

RESOLVE CONFLICT: EVERYONE CAN WIN

SKILL 3. Empathy

Part II

Podcast time codes:

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‘If both of us thought the same, one of us would be unnecessary.’

This audio is Part Two of skill number 3, Empathy. It comes from the book, *Everyone can Win*, about handling conflict constructively. Now we’re delving into difference. And what it takes to respect personality styles and values that are not a bit like our own.

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Some people are just so different! Perhaps you can’t see why they behave the way they do, why something trivial to you seems so important to them. Do you sometimes wonder if they’ve come from another planet! When two people are very different, it is easy for discomforts and small incidents to escalate and grow to deeper misunderstandings, tension and or even crisis. At that point anything they do or say can seem alien and ‘wrong’. Worse still, they are probably thinking exactly the same about you. We’re talking here about *major* differences in personality style and values.

Yet, difference itself is not the problem. The problem is our judgement about that difference. Of course, we’re going to get on most easily with people who are

more like us, but that's not necessarily the best for a productive relationship. There's a good reason why opposites attract. Balance! It's actually smart to team up with someone who has a very different style of operating. The 'big picture' person does well to work with someone who quite enjoys the number crunching detail. They may not absolutely love it, but they're good at it. If you're rather academic and logical, there'll be times when it's vital to listen to someone who'll be more in touch with the emotional climate in a situation. Combining different personalities can be just what makes a marriage successful or a work team function well. Remember:

'If both of us thought the same, one of us would be unnecessary.'

That magical quality of empathy in a relationship starts with *respect*. We can't judge the other person as somehow lesser or wrong. They're just looking out at the world through different spectacles. Their perspective is just as valid as ours. It's built on their experience and their values and needs. Moreover, they need to know we respect them and we'll only persuade them of this if we actually do!

Of course, respect is not always automatic. We may need a rethink to see how it looks from where they stand. Rapport grows of its own accord when you really know where the other person is coming from.

Can we make space for difference?

Diversity is a rich resource.

Can we become curious about it?

So let's explore further. There are some frameworks that explain differences quite well. The first one we call DISC [*say as one word*], that's 'D' 'I' 'S' 'C' [*say the letters*]. I find the DISC model really helps teams work better together. 'Team' might be a family, a work group, or perhaps a committee.

THE DISC MODEL

talks about four very different styles of behaviour. It starts with the distinction between extroversion and introversion. Carl Jung, the psychiatrist and theoretician working early last century, pointed to this clearly when he said:

‘If one is an extrovert and the other an introvert, their different and contradictory standpoints may clash right away, particularly when they are unaware of their own type of personality, or when they are convinced that their own is the only right type.’

Extroverts are outgoing. They tend to say what they’re currently thinking or feeling quite easily. Introverts are more reserved. They’re more internal and more restrained when they talk. Extroverts think out loud, *as* they talk. So don’t be too surprised if they change their minds afterwards.

Introverts don’t operate like that. They’re internal thinkers. They’ll think things through before they open their mouths. They may need to be invited to speak out and then they’ll need time to finish their sentences. Extroverts however hold the floor and are often quite happy jumping right in and interrupting. Plenty of potential for friction and judgement here! When extroverts and introverts are together, both will need to make space for difference.

However, a note of warning. Don’t label people too glibly. It’s a sliding scale. Not introvert OR extrovert. Most people probably do prefer one or other end of the scale, but they’ll usually sit somewhere inside the two extremes. For most people if you’re being accurate, you can only say that they’re ‘more outgoing’ or perhaps ‘a bit more reserved.’

The second distinction the DISC model makes is between someone who is ‘more people-oriented’ and someone who is more ‘more task-oriented’. Let’s call them a people person or a task person for a quick explanation. But don’t box people in to either one of these categories here either. In truth, very few people will think task totally at the expense of people or people totally at the expense of task. So, like any model, it has its limits. However, it *is* useful when we’re trying to point out *tendencies*, and which ones show up at difficult times, when there’s conflict in the air.

Also bear in mind that people often change their style depending on the circumstances. Different jobs foster different behaviours. And we may be rather different at home than we are socially, at sports or in the workplace.

So, with those provisos about our labels, note that a people person regards the relationship as their top priority; while a task person will generally focus on the job at hand before they pay attention to the relationship.

Task people are likely to start a conversation with ‘what needs to be done’, and then if they’re not too busy, they may check in with you about how your children are going or if you’ve fully recovered from your cold. A people person might presume the task person doesn’t care about them and perhaps makes judgements about how self-centred they are. ‘They never ask about me!’ might be their complaint. While this mind chatter is going on, the task person is probably making judgements too. They’re finding all those social preliminaries of the people person are insincere and just filling in time.

So, we’ve discussed the two scales used by the DISC model: the first being ‘Introverted’ to ‘Extroverted’ and the second, ‘Task-oriented’ to ‘People-oriented’. It might help to scribble a diagram while you’re listening or look up the chart in the study notes on the Conflict Resolution Network website. Draw them as two lines crossing each other, like a big plus sign. And you’ll have four possible combinations of characteristics. Each has a very different style of operating.

- The first combination, *extroversion* in a *task* person, gives them a rather **Direct** style.
- Whereas *extroversion* mixed into a *people* person results in an outgoing, **Influencing** style.
- **Stabilising** is the name in the DISC model for a *people* person who is *introverted*.
- And the last, **Conscientious** is the name given to the combination of *introversion* in a *task-oriented* person.

Can you see where the model gets its name from? Yes, the first letters of these four styles. ‘D’ for Direct; ‘I’ for Influencing; ‘S’ for Stabilising; and ‘C’ for Conscientious.

These differences can produce lots of misunderstandings and conflict. Especially if you don’t realise what style you’re up against. So, let’s see if we can understand each style a bit better.

- It’ll really help you recall this later if you can bring to mind someone you know who fits each style. Ideally, you’ll end up with four different people who

can serve as your personal models for Direct, Influencing, Stabilising and Conscientious.

- Also listen to what each style offers in useful insights or perspectives, particularly if their style is very different to your own. Take a moment to honour the type of contributions that sort of person can make. We shouldn't dismiss those contributions lightly, just because it's not how we see things. We need them.
- We'll also consider how each style of person likes to be treated so that they feel their contributions are appreciated and we don't get them offside.

Here we go:

- **Direct people** value action and results and use a forthright no-nonsense style of conversation. They'll often be very brief. They've other things to get on with. So, respect their time and get to the point without getting emotional, too personal or telling long-winded stories.

Who do you know like that? Forthright, no nonsense?

- **Influencers** value relationship and prefer to let the details take care of themselves. They really need people to talk to. To show them you respect them, you'll ask their opinion and you'll check whether they can do what you want – you certainly won't order them to do it. If they really must take lots of detail onboard, they'll need a friendly, helping hand like visual aids. Detail is definitely not their strong suit!

Know anyone who's an influencer? They tend to talk a lot!

- **Stabilisers** value peace and harmony. Conflict can really rattle them; they much prefer an open, calm approach. They're sensing the situation deeply, not only for themselves, but for others around them. They have a quieter style and probably won't jump into group conversations. And they're easily stifled if they try. They'll want to see a considered review of the impact on everyone involved. Respect that. If you encourage them to come out with their point of

view, really turn your focus on them and their opinions for a while, it will be worth it!

Have you got a stabiliser in your life? Generally calm and kindly?

- **Conscientious** people value order, logic, research and quality. Remember they're reserved, and there's a lot going on under the surface. Give them bit of extra time to communicate effectively. They'll do their homework on the topic. And their advice, when they share it, will be very practical. In the midst of all that detail they're engrossed with, they'll bring forth a gem! Maybe just the very one you need badly and have completely overlooked. They'll know you *respect* them if you are on time, prepared, move forward sequentially and follow the rules, like they do. Most importantly: make sure you acknowledge their painstaking work. When they're at work, they'll focus on their work, but take a moment to inquire about their family too. They'll also be giving that their focused attention.

The details person in your life will often lean towards a conscientious style. Got one of those?

These four styles are very different.

How will you work with that?

The key is to be flexible. When you've got to talk about difficult issues with someone whose style is very different to yours, adapt your approach. Include their perspectives. In return, they're more likely to respect what you are saying also.

So, the big question is, where would you place yourself? More Direct, Influencing, Stabilising or Conscientious?

Now think about the person in your life with whom you're having the most difficulty. Are they opposite to you on the introversion-extroversion scale? Are they also opposite to you on the people versus task scale? If their style is radically different to your own, this may well be the source of many of your difficulties with each other.

Each style is rooted in different underlying needs and concerns. And it's worth respecting those when you're dealing with them.

- If their style is *Direct*, they are happiest with a challenge, a project in their life and they need to feel like they're in charge. Hold them back and they'll lash out.
- *Influencers* need opportunities to express their points of view in person. They're at their best putting forward new ideas, liaising with others and then feeding off the feedback. Block these needs and you've got them offside, frustrated and possibly quite depressed.
- *Stabilisers* need to feel appreciated for what they bring to the situation. They're making sure that everyone is pleased or at least satisfied. Their eye is on the whole social context. If someone else is unhappy, they're also in trouble. Disharmony is their biggest concern. They desperately need you to resolve any conflict as quickly as you can.
- The *Conscientious* person needs a detailed picture. Help them get that. Of course, we all hate criticism but, the Conscientious person who is trying so hard to get every detail right, may well react badly if you criticise them – much more extremely than you meant or expected. Their self-esteem may rest on how well they've lined up all the facts! Support that.

Thinking again of that difficult person in your life, are they *outgoing or reserved, focused on people or focused on task*? Have you done enough to meet their needs?

There are other useful models around that can help us understand ourselves and others, how we perceive the world and make decisions. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is one of them.

The take-home message from any model is:

Make space for different styles.

Moving on, let's look at some ways to avoid

CLASHING VALUES

If we don't attend to these, they can quickly drain out the empathy from the relationship.

Here's a super-simple example: tidiness. We each value it a bit differently. There's liable to be a *values clash* if one person has a high regard for tidiness but it's very low on the other person's priority list. Another example might be that we really value chatting about the day's events. We may come to resent a partner for whom quiet time is uppermost for them when they return home.

It's a pretty dangerous strategy to try to shift another person's underlying values. It rarely works out! People's values can go right to their core, and they'll rarely alter them. And anyway, why should you alter yours? We all need our values respected! Religious or spiritual values are a clear case in point. We hold our values close to our heart. They dictate how we like to run our lives. Tempers rise if they're not being supported.

So how can we sidestep these values clashes? Here's the tip: can we find a marker – a signal, a flag – that demonstrates respect for the value? What marker is going to depend on the situation and particular value, of course. If you value a chat about the day's events with your partner at the end of the day, exactly when and for how long will generally be enough for you?

Markers might be phone calls, regular reports, a bunch of flowers, a 'thank you,' meeting a production target, clothes not being left on the floor, or time respected for prayers or meditation. How much of each marker needs to happen to show respect for the value?

Find the value marker and negotiate how much is enough.

Here's some examples:

- If I telephone my elderly parent twice a week, will they think that's sufficiently dutiful?
- If the value is that birthdays should be properly acknowledged, what adequately acknowledges that? A text, a card, a bunch of flowers? And do I need a more considered present from someone close to me?

- How many staff meetings per month will signal that teamwork is valued in this organisation?
- What would flag that your tidiness standards are being respected? Everyone puts their own dirty clothes into the laundry basket? By when? Every day? Or do you just need your messy teenager to pick up all their stuff on cleaning day, *without* having to be nagged?

You'll need to negotiate. How much of what? Where? How often? These are values chats that can restore empathy when values clash.

However, there'll be times when:

Our own values are in head-on collision with the other person's.

We have directly opposing priorities. Let's look at some common ones that often show up and particularly in the workplace. They're opposing values that seem to cause people repeated problems with each other. Others may be demonstrating a value that's pretty low on our own list.

The four opposing polarities we'll consider here are:

- **equality** versus **status**;
- needing **agreement** versus loving **competition**;
- focusing on **feelings** first versus all our attention on the outer world of **action and objects**;
- and the last of these is about our comfort zone: do we rest in **interdependence** or much prefer **autonomy** and independence?

They're directly conflicting values. Rate high on the value of equality and see everyone as equal, and you won't think much of those who build self-esteem on their superior status. If you thrive on competition, just agreeing to restore harmony can seem pretty wishy-washy to you. If your first focus goes to inner feelings, you can feel terribly dismissed by someone who just attends to what to do next or what they want to buy. Those people's eyes are on the outer world and accomplishment. If your prime value is being autonomous and independent, you'll look askance at the team players, and being required to be dependent on others will often grate.

Yes, we all have a bit of both ends of these polarities but people who rate high on one value tend to be low on the value at the opposite end.

Our priorities are influenced by our personalities, life experiences, cultures, and how we view this particular situation. Our values will often, though certainly not always, line up with gender. We might regard values of equality, agreement, feelings focus and interdependence as more of a traditionally feminine style. While status, competition, actions-and-objects focus and autonomy has been seen as more masculine. But watch out! Many a man holds these so called ‘feminine’ values sacred, and many a woman has smashed through the glass ceiling with a very ‘masculine’ set of values. Don’t box ‘all men’ or ‘all women’ as such into these categories. Not all men come from Mars and not all women come from Venus. The Chinese system of Yin and Yang may say this better.

I’ve explored these values in depth in my book, *The Gentle Revolution* and on our website, there’s a summary in the extra study material for this episode.

Spot the values clash

Unfortunately, during conflict, we tend to take a stance for the value in question. The more righteously we defend it, the more we will attract conflict with other people who hold to the opposite value. Let’s look at that.

Equality versus Status:

- *Equalisers*’ work hard to avoid arousing others’ jealousy. They won’t choose an expensive car even if they can afford it. They won’t flaunt their status. They’ll use fairness to evaluate the alternatives. They’ll come out fighting to defend their own rights or the rights of friends or colleagues or the disadvantaged.
- *Status Watchers*’ are drawn towards anything that will improve their status – in particular, power and leverage. They’re striving to rise to the top and doing what it takes to get there: self-improvement, building a clear chain of command, enforcing obedience to protocol and instructions. The best of them use their power wisely. However, some build status by taking personal credit for other people’s achievements. That’s a particularly annoying misuse of power.

Let's turn to **Agreement versus competition:**

- *'Agreers'* like to keep the peace, so they emphasise similarities and common ground. They might rush into an unsatisfactory arrangement just because they hate leaving the disagreement hanging in the air.
- *'Competers'* on the other hand, have high regard for competition because it drives people forward to achieve their best. They'll accept certain level of aggression as part of the 'rough and tumble' of life. They enjoy coming out on top after a disagreement. Are they testing the real worth of an idea or do they just love the sport of debate?

Let's turn now to the axis of

feelings versus actions-and-objects:

- For *'Feeling Focusers'* their first source of information is internal, on *feelings* – their own and other people's. They're relatively willing to disclose vulnerable feelings and they will often use emotions, intuition, their 'gut feelings' as their guide to action. They'll thrive on a 'deep and meaningful' – a conversation about the feelings involved.
- *'Action Focusers'* hold their attention on the external world, on *actions and objects*, what they know through their five senses, the hard facts. They'll generally steer a conversation away from feelings. They'll build rapport through the exchange of concrete information, shared activities, results and conversations about tangible things, like the stock market, or vintage cars or recipes. For some Action Focusers the internal world of feelings is difficult, private or uncharted territory.

Then there's the **Interdependence versus autonomy axis:**

- The *'Interdependent person'* centres themselves in their work team or their family. It's a great place to start from, but it has its faults. They'll judge others harshly if they're not a team player. They can depend too much on others, and they may need lots of encouragement to manage alone when that's needed.

- The ‘*Independent person*’, however wants to be autonomous to prove themselves, to solve problems on their own. They can judge others who aren’t like that, as weak, dependent or even meddling. They’re working towards a clear sense of self. They might work well with others, but they like sole responsibility in their personal area, be it cooking a meal, or being in charge of their own work project. They build self-esteem on ‘I can do this myself’.. We particularly applaud that in a developing child. In adults it can get out of hand, and conflicts will erupt when it does.

Watch out for signs of a values clash.

In the following examples, someone’s underlying value has been ignored. Listen and guess which one it might be:

- *“That’s not fair!”*
What’s the underlying value here? EQUALITY!
- *“Show some respect!”*
You’d better acknowledge their STATUS, pretty soon!
- *“Why do you always have to make such a fuss?”*
The challenge has been to their underlying value of AGREEMENT.
- *“This job is a dog eat dog world. If you can’t stand the heat, get out.”*
This person is thriving on COMPETITION.
- *“You don’t give a damn about how I feel! You’re not listening!”*
They’re focused on FEELINGS.
- *“Stop complaining and just get on with it!”*
They’re over this feelings business. Their focus is on ACTION.
- *“We’re all in this together!”*
The theme song of INTERDEPENDENCE.
- *“Let me do it myself! Don’t tell me what to do.”*
They’re crying out for AUTONOMY and we all want some of that!

Sorting out a values clash

- Can we spot a conflict of values and name it, at least to ourselves? It might tone down our negative judgements. For example, once we become aware that the other person is more oriented towards action whereas we're more concerned with feelings, there's a bit less sting in our tail. When we acknowledge their value and the way that our style has clashed with that, we've got insight into the underlying issue. We're well on the way to a reasonable compromise.
- Just can't understand them? When might you operate out of that difficult value, even if generally you'd never be motivated by it? You might hate competition, but do you actually enjoy a tough game of tennis, particularly if you've finally won? Find that alien value somewhere within yourself and you'll understand them better.
- If we recognise that we are in fact at the extreme end of one of these spectrums, can we pull it back a bit and try to accommodate the other person's values? Remember, don't try to *change* someone else's values. But perhaps you and the other person can shift priorities a bit. Can your key value find some place in their decision-making? Can you *include* their key value in yours? You're looking for a values marker. How much of what will satisfy the value here?

There's a changing emphasis on these values in the workplace. Best practices in management are shifting towards equality, agreement, feelings and interdependence, and away from traditional authoritarian control. Conflicting opinions on management styles will often cause conflict.

If management has set up the work climate to be highly competitive, someone is sure to feel that they've got it all wrong. If your boss keeps tight reins on every last detail, you may well resist. It might get compliance, but usually produces pretty unsatisfied workers. People want to offer their suggestions and have them respected. There's a tell-tale sign if a management style is out of date. Watch for staff turnover!

WHAT'S THE GOOD INTENTION?

We often see other people's motivations only from our own perspective. From theirs it looks quite different. Someone abruptly asks you to leave the room straight after a meeting. If you think they are just being rude and bossy, you'll probably feel very alienated. If you know that they're trying to clear the room quickly for the next meeting, you will probably brush off the incident: "OK! OK! I'm going!" and offer a quick smile.

When your feathers are ruffled, look for the other person's good intention.

There almost always is one and it helps to know it, or even guess at what it could be. You'll be less prickly if you go looking for it. Often, they're coming from a value that you can respect. Perhaps it's their right to privacy or their duty to protect. Even when you disagree with the underlying value or motivation, a meaningful discussion might help you understand it better. You might open it up with: 'Tell me why that's so important to you?' Even if you cannot identify a good intention, presume it exists. It gives empathy a chance.

Katherine and John's story demonstrates what I'm on about here.

#

Katherine and John

Katherine said that she'd been dating John. Apparently, they'd gone out together several times and she felt their relationship was really starting to develop. Yet something was getting in the way.

John had children from a previous marriage and each time they'd been out he'd mentioned another present he'd bought for them. Katherine found herself quite judgemental about so many expensive gifts for children. Last time, she'd come out with a somewhat snide remark, 'You sure give your kids a lot'. Afterwards, she said, she kept rolling the problem over in her mind. Sometimes she felt guilty about feeling so uncharitable. Sometimes, her negative judgements about John's generosity toward his children ballooned and interfered with how she felt about the whole relationship.

She went to a friend for advice. Her friend was very cautious about telling Katherine what to do, and so she took a different tack: 'Just imagine for a moment that you're a third person looking down at you both, say from up near the ceiling. There's Katherine and John having a romantic dinner. John's enthusiastically telling Katherine about the latest toy he's bought for one of his sons. There's Katherine getting hot under the collar, stewing on whether John has the wrong attitude to love and whether this whole relationship would never work for her.'

Her friend went on: 'Oh, Katherine seems to be weighing up a number of options: suggest he stops buying them such expensive gifts; just sit and say nothing; tell him not to talk to her about the gifts anymore; or leave the relationship. From your bird's eye view, what would you recommend she do?'

Katherine told us she found her friend's summary of the problem was actually very helpful. She paused a moment and took it all in. Then she looked back at her friend with a new idea: 'Why doesn't she find out why he does it?' she said.

The next time John mentioned a gift he'd bought, Katherine held back on her acid remark and instead said: 'I've noticed you buy a lot of expensive gifts for your children. Can you tell me about why you do that?' She was careful to keep her tone just curious.

She said he thought about it for a while and then replied that he thought it helped him feel OK about himself as a father. His dad had been incredibly stingy with him, stingy with his time and stingy with his money. And he had vowed he'd be different with his own children. He asked her, "You know what's my test for a good toy? I always choose toys I can use to relate to the children." He said he buys things they can assemble together, or they all have to go off to a park to use. He thought, in part, he was making up for all those lost opportunities with his own dad.'

She'd discovered his good intention and now her negative judgement just fell away. They talked on and it led to Katherine talking about her childhood and her parents' attitude to gifts. Toys only came her way at birthdays and Christmas. Her parents didn't think toys were all that important. Katherine and John didn't try to change each other's opinions. They just spent the time listening and trying to understand each other's values.

Finally, she said, John smiled warmly, saying how good it was to be able to talk about himself so openly! Katherine was delighted that she'd skirted their potential clash like that. All she'd really done was open up the conversation and find out more. And now Katherine felt closer to him.

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Katherine made some space to find the good intention and she did so with another empathy building technique called:

DIALOGUING

A *dialogue* or *dialoguing* can soften our resistance to a set of values very different from our own. Perhaps we've come up against deeply divided core beliefs or world views, between a clash of cultures or ethics. When your opposing opinions must to somehow must co-exist and interact, a dialogue might be your answer. It's a valuable technique often used to facilitate quite large groups. And it also can work just between just two individuals – once you understand the principles behind the method.

Dialoguing builds empathy independently of the problems.

It's about people telling their personal stories rather than debating the issues. When the issues rest on strongly held beliefs and values, challenging the other person head-on will just inflame the situation further, particularly where you each want wildly different things. This might be the time to encourage personal stories instead.

How does it work? In dialoguing, each person tells something of their own life experiences that connect to their values and beliefs – the influences on their life, perhaps something about past traumas or difficulties they're currently battling with. The purpose is for people in opposition to hear each other's experiences and the personal meaning they've drawn from those. They are looking at what's behind the values that are clashing. If you're just one on one, you might start the ball rolling with a question, such as "Can you tell me something about how you've come to really value that? I'd love to understand it a bit better." We'll explore more good openers shortly.

People might talk about why the issue is important to them, how they got to this place and possibly their pain around the issue. So tread lightly. There must be no debate. Just take onboard whatever they say. The focus shifts from the conflicting values to a fuller picture of the people themselves. Once we hear these backstories, we begin to view the conflict in a different way. We see that what the other person is saying is true *for them*, it's *their* reality.

Here's an example:

A blogger

This woman was repeatedly being hassled online. In internet slang, this guy was a *troll*. He was posting inflammatory remarks onto her blogs. She decided to engage with him. But how could she do that when her fans would be reading these exchanges too?

She started typing: 'Gosh, you feel strongly about that. Can you tell me something about how you came to that?' and she shared a few things that had influenced her opinions that he was rubbishing. She didn't expect him to justify himself, and she didn't want to go too deep herself. But she chose a real online relationship with him.

The outcome? He actually stopped trolling! And she felt better about her other trolls too. She felt much less threatened and hurt by their comments.

You'll often come up against a value that is very alien to you. Others may hold very different world views and they may build their sense of identity quite differently to you. When it's appropriate, encourage someone to tell you the story of how they formed those. People are often quite willing to talk in this way. You'll see the person, as well as the problem, differently and the conflicts you've been having become less biting. It can seem as though nothing really has happened – people have just talked, there was no resolution – and yet something has changed. A more empathic climate unfolds. And it's quite possible that your opposing positions have become less polarised.

If you're really able to create a totally non-judgmental space, people may also begin to discuss their unanswered questions, their difficulties and doubts. And there might be room for movement on the issues that must be resolved between you. Long term, more solutions might open up. But that's not why you switch to dialoguing. Leave that for later. Just let dialoguing do its work. As we saw with Katherine and John, often:

The problem dissolves rather than resolves.

Dialoguing can be used to steer quite large groups with clashing religious and ethnic values and factions holding deeply opposing opinions, say on the matter of abortion or logging. It's also be used in victim-offender reconciliations There's a wonderful organisation called [Essential Partners](#) (formerly known as the Public Conversations Project). It specialises in this type of group facilitation.

It's very important that the dialogue informs and does not inflame the situation further. Large group dialogues definitely need a skilled facilitator to steer the process Likewise, where there has been violence in the past. The professional facilitator might have designated speakers from each group sharing typical experiences with everyone. They'll try to roughly balance the numbers on each side of the divide. With a smaller group (say 5 to 8 people) the facilitator might let the dialogue evolve naturally without a set format. They'll use careful questions to steer the process.

Whether you're one-on-one or dealing with a bigger group, you may decide on dialogue, rather deepen the gulf by risking further debate. You totally shift your approach to encourage some personal sharing. Here are some ways to lead the conversation that way:

Good steering questions might include:

- 'I'd love to understand it all better. Can you tell me something about how you've come to think or feel this way?'
- 'Has there been some important experiences in your life that have led you to this?'
- 'Can you talk about something that has really affected you personally that relates to all this?'

Perhaps you're dialoguing about a difficult piece of behaviour, perhaps stealing or gambling, or an addiction to gaming. Let's just call it 'X' here.

- 'When you do X, how do you feel in the moment?'
- Or 'When you've done X, what's it like for you?'

Just ask and then really listen and acknowledge the answers. You might encourage them to go further. But make sure you're genuinely curious. No judgements behind your questions! You might ask:

- 'What doubts have you had?'

Keep the space safe – absolutely no direct challenges! Dialoguing is NOT about fixing.

Perhaps you can find a place for the 'miracle' question:

- 'If you woke up one morning and the whole problem was solved, what differences might you notice?'

If you're dialoguing one on one, ideally this is a two-way process. You need to be willing to share your personal experiences too and talk about times when you were pulled in two directions on the issues in question. Find appropriate moments to do that.

Even with the best of intentions we will never fully understand the other person. However, if we can manage to put judgements off to one side and try for respectful conversations, empathy *will* build. Dialoguing builds more trust for better decision-making when the time is right.

Here's the

SUMMARY

Conflicts are best handled in a climate of mutual respect. It helps when we really know where the other person is coming from and understand different personality styles and values. Diversity is a rich resource.

We've looked at a number of ways we can work with it.

- **The DISC model** explains differing styles on the scales of 'introverted versus extroverted' combined with 'oriented to people or oriented to task'. In difficult conversations can we accommodate the other person's style?
- **We've looked at value markers** – ways to flag that someone's value is being respected. Can you find some agreed signals? Such as regular phone calls, or team meetings, or agreed time out. How much of what is enough?

- **We spotted a clash of values.** Common clashes include Equality versus Status, Agreement versus Competition, Feeling versus Actions-and-Objects focus, Interdependence versus Autonomy.
- **We looked at how it helps to find the other person's good intention** underneath their unwelcome behaviour.
- **And we considered switching to Dialoguing rather than further debate when the issues and conflicting values run deep.** You don't try to fix the problem. You just encourage the person to talk about the personal experiences that have shaped those beliefs and attitudes and share some of your own.

All these methods shift judgement out of the way and help us respect the other person's personal context. Our words, our actions, and our decision-making can then demonstrate this new respect. We are finding ways for our empathy to flow beyond and around the issues. Make space for difference!

If you'd like more details on all of this, have a look at our website, at Conflict Resolution Network. Our headquarters are at crnhq.org. You can download a transcript and explore extra study notes. There's a free manual for trainers there too.

Empathy has been about respecting the other person and the place they come from. It's time we looked at how we respect ourselves at the same time by clearly state our case. So, in the next episode we'll look closely at Appropriate assertiveness, the fourth tool in your toolkit of conflict resolution skills.