



Conflict and Defensive Communication

ASSP April Lunch Meeting

Mary Sue Love, Ph.D.

April 8, 2019

"Interpersonal skills (soft skills) are crucial if you want to become a great safety professional."

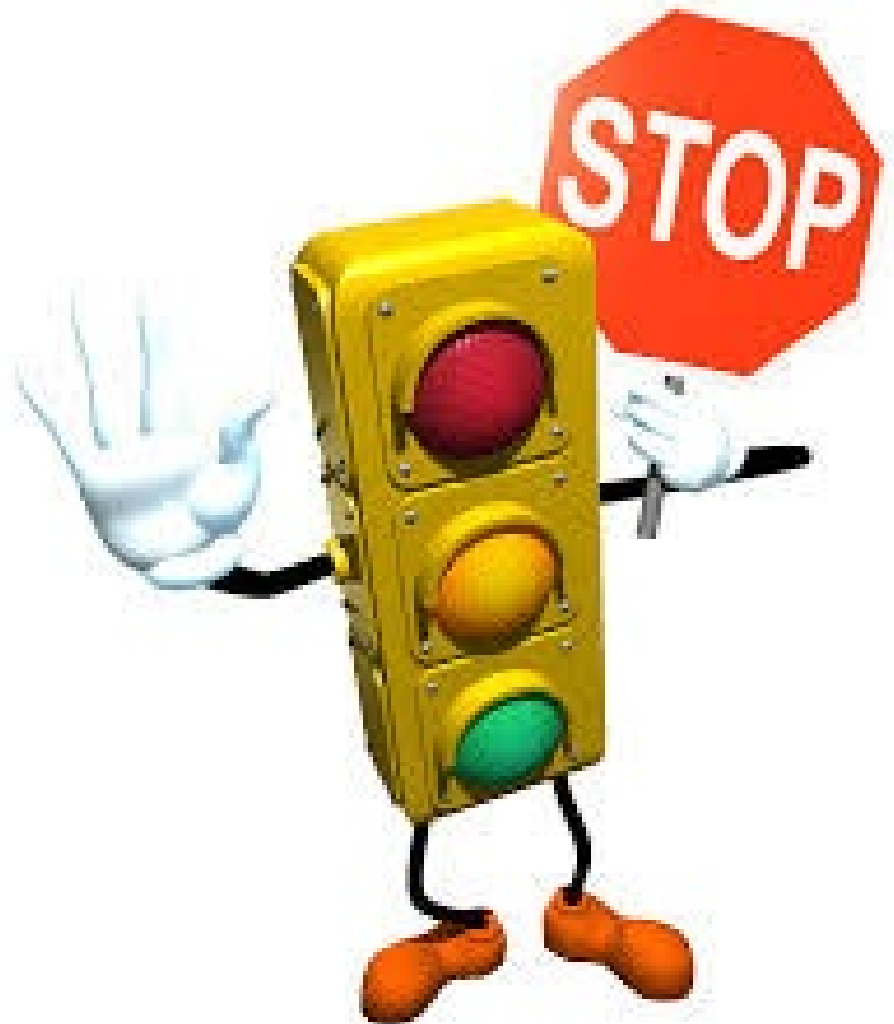
"The work of a safety professional is 80 percent soft skills and 20 percent knowledge. It is guaranteed that you will be dealing with difficult individuals or groups who don't share the same goals as you. You will need to learn how to win overall all kinds of different personalities."

--Christian Fournier



Agenda

- Discuss Conflict & Anger
- Discover your conflict handling style and Your Anger Style
- Discuss Defensive Communication and How to Reduce its Negative Impacts



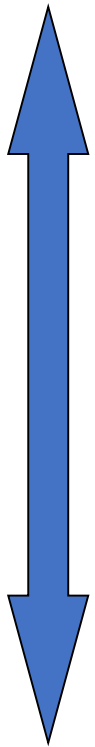
Interpersonal Conflict...

- ... is an *expressed* struggle,
- between *two or more* parties,
- that are *interdependent*,
- involving strong *emotion*,
- and a *perceived blockage* to *needs* and/or *values*.

(N. Katz)

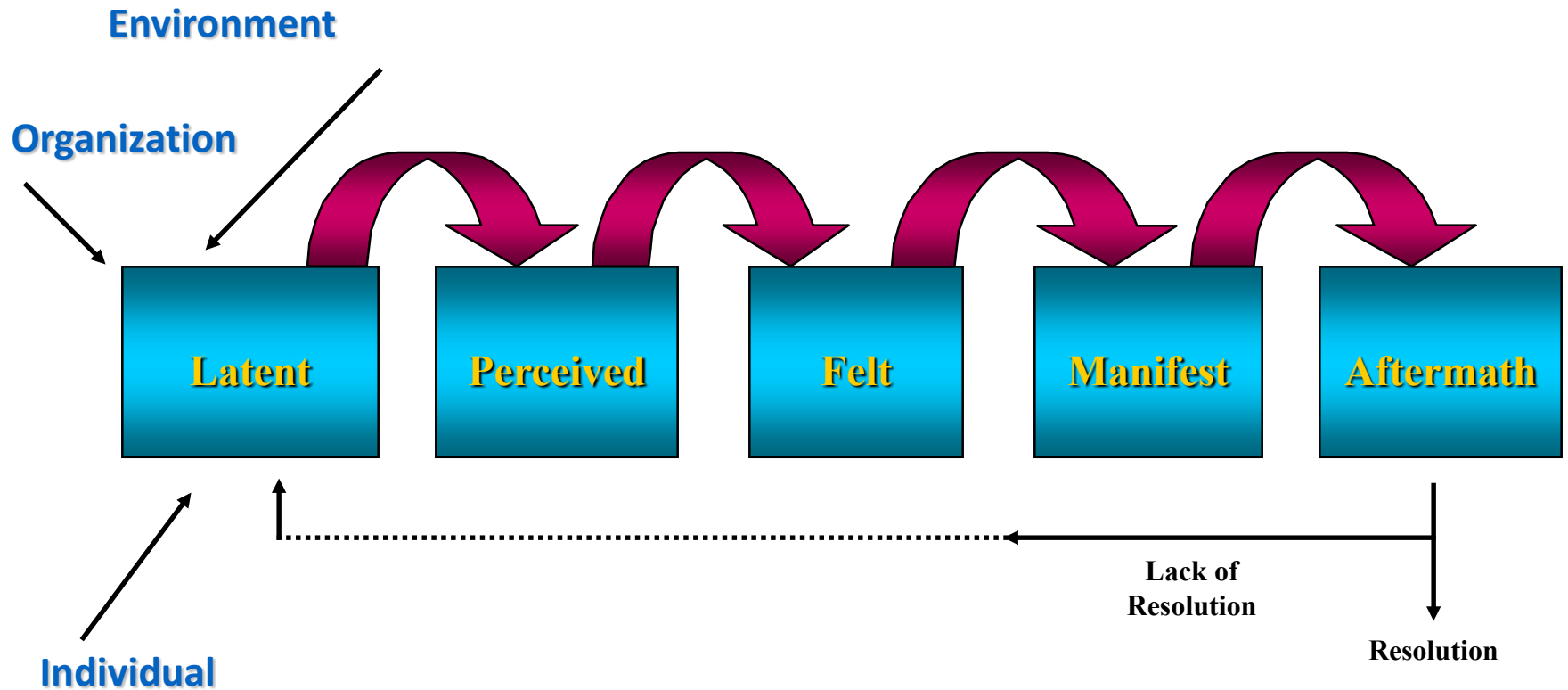


Conflict Intensity



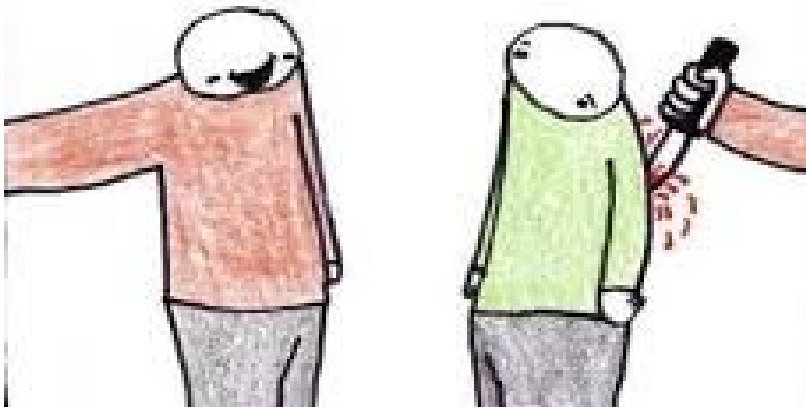
- Overt efforts to destroy other party.
- Aggressive physical attacks.
- Threats and ultimatums.
- Overt questioning or challenging of others.
- Minor disagreements or misunderstandings.

Stages of Conflict

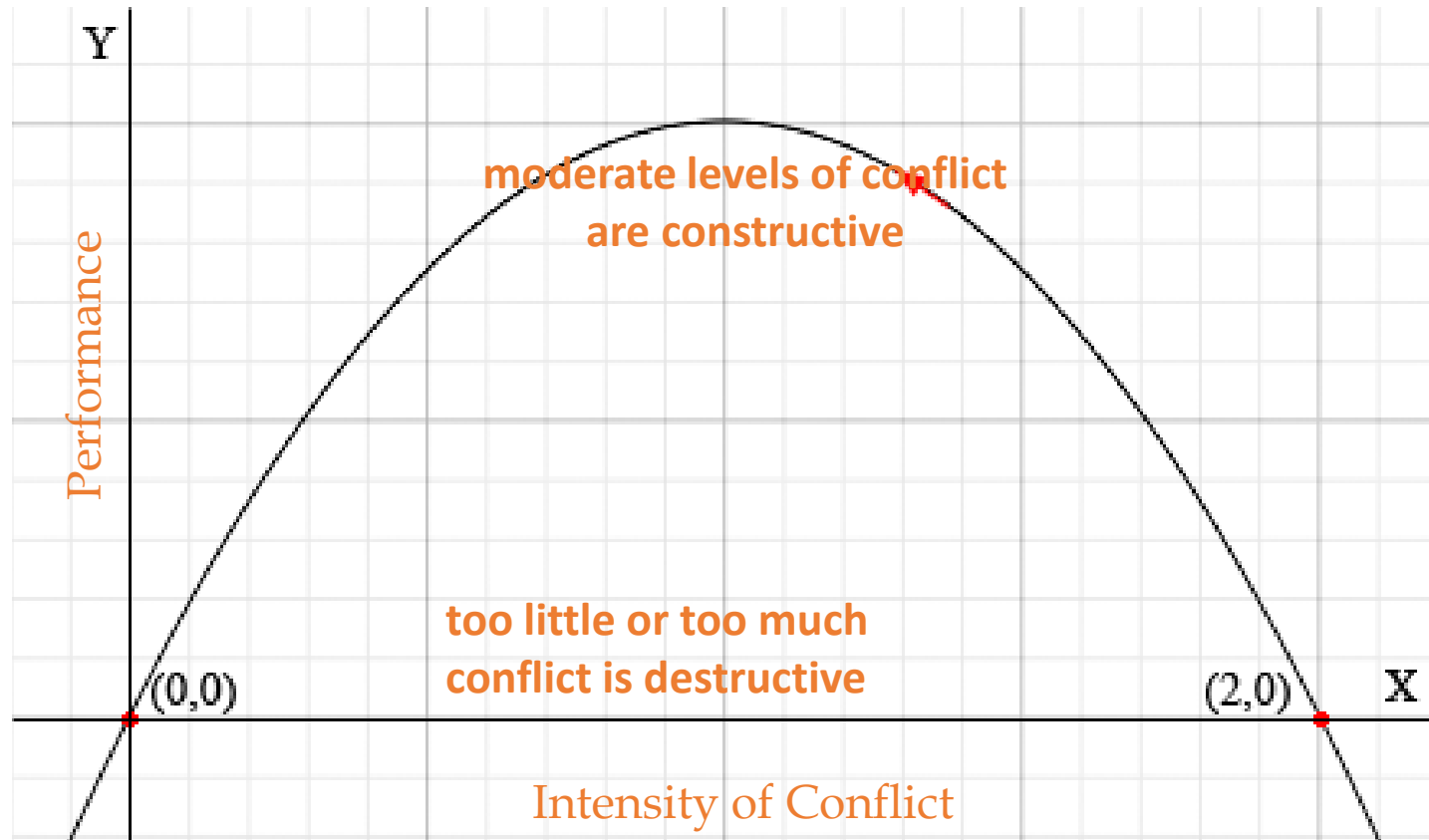


Hidden Conflict in Organizations

Of course I'm behind you 100%. Why would you think otherwise?



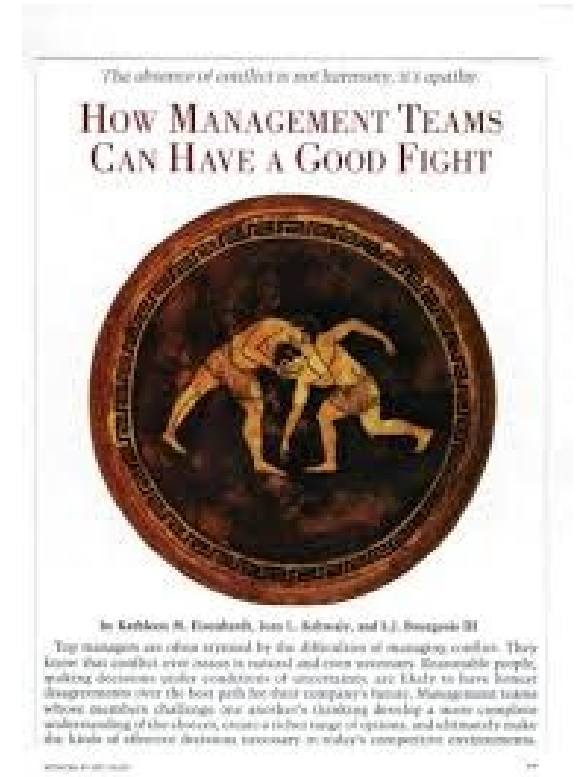
- Conflict may not be overt, it can be covert and hidden.
- Hidden conflict may be nonrational, spontaneous, impulsive and emotional.
- Managers need to be sensitive to hidden conflict.



How Management Teams Can Have a Good Fight

Tactics

- Focus on the Facts
- Multiply the Alternatives
- Create Common Goals
- Use Humor
- Balance the Power Structure
- Seek Consensus with Qualification



Causes of Conflict in Organizations



Structural Factors

- Specialization
- Interdependence
- Common resources
- Goal differences
- Authority relationships
- Status inconsistencies
- Jurisdictional ambiguities

Personal Factors

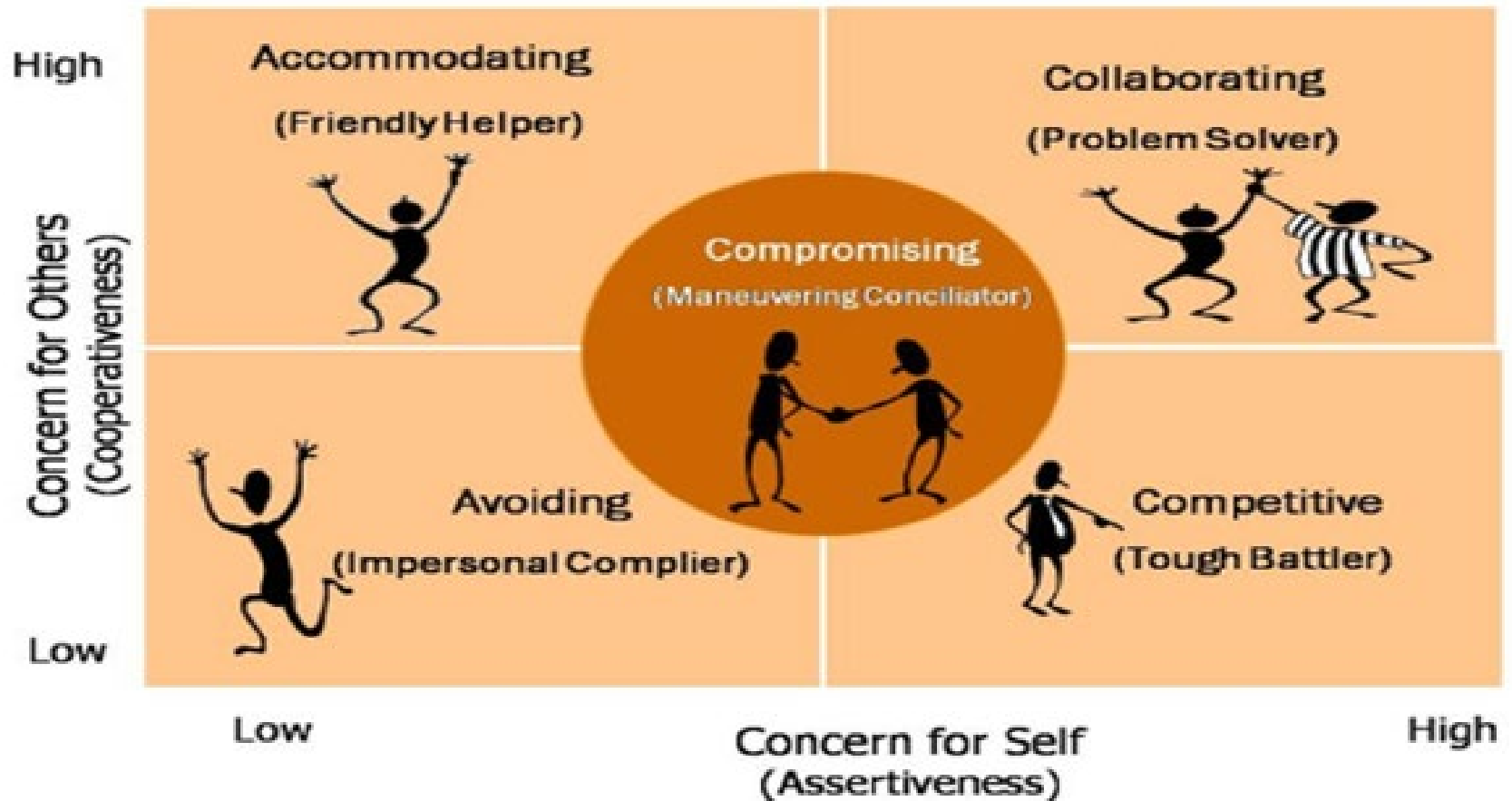
- Skills & abilities
- Personalities
- Perceptions
- Values & ethics
- Emotions
- Communication barriers
- Cultural differences



Conflict Style

Complete the Kraybill Conflict
Response Inventory

CONFLICT HANDLING INTENTIONS



Choosing and Approach: Situational considerations



- Issue importance
- Relationship importance
- Relative power
- Time constraints



When Should the Avoiding Style Be Used to Handle Interpersonal Conflicts?

- ❖ **The issue is of minor or passing importance**
- ❖ **Insufficient information to effectively deal with the conflict**
- ❖ **Low power relative to the other party**
- ❖ **Others can more effectively resolve the conflict**
- ❖ **Likely outcome: no resolution, long-term frustration**

When Should the Forcing Style Be Used to Handle Interpersonal Conflicts?



❖ **Emergencies requiring quick action**

❖ **Unpopular actions must be taken for long-term organizational effectiveness and survival**

❖ **Self-protective action is needed**

- No long term relationship
- To protect yourself against untrustworthy parties
- Unpopular courses of action need implementation
- Issues are vital to your welfare
- Likely outcome: you feel vindicated and other party feels defeated...humiliated

When Should the Accommodating Style Be Used to Handle Interpersonal Conflicts?



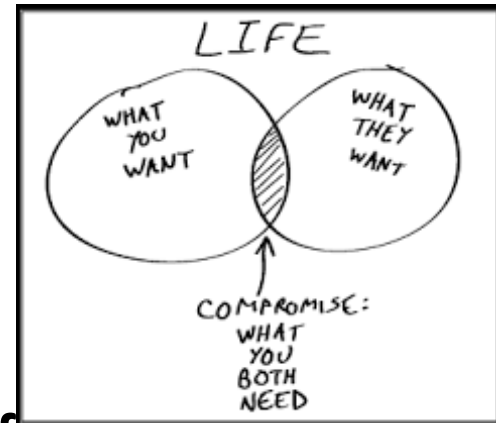
- ❖ **Need to defuse a potentially explosive emotional conflict situation**
- ❖ **Short-run need to keep harmony and avoid disruption**
- ❖ **Conflict is primarily based on personality and cannot be easily resolved**
 - You realize you are wrong
 - Issue is much more important to other party
 - To build up credit for later negotiations
 - To preserve harmony
 - Likely outcome: the other person is likely to take advantage of you



When Should the Collaborating Style Be Used to Handle Interpersonal Conflicts?

- ❖ **High level of cooperation is needed**
- ❖ **Sufficient parity exists in power of conflicting parties**
- ❖ **Potential for mutual benefits, especially over long run**
- ❖ **Sufficient organizational support to take the time and energy for collaboration**
 - ▶ Both parties' concerns are too important to be compromised
 - ▶ To gain commitment
 - ▶ Time is not an issue
 - ▶ Likely outcome: the problem will be resolved, both parties are committed to the solution and satisfied they have been treated fairly

When Should the Compromising Style Be Used to Handle Interpersonal Conflicts?



- ❖ **Agreement enables each party to be better off, or at least not worse off, than without an agreement**
- ❖ **Achieving a total win–win agreement is not possible**
- ❖ **Conflicting goals block agreement on one person's proposal**
 - ▶ Goals are less important to you than collaboration
 - ▶ Mutually exclusive goals
 - ▶ To achieve temporary settlements
 - ▶ Under intense time pressure
 - ▶ Likely outcome: Participants become conditioned to seek expedient, rather than effective, solutions

ANGER ICEBERG

What you can see from the surface can be misleading. Most of the iceberg is hidden under the water.

ANGRY

DISAPPOINTED SCARED REJECTED
NERVOUS REPEATED ENVY GUILT
ABANDONED MURT PHYSICAL TRAUMA
MISDIRECTED VIOLENCE REFUSAL
STRESSED LONELY MISERABLE
WOUNDED TRAPPED GUILTY
WARRING DAMAGED BELIEFS
BESOT
FRUSTRATED
GRIEF

Anger is often a range of emotions hidden under the surface.

1. I try to never get angry.	Avoidance- anger is bad, scary, and useless. Cannot use anger appropriately in daily life. Need assertiveness, Selfishness vs. Self-care, permission to be angry.	H I D D E N
2. I get really nervous when others are angry.		
3. I feel I'm doing something bad when I get angry.		
4. I often tell people I'll do what they want, but I often forget.	Sneaky- Passive aggressive individuals whose power centers on frustrating others through inaction. Learn to say yes and no more clearly; focus on positive goals; learn from past to understand the cause of PA anger.	
5. I say things like, "yeah, but..." and "I'll do it later."		
6. People tell me I must be angry, but I'm not sure why.		
7. I get jealous a lot, even when there is no reason.	Paranoid- Anger projected onto others and then defended against. Own your angry; end vigilance; develop appropriate trust.	
8. I don't trust people very much.		
9. Sometimes it feels like people are out to get me.		

10. My anger comes on real fast.	Sudden- Rapid, short lived, intense outbursts. Slow down anger; time outs; gain awareness of build up stage.	E X P L O S I V E
11. I act before I think when I get angry.		
12. My anger goes away very quickly after I explode.		
13. I get very angry when people criticize me.	Shame Based- Anger reflects perceived attacks upon a person's core self. Address the shame-rage connection; self worth.	
14. People say I'm easily hurt and oversensitive.		
15. I get angry when I feel bad about myself.		
16. I get mad in order to get what I want.	Deliberate- manipulative, used to intimidate. Discuss gains and loses; empathy training; teach alternative communication skills.	
17. I try to scare others with my anger.		
18. I can pretend to be very mad when I am really OK.		
19. Sometimes I get angry just for the excitement and action.	Addictive- Seeking the adrenaline rush. Commitment to calmness and moderation; new life style; connect to stimulant addiction pattern.	
20. I like the strong feelings that come with my anger.		
21. My anger takes over and I go out of control.		

C H R O N I C

22. I seem to get angry all the time.	Habitual- Automatic thoughts and actions perpetuate non-functional anger. Increase awareness; discuss gains and losses; focus on choices.	C H R O N I C
23. I just can't break the habit of getting angry a lot.		
24. I get mad without thinking- it just happens.		
25. I become very angry when I defend my beliefs and opinions.	Moral- Anger is perceived as justified, righteous, for a cause greater than self-interest. Integrate splits; black and white thinking; develop empathy; emphasis on humanity.	
26. I feel outraged about that others try to get away with.		
27. I always know I'm right in an argument.		
28. I hang onto my anger for a long time.	Resentment/hate- Others are treated as loathsome and unforgivable. Teach that forgiveness is a gift to self; letting go of the past; resentment prevention; live and let live.	
29. I have a hard time forgiving people.		
30. I hate people for what they have done.		



Defensive Communication

Definition and Significance



- **Defensive Behavior** – That behavior which occurs when an individual perceives threat or anticipates threat in a group.
- A person who behaves defensively devotes a substantial portion of energy to defending him/herself. In addition to talking about it:
 - they think about how they appear to others
 - how they may be seen more favorably
 - how they may win, dominate, impress or escape punishment
 - how they may avoid or lessen a perceived attack.

Outcomes

- This defensive behavior prevents the listener from concentrating on the message.
- Not only do defensive communicators send off these cues, but defensive listeners tend to distort what they receive.
- As people become more and more defensive, they become less and less able to perceive accurately the motives, values and emotions of the sender.



Defensive Communication

- **Defensive Communication** - communication that can be aggressive, attacking & angry, or passive & withdrawing
- Leads to
 - injured feelings
 - communication breakdowns
 - alienation
 - retaliatory behaviors
 - nonproductive efforts
 - problem solving failures

Supportive Communication



Nondefensive (Supportive) Communication - communication that is assertive, direct, & powerful

Provides

- basis for defense when attacked
- restores order, balance, and effectiveness

Two Defensiveness Patterns

Subordinate Defensiveness - characterized by passive, submissive, withdrawing behavior



Dominant Defensiveness - characterized by active, aggressive, attacking behavior

Defensive Tactics

Defensive Tactic	Speaker	Example
Power Play	Boss	“Finish this report by month’s end or lose your promotion.”
Put-Down	Boss	“A capable manager would already be done with this report.”
Labeling	Boss	“You must be a slow learner. Your report is still not done?”
Raising Doubts	Boss	“How can I trust you, Chris, if you can’t finish an easy report?”

Defensive Tactics

Defensive Tactic	Speaker	Example
Misleading Information	Employee	“Morgan has not gone over with me the information I need for the report.” [Morgan left Chris with a copy of the report.]
Scapegoating	Employee	“Morgan did not give me input until just today.”
Hostile Jokes	Employee	“You can’t be serious! The report isn’t that important.”
Deception	Employee	“I gave it to the secretary. Did she lose it?”

Gibb categories of communication

from Jack Gibb's "Defensive Communication" in *Communication Theory* (2007)

■ **Evaluation vs. Description**

Is feedback phrased in "I" statements or "you" statements?

■ **Control vs. Orientation**

Are decisions made by and for a few, or by and for the entire group?

■ **Strategy vs. Spontaneity**

Are we angling for a desired result or responding honestly to new data?

■ **Neutrality vs. Empathy**

Are participants engaged and involved or distant and aloof?

■ **Superiority vs. Equality**

Can everyone participate in the discussion with common understanding?

■ **Certainty vs. Provisionalism**

Are opinions held with disregard for evidence, or are decisions affected by data?

Evaluation and Description



- **Evaluation** – Speech or other behavior which appears to be evaluating or judging the listener will put the listener on guard.
- Could be manner of speech, tone of voice or content of the message.

Evaluation and Description

- For example, after an earth tremor that shook the house, a mother seeks her son saying, “Bobby, where are you?”
- His chronic mild defensiveness might respond, “Mommy, I didn’t do it.”
- Why? Because speech is so frequently judgmental.
- **Descriptive Speech** – Tends to arouse a minimum of un-easiness. Speech which the listener perceives as a genuine request for information.
- If the listener thought that the speaker regarded him as an equal, was being open and spontaneous.



Control and Problem Orientation

- **Control** – Speech which is used to control the listener evokes resistance.
- In most social interactions, someone is trying to do something to someone else.
- The degree to which attempts to control produce defensiveness, depends on the openness of the effort.
- The suspicion that a hidden motive exists heightens resistance.

Control and Problem Orientation

- **Problem Orientation** – Non-controllers must earn the perception that their efforts have no hidden motives.
- Implicit in all attempts to alter another person is the assumption that the person to be altered is inadequate. That the speaker sees the listener as ignorant, uniformed, immature, unwise, etc.

Strategy and Spontaneity



- **Strategy** – when a sender is perceived as ambiguous and with multiple motivations, the receiver has a tendency to become defensive.
- No one wants to be the guinea pig or the victim of some hidden motivation.

Strategy and Spontaneity

- **Spontaneity** - Voluntary or undetermined action or movement.
- Behavior that appears to be spontaneous and free of deception is defense reductive.
- If the communicator is seen as having uncomplicated motivation, straightforward and honest as behaving spontaneously in response to the situation is likely to arouse minimal defensiveness.

Neutrality and Empathy



- **Neutrality** – When appearing to indicate a lack of concern for his welfare, the listener becomes defensive.
- Listeners desire to be perceived as valued persons.

Neutrality and Empathy

- **Empathy** - Identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives.
- Communication that conveys empathy for the feelings and respect for the worth of the listener is supportive and defense reductive.
- This includes non-verbal, spontaneous expressions that are interpreted as especially valid evidence of empathy.



TA-HA-HA-HA
Morons...

Superiority and Equality

- **Superiority** – When a person communicates to another that he or she feels superior in position, power, wealth, intellectual ability, physical characteristics or other ways, they arouse defensiveness.
- The receiver reacts by not hearing, forgetting, competing with the sender or become jealous.

Superiority and Equality



- **Equality** – Creating the atmosphere that the sender feels equal to the listener.
- Defenses are reduced when one perceives the sender as willing to enter in to participative planning with mutual trust and respect. But attaching little importance to these differences reduce defenses.



Certainty and Provisionalism

- **Certainty (Dogmatism)** - Unfounded positiveness in matters of opinion; arrogant assertion of opinions as truths.
- Those who seem to know the answers, to require no additional and to regard themselves as teachers rather than as co-workers tend to put others on guard.

Certainty and Provisionalism

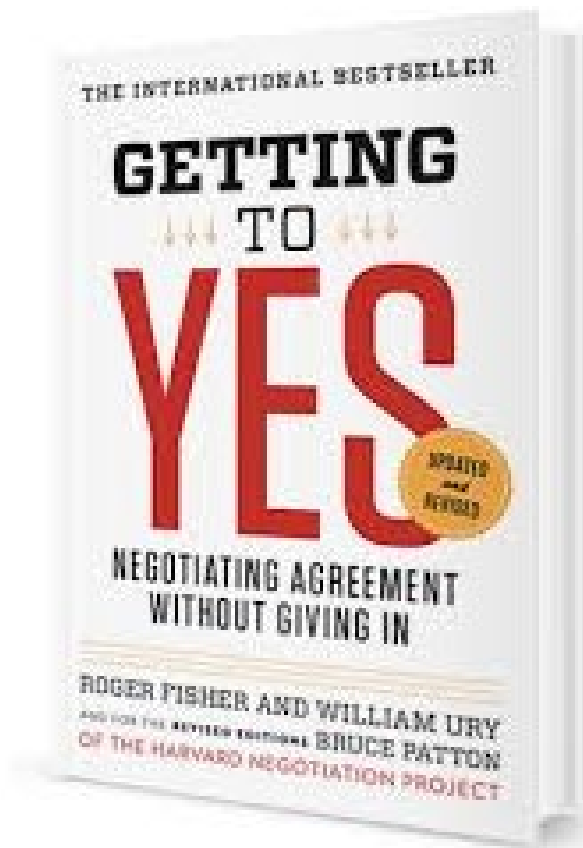
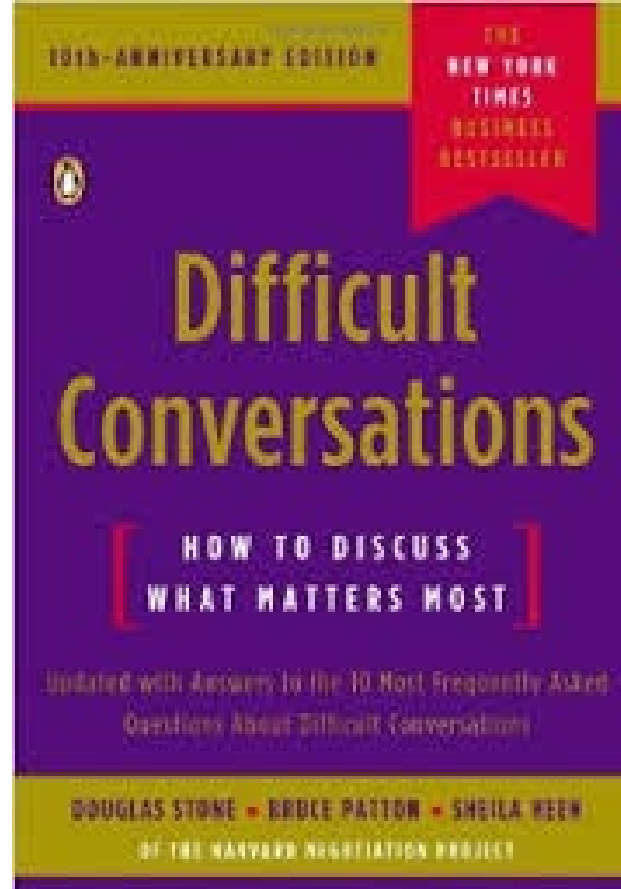
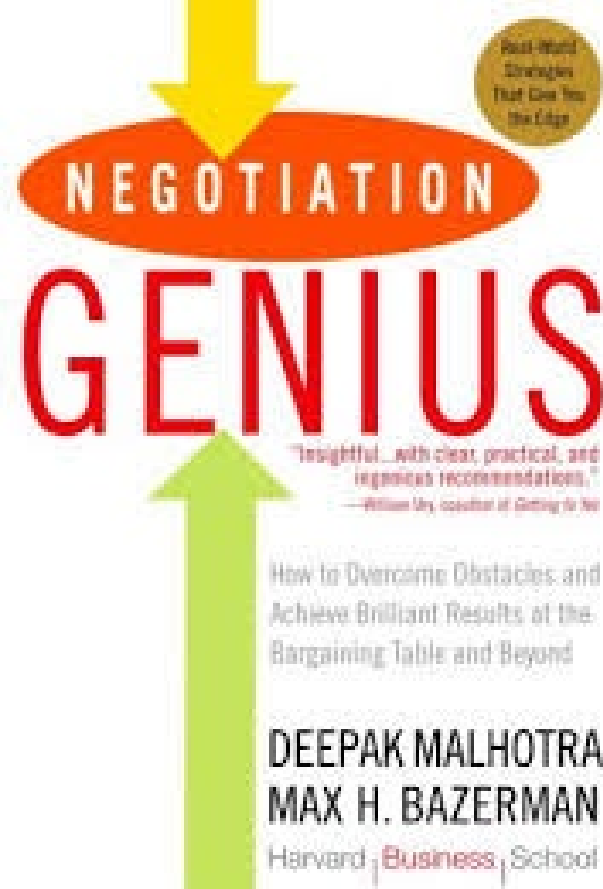
- **Provisional** – Accepted or adopted tentatively; conditional; probationary.
- When one communicates that one is willing to experiment with one's own behavior, attitudes and ideas, defensiveness is reduced.
- The person that appears to be investigating issues rather than taking sides on them, problem solving tends to show there is a shared quest or investigation of the ideas.

Supportive Communication: A Powerful Tool

- Speaker seen as centered, assertive, controlled, informative, realistic, and honest
- Speaker exhibits self-control & self possession
- Listener feels accepted rather than rejected
- Catherine Crier's rules to nondefensive communication
 1. Define the situation
 2. Clarify the person's position
 3. Acknowledge the person's feelings
 4. Bring the focus back to the facts

Thank You!





WANT TO LEARN
MORE?