

How To Channel Conflict Into Change

Conflict is not a dirty word. It may feel uncomfortable and it may not be enjoyable but it's a necessary evil. And it's a constant in our lives whether we enjoy it or not.

If we want to make better decisions, we need to be able to hear others tell us when we're wrong—of course, we're only human and this doesn't come easy to us. If we want to get other people to commit to an action, we need to listen to them and understand their concerns.

For the most part, we don't enjoy conflict. This is because most of us have had experience with the "bad" kind: when you try to "win" the conversation by using your power to squash the other person.

Instead we need to approach a conversation with an attitude of trying to understand, rather than persuade. If we can really listen and make sure the other person feels heard, we are in a better position to explain our point of view in a way that they can understand. We're more likely to be able to frame our arguments in a way that makes sense to them. And we might just change their minds.

Conflict fuels change, and while change is inevitable in life it is vital in business. Conflict also makes life interesting. It is entirely necessary for intellectual, emotional, and even moral growth.

There are two ways not to approach conflict: squashing and going speechless.

Using your power to push others into accepting your proposed solution can range from using your influence as a manager, to simply shouting or embarrassing the other person. Doing this teaches the people around you that you're not interested in what they have to say.

Withdrawing from the conversation and avoiding the topic is also not useful. It's ok to let it go if you don't think it's worthwhile to engage, but you really must let it go and not complain or be resentful. If you can't do that, you need to learn some tools and techniques to approach conflict in the right way.

Two ways you can improve your ability to approach conflict effectively are by remembering your purpose and listening.

You are not getting into a conflict for the sake of it (if you are, then stop!) Instead it's because you care about the person and/or the issue at stake. Bear that in mind and monitor your behavior so that it reflects your long-term purpose.

Too often we speak when we should be listening. You will need to speak up, but we're likely to be a lot more effective if we do so after really listening to understand the other person.

It takes courage to enter into a conflict. It's hard to honestly articulate your needs or

concerns. And it's really hard to listen to people who don't agree with you and to in turn respect their point of view. The people who can do this will find themselves respected and able to make real change happen.

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