



## Conflicts Are Just Like Driving a Car -Part 2-

I wrote previously about the fun we have with turn signals and how this relates to 'signalling' our intentions in a conversation. I thought I would continue with the driving theme and look at a couple other scenarios.

### **Stuck in Gear**

What do you do when you are in 'PARK' or 'REVERSE' but need to move forward? In a car, you shift gears - pretty easy to do.

In a conflict situation, often times the only way to move forward is also to "shift gears". Only, it is not a physical shift, it is a perspective shift.

So how do you make that shift?

You first need to think about how you are looking at the conflict. Are you making accusations? Are you seeking revenge? Are you making assumptions?

If you are, then you will need to shift your approach to be more curious. This will help you get to a successful resolution.

Here's some ways to 'shift' your perspective...

Ask yourself questions

- What were the events that led up to the situation?
- What would happen if the situation continued as is?
- What is important to you in this conflict? (Reputation, being right, job security, etc)
- How do you think the other person is feeling?
- What, if anything, do you need to hear or to express so you can feel better?
- If you could turn back time, what would you do differently?

## **Contribution Solution**

Acknowledging your own contribution to a situation is also a big step to helping yourself move forward in the conflict.

How did you contribute to the situation? - Did you gossip, make assumptions or use a tone or words that hurt the other person?

Often times, contributions are things that you didn't do. Maybe you didn't fully explain your intentions, didn't listen properly, or didn't ask questions when you needed more information.

So, what can you now do to move forward through this conflict? First you can answer the above questions. Then you have a choice to make...

Based on your answers, can you constructively move on and not feel resentful or upset even if you don't have a conversation with the other person? If so, then congratulations! You have moved from feeling stuck in park to a solution just by 'shifting' your perspective.

If you feel that a conversation with the other person would help, then you need to do just that.

## **Time to share**

Now how do you talk with the other person in a way that won't make them defensive and won't have you overly nervous?

Each situation will require a little different approach, but there are some common techniques that will serve you well in any circumstance.

### **1. Prepare and Use...**

- The Initial Approach

*"This is awkward/uncomfortable/important for me, and I would like to meet with you today."*

- **An 'I' Message**

There are four parts to an 'I' Message:

- When (describe the event without making accusations)  
*"When I couldn't finish my sentences in the team meeting,"*
- I (describe the emotional impact the event had on you)  
*"I was/felt concerned/upset/curious/hurt"*
- Because (describe why the event impacted you)  
*"Because being understood by everyone is important to me."*
- And I (describe the action you now want to take)  
*"And I would like to talk to you about how to make sure I can get my thoughts across to everyone without being interrupted."*

## **2. Ask Open Ended Questions**

Be curious - get information. These questions usually begin with "What" or "How".

*"What is important to you in our meetings?"*

## **3. Listen and paraphrase**

Allow the other person's thoughts to sink in before you put your response together. Don't be concerned if there is silence between sentences.

Be sure to paraphrase back to the other person. This ensures that you understood what was said and it confirms to the other person that you were listening.

## **4. Come Up With Options**

Discuss different solutions that will meet both your needs.

## 5. Choose a Solution

Pick an option that works for both of you and make a commitment to each other to follow through on your agreement.

### Student Driver

Sharing your thoughts when in a conflict situation is a lot like getting your drivers license.

What do we do with inexperienced drivers? We stick a sign on the back of their car to warn others. We usually give them lots of space and have patience when they don't go as soon as the light turns green. And now there are graduated licensing programs that ensure new drivers get plenty of coaching before they can drive on their own.

Unfortunately, we don't have signs for people to wear when they are inexperienced at conflict resolution conversations. So, we have to assume that everyone is new and give them lots of room to talk. We need to have patience and understanding.

Like an inexperienced driver, a conversation about a conflict can be all over the road. Once people gain knowledge about the flow of conversations - 'I' messages, paraphrasing - the better a person gets at "driving" the conversation, at staying in the lane, of making sure intentions are clear.

Whatever you choose to do, congratulate yourself on the fact that you are choosing to do something different. Whether it be looking at the situation from a more constructive perspective, or seeking help in finding better words to use, you can feel good about your contribution to a situation simply by knowing that you are working towards a more positive approach.

Mike Lund

Conflict Resolution Practitioner