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About the Authors

Preface

Introduction:

Language for conflict or co-operation?

1 How the View Explains our Differences

This chapter recognizes that each of us has our unique window on the world, which is subjective, partial and likely to be distorted. This can explain why we are different from and often difficult for each other.

2 Differences in Personality Types

The reader is introduced to the four basic personality types and typical sources of tension across the styles. The reader also discovers that strengths can be experienced as weaknesses.

3 Fight the Difference or Celebrate it?

Is conflict inevitable? Can conflict be constructive? This chapter suggests that conflict comes more from the management of these differences than from the differences themselves. Understand why rows can spiral out of control.

4 Are you Building a Bridge or a Barrier?

Explore the win-win and the win-lose mindsets and the consequences of these approaches. Discover the language that fuels conflict and find out how 'you' and 'I' can become 'we'.

5 Understand and Manage your Feelings

This chapter gives some practical ways to defuse your own anger and to manage the feelings of others. Know when to take time out.

6 Develop your Skills and Increase Your Choices

Discover the three key skills for managing conflict. Learn how to listen acceptingly, talk constructively and negotiate successfully. Also ways to disagree and keep rapport.

7 Four Steps to Resolution

Do you want to manage differences in open and honest ways without conflict or argument? This four-step model gives you the language and the processing for win-win. The 'steps' will reduce defensiveness, deepen understanding and create collaboration. Learn to deal with power plays.

8 Preventing Conflict

This chapter shows you how to nip conflict in the bud. Discover ways to deal with the irritations and minor tensions rather than let them fester.

Appendices

The appendices include a questionnaire to help you discover your preferred conflict management style and a collection of other tools to enable you to turn difficult situations around. There is also a case study showing symptoms of organizational conflict – low morale and a high turnover of staff. The study demonstrates how using the processes and language of the ‘steps’ enables staff and management to listen, understand and work towards a mutual solution.

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About the Authors



Shay and Margaret McConnon spent 15 years in Special education teaching young people who had emotional and behavioural difficulties. They developed programmes to enhance the self-worth of these students and improve their social skills.

These programmes were written up and are now a series of twelve titles ranging from *Conflict Resolution* to *Self Esteem*. They continue to form the basis for many Personal and Social Education Programmes across the English-speaking world.

In 1988 they established *People First* management training and consultancy group that specialises in creating winning relationships in the workplace.

People First is best known for its highly acclaimed *Winning Relationships in the Workplace™* programme. This uses the latest in organizational psychology and leadership theory to create openness, trust and collaboration in working relationships.

The programme is being used by leading companies in Europe and the USA. The workshops are fully supported by a range of products, including workbooks, profiles, posters, memory cards and games.

Shay is a founder member of the Professional Speakers Association and he speaks regularly at conferences on people issues. His keynotes are content-rich, providing delegates with practical techniques for creating winning relationships in the workplace. He uses magic to illustrate these in a fun and memorable way.

Margaret specializes in one to one work and couple counselling. She is co-author of a range of workshop materials and trains on people issues within education and the service sectors.

“This book offers many tried and tested approaches to ensure that conflicts are managed so that they are positive and creative rather than a process of discrimination.”

SIR JOHN HARVEY-JONES

“Your Conflict Resolution Workshops have given staff a greater understanding of themselves. Consequently we now have much improved relationships within the company and with our customers.”

SIEMANS TRAFFIC CONTROLS LTD

“Conflict resolution is a big part of my work. The techniques and skills in this book have helped me and my team, freeing up precious time for us to be more productive.”

RICHARD SHEARD, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SALISBURY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Preface

Our differences define our uniqueness – nationality, culture, gender, beliefs, values and our behaviours. From a very early age, we are aware of those differences, with siblings and peer groups. We may have different abilities, talents, and levels of attractiveness or interest. Those differences define mankind, allow progress and contribute to the dynamics of the world.

We are also aware that those differences contribute to conflict in our world. Each of us is likely to experience some degree of conflict, be it personal, professional, national or international.

Why is it that the very essence of being human contributes directly to the varying degrees of unhappiness, distress and destruction?

Each of us has our own unique window on our world, fashioned by our socialization and our place in history. We have our own needs, defined by our values and beliefs. When needs are not met, or are denied to us, we are in conflict.

This book offers an understanding of the nature of conflict and structures, which enable the reader to negotiate a solution.

It aims to remove the mind-reading syndrome, which often accompanies conflict, and to replace it with open communication, trust and respect and a simple structure, which allows all parties to reach the magic of win–win.

Shay & Margaret McConnon

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Many influences have contributed to the writing of this book. Thanks to our friends and colleagues who have encouraged and supported us in developing the ideas and approaches.

In particular we would like to thank Andy Colehan and John Jerwood for their time, professionalism, friendship and most of all their willingness to challenge.

We are particularly grateful to all the people who have attended our workshops. The shared experiences have contributed greatly to the approaches contained in this book.

We wish to acknowledge all these influences and trust that what is offered in these pages reflects the ideals we share.

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Language for Conflict or Co-operation ?

- ◆ Have you ever slammed a door in rage?
- ◆ Are you inclined to avoid the issue?
- ◆ Do you say 'you should' or 'you never'?
- ◆ Do you get the boxing gloves out every time a row beckons?
- ◆ Do you sometimes make accusing statements like 'you started it' or 'it's your fault'?
- ◆ Do you often cover up your real feelings by saying 'it doesn't matter' when it does, or 'I'm fine' when you are not?
- ◆ Ever been so hurt, angry and resentful that you don't care about the other person, you just want revenge?
- ◆ Have you ever wished you could handle those difficult people better?

If so, then this book is for you. It will give you some tried and proven ways to prevent and manage conflict in your life. It is written for parents, managers, teachers, students, anyone who wishes to manage differences in open and honest ways without argument or conflict.

Me and my big mouth!

No matter who you are, or where you live, if you are in contact with other people you are likely to face some form of conflict, be it a minor irritation or an earth-shattering row.

The answer to resolving these conflicts is right under your nose, in the words you use. Words enable you to build bridges or create barriers. Words have the power to

- ◆ heal or wound.
- ◆ unite or divide.
- ◆ create conflict or harmony.

The cost of conflict

Of course we are all different from each other. We have different needs, tastes, opinions, beliefs, preferences and values. The question is, how do we cope with the differences? Are they allowed to get in the way and be the source of conflict, or can we celebrate the differences and view them creatively? Let's look at a few problem scenarios.

Conflict
wastes time
and money

Relationship cost

Kate finds Pete increasingly distant and hostile at times. She would like to come home from work and chat about her day and hear all about his day, but he comes home wanting to be left alone to unwind. Kate feels excluded, and Pete seems to be spending more and more time in front of his computer.

What needs to happen? Would a good row clear the air? Should they pretend there isn't a problem? What choices do they have? What are the words they need to use to resolve this difference?

Mike wants up-to-date information for the monthly sales meeting. Lisa seldom meets the deadline, complaining

that she never has time to collect the data and write a comprehensive report.

Mike is getting increasingly frustrated and angry with Lisa. She feels that Mike is unreasonable and insensitive to her situation. The increasing tension and anger shows in the raised voices whenever this matter is discussed.

They are getting locked into a 'you against me' scenario. What choices do Mike and Lisa have for moving this situation forward?

Cost to the individual

While conflict can be constructive, most conflict is destructive, with time, emotional and health costs. Kate and Pete, Lisa and Mike might argue, retaliate, blame and engage in a war of words. Such power struggles can result in stress, loss of confidence, unhappiness, hostility, withdrawal and even illness.

Cost to the organization

Conflict not only has a high personal cost but it is expensive for your organisation. Research indicates that a typical manager loses 25% of the day responding to unhelpful conflict. This is time lost to creative, productive work.

Take a medium sized organization with one hundred managers. Let's assume the average annual salary per manager is £40,000. With managers losing 25% of their time on conflict, the cost will be £1,000,000.

This only accounts for management time. The true cost will include wasted employee time, higher staff turnover, missed opportunities, absenteeism, inefficiency, low morale and poor teamwork.

Conversely of course, people who are skilled at managing conflict are more likely to be perceived as leaders, are more influential, gain respect and co-operation and increase the worth of an organization.

Unmanaged conflict is the largest reducible cost for many organisations and it is usually the least recognized.

Breaking the stalemate

In conflict, there is the danger that people get locked into their own positions, digging their heels in and insisting they get their own way. If this happens, it is stalemate with both sets of needs unmet. It is a *you against me* scenario.

This book is about how to make the transformation from *you against me* to *us against the problem*. It is about giving the reader more behavioural choices in managing differences. It will leave you better equipped to deal with the difficult people in your life. It will show you how to:

- ◆ prevent blow-ups
- ◆ defuse anger
- ◆ build bridges
- ◆ keep your cool
- ◆ resolve conflict for good
- ◆ build better relationships
- ◆ avoid the pitfalls.

How the View Explains our Differences

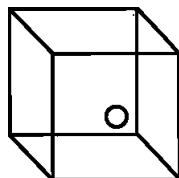
In this chapter:

- ◆ understand your unique window on the world
- ◆ your view is subjective, partial and likely to be distorted
- ◆ hero or villain – who's viewpoint
- ◆ opinions are not right or wrong they are points of view
- ◆ seek to understand rather than to change others
- ◆ beware of making assumptions about people's intentions
- ◆ explore different perspectives for richer solutions.

Without realising it, we can become stuck in how we view things. The first way we look at something is not always the only or the 'best' way. The more ways we can view a situation, the more possibilities we will discover and the more creative we can be.

Where do you see this circle:

- ◆ at the lower right hand corner of the rear panel?
- ◆ at the centre of the front panel?



- ◆ at the lower right corner of the front panel?
- ◆ at the centre of the back panel?

Different views

An old story tells how five blind men once went to find out what an elephant was like. They found one and felt it all over. One found its waving trunk. 'It's like a snake,' he said.

Another found its tail. 'More like a rope,' was his opinion.

A third touched one of the elephant's big ears. 'It's like a fan,' he said.

'No, like a pillar,' said the fourth, feeling its great leg.

The last man leaned against the elephant's massive side. 'It's like a wall,' he declared.

Each of them experienced the elephant from his own point of view, and each came to a different conclusion. That is the trouble with points of view. If you want a true view of anything, you must look at it from every angle. Otherwise, if you stick to your own point of view, as someone has said, you will sit on the point and lose the view.

Beware of
expecting
others to
see what
you see

We all have slightly different views on the world. Our window on the world is filtered by our early experiences, beliefs and memories. These filters allow us to deal with the two million bits of information that we are exposed to at any one moment. It is impossible to process all this

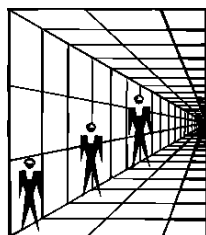
data. So we delete, distort and generalise the incoming information.

However, many of us believe that the way we experience the world is the way it is. It is your unique view ... it is the truth for you. Others will have a different view. Their truth, while being different from yours, is right for them.

Your reality is not totality

Of course we don't have totality. What we experience is subjective, partial and likely to be distorted. People believed the world was flat until fifteenth-century explorers discovered that we can go to the East by sailing west. When Albert Einstein was ten years old, his teacher told him that he would not amount to much. Mr Gottlieb Daimler, the founder of Daimler Motor Company, said that the car would never catch on because there would never be enough chauffeurs. The president of Decca Records, rejecting the Beatles, said, 'We don't like their sound and guitar music is on the way out anyway.'

Our views are always restricted to the window we have on our world and its filters. Without realising it, we are discounting something from what is out there.



Which person is the tallest?

- ◆ 'I didn't notice what she was wearing.'
- ◆ 'I didn't realise you felt like that about me.'
- ◆ 'I didn't hear him say that.'

How much can you trust your experiences?

Is the world flat? Well it certainly looks it. Is it stationary? It has that appearance. However, the astronomer will tell us we are rotating at thousands of miles an hour. Is the chair you are sitting on solid? If I strike my hand against it, it certainly feels solid. However, the physicist will tell us it is a moving bundle of energy.

Difficult people

Mike is quick to act. Sarah finds him abrasive and Fiona sees him as rash. Who is this person? Is he quick to act, rash or abrasive? He is all three, it depends on the window and the view. They are opinions, each one created from a partial view with information discounted. Who is right? Everyone and no one.

A bucket of water can be a home to a fish, a cool drink to an elephant and a lake to an ant. What you experience reflects who you are. If someone is difficult for you, how much does that reflect you? There will be other people who won't find that behaviour difficult ... they have a different window on it. Maybe people are difficult because of who you are!

Who is right?

Fox-hunting is a sport to some people and slaughter to another. Everyone thinks he is right, and each opinion will be right for that individual. There is always more than what any of us are noticing at any given moment. Expand your view to grow in wisdom.

Can you see the hero?

Because you don't see something, it doesn't mean it is not there. Even though you can't see the stars when the sun comes up, they are still there. You might see this person as abrasive. Behind abrasiveness is quickness to act; this is a strength, even though you might not see it as such. Every villain is likely to be a hero in his own story.

Recognize the positive intention

Conflict often comes from goodwill, people thinking they are doing right but in fact getting it wrong. Having been round the block three times looking for a street, you suggest to your partner that he stops and asks someone ... and the advice is rejected. Although you were only trying to help, your partner heard an attack on his competence.

I care – you feel smothered

I am assertive – you see me as aggressive

I am principled – you experience me as stubborn

I am ambitious – you see me as ruthless

Intent and impact

We are inclined to draw conclusions about people's intentions from how their behaviour impacts on us. I feel hurt, therefore you intended to hurt me. I feel put down, so your intention was to humiliate me.

This is not always the case. When someone says '*But I was only trying to help you*' they are really saying they have a positive intention, even though your experience of it was negative.

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