However it must be genuine or it may be counter productive.

**For example:** “I didn’t realise my voice was so loud, it must be pretty unnerving to be on the receiving end of it”

as opposed to

“I appreciate its unnerving to be on the receiving end sometime, but you need to toughen up”

## ***Listening & Asking Questions***

### **Active Listening**

If we want to maintain our personal power in a conflict situation, then we need to gain information about the other person's perspective.

By paying attention to and actively listening to what the other person is saying we are more likely to identify what is behind their concern. Active listening is truly focussing on what the other person is saying and picking up their message both factually and emotionally.

### **Practical Exercise**

- With a friend or colleague, ask them to talk about their favourite subject for three minutes
- You then focus on really listening to what they are saying.
- Afterwards, summarise what they said and check this out with them.
- Then summarise what emotion was coming through while they were talking and check this out with them.

### **Asking Questions**

Remember that conflict is usually value driven so its important to find out what may be the values that are held by the other person. Asking questions can help us identify values. Its more helpful to ask open questions, those that seek lots of information, rather than closed questions, those that seek a "yes" or "no" response. :

Open questions that identify values are:                    "What is important to you about that?"  
                                                                                  "Why do you want it that way?"

Questions can also help us reach a solution:            "What would you like to see happen?"  
                                                                                  "How do you see us working together?"

### **Practical Exercise**

Think of a situation where you are experiencing conflict.

What three questions could you use to help you find out more about the other persons values?

What three questions would help you begin to find a solution?

## ***Putting Yourself in the Other Persons Shoes***

When managing difficult situations, a lot of conflict can arise from the people involved having very different perspectives on things and neither taking the time to appreciate the others viewpoint. Alternatively some people are well able to see things from the others view and therefore often concede their own rights and feelings for the other persons.

A useful way of thinking about an issue which considers all peoples views and experiences within a situation, is to think about it from 3 different positions.

### **Position 1: consider the difficult situation from your own perspective.**

- What are you experiencing?
- What do you see happening?
- What do you hear going on?
- How is this making you feel?

### **Position 2: consider the difficult situation from the other person perspective**

- What are they experiencing?
- What do they see happening?
- What do they hear going on?
- How is it making them feel?

### **Position 3: step outside of both peoples perspective and consider objectively**

- What is happening between the 2 parties?**
- What is happening between them?
- Objectively what do you see each doing?
- Objectively what do you hear each saying?

In looking at the situation from all different positions, you should be able to gain an all round view of each persons needs and particularly having considered 3rd position, identify ways in which the issue can be resolved that satisfies these.

## ***Positions Practical***

Work with a partner to help take you through this exercise.

Identify a situation where you are finding the other person difficult to manage.

Use 3 chairs and identify a different one for 1st, 2nd or 3rd position. (Alternatively, you may wish to stand and use different floor positions)

1) Get into 1st position.

Describe the situation from your own experiences.

Really get into it and identify what you hear and see the other person doing and how it is making you feel?

2) Get into 2nd position and change chairs.

Consider the situation from the other person's perspective.

Really try and get into what must be going on for them, and try and experience it as if you were them. What do they see & hear from you? How is this situation making them feel?

3) Now move outside of the situation and take 3rd position, in the 3rd chair.

Consider the situation objectively. What do you observe happening between these 2 people? What do you hear going on?

Identify the positive intention from the person in position 2 to the person in position 1.

4) Return to 1st position and move to your original chair

As yourself in 1st position, consider the situation again bearing in mind the insight you have gain from experiencing all 3 positions.

Identify actions you now want to take and ideas you have for handling the situation differently.



## Further Reading & Resources

Springboard Women's Development	Liz Willis & Jenny Daisley
A Woman in Your Own Right	Anne Dickson
Emotional Competence	Daniel Goleman
You Don't Have to Take It	Ginny NicCarthy, Naomi Gottlieb, Sandra Coffman
T.A. Today	Ian Stewart & Vann Joines
NLP at Work	Sue Knight
Training for assertiveness	Lucy Seifert
Feel the Fear & Do It Anyway	Susan Jeffers
Growing Up Again	Jean Illsley Clarke & Connie Dawson
The Dance of Anger	Harriet J. Lerner