INTERNATIONAL DAY OF LISTENING

SEPTEMBER 19, 2019

Be Bold!   Listen for Common Ground

A Listening Guide by Sheila Bentley

August 19: Listening for Common Ground During Conflict

The purpose of today's activity is to help you have a successful outcome to a conversation that might involve moderate conflict or disagreement. To do this, hold the conversation in a series of "rounds," following the directions for each round.   Some of these rounds might take considerable time. You might try to accomplish Rounds 1, 2, and 3 at one session, and then tackle Rounds 4 and 5 at a later session.

Round 1: Identify the conflict. What are the goals you would like to achieve in this conversation? What needs to change for this conversation to be more successful?

Round 2: Determine whether the conflict exists in a closed system, an open system, or a combination.

Round 3: Identify which conflict management style would be appropriate for this conflict.

Round 4: Brainstorm what solutions are available.

Round 5: Revisit your goals for this conversation, determine which conflict management style will support achieving the goals, and select the solution (or combination) that meets the goals you set and works best for all parties.

Preparing to Listen for Common Ground

Step 1: To ensure that all parties have the same perception of what the conflict is, have each person state what they think the issue/conflict is. Make sure you are all in agreement with what the issue is; otherwise, the solutions may not fit the problem. Find the common ground about what the conflict is.

The Conflict:

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Step 2: List the goals you would like to achieve with this conversation. What is "the point" of this conversation – to find a solution or simply consider alternatives? Does an agreement have to be reached after this conversation, or will it take other conversations to reach that goal? Are your desired outcomes aligned with others in the conversation? Have the group discuss the desired outcomes. Do you agree on the goals, or do you need to accept several goals that could all be achieved?
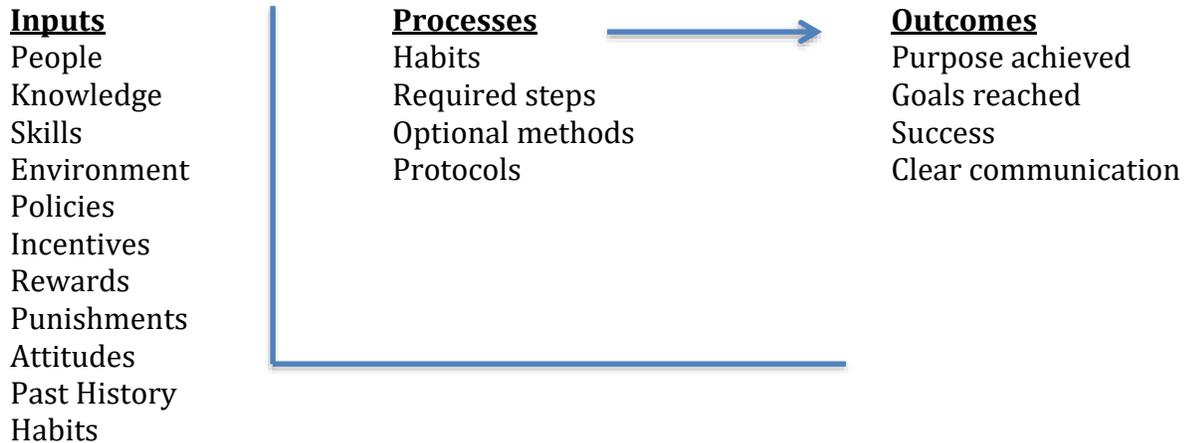
The Goals:

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Step 3: Identify what needs to change for this conversation to have a positive outcome. When we don't get the outcomes that we want from a conversation, we need to look at the inputs and processes that we used prior to and during that conversation.

Inputs + Processes = Outcomes

Inputs	**Processes**	**Outcomes**
People	Habits	Purpose achieved
Knowledge	Required steps	Goals reached
Skills	Optional methods	Success
Environment	Protocols	Clear communication
Policies		
Incentives		
Rewards		
Punishments		
Attitudes		
Past History		
Habits		

Inputs, Processes, and Outcomes of the Listening Process

Inputs	+	**Processes**	=	**Outcomes**
Environment		Listening Habits		Message Understood
People Involved		Listening Behaviors		Empathy
Listening habits		Hearing		Correct Action Taken
Past history		Attending		Relationship Improved
Prior knowledge		Comprehending		Information Gained
Expectations		Responding		
Attitudes		Remembering		
Time available				

Do you have the right people involved?
Would it be better to meet on neutral turf?
Is everyone up-to-date on the past history, or does it need to be reviewed?
Does everyone have the necessary prior knowledge?
Are there some attitudes that need to be changed?
Do you need to establish some rules of engagement?
Would a mediator or "referee" help?
Do you need to create a way to capture the information, commitments made, actions to be taken, including dates and responsible party?

What needs to change:

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_____

Step 4: Create a plan that identifies what preparation needs to occur for this conversation to be successful and perhaps create a set of "Rules of Engagement" that specify positive listening behaviors that should be used and negative listening behaviors that should be avoided. Have group members agree to abide by the rules.

Sample Rules of Engagement

1. Commit to finding common ground.
2. Come with an attitude of wonder—why would the other person feel as they do?
3. Do not interrupt.
4. Allow the speaker to finish his/her thoughts.
5. Respect the other person's views and show respect as you listen.
6. Put away cell phones and other devices that cause interruptions.
7. Avoid listening for what you can disagree with.
8. When appropriate, restate what the other person said in your own words to show that you have listened and understood.

The Plan:

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Closed vs. Open System in Conflict

<u>**Closed System**</u>: one with limited resources, such as time, money, responsibility for tasks, equipment, natural resources, etc.

Examples of a closed system:
- If you get a raise, there is less money for my raise.
- If you get a holiday off, and only one of us can have that day off, I can't get that day off.
- If you get assigned fewer responsibilities that must be achieved, then I have to do those responsibilities. (At home, if you don't do the dishes, then I have to, or they don't get done.)
- You don't have the power that you think you should have. (Can the power be shared, or do you need to establish who has the power and in which situations?)
- Conflicts over natural resources, such as land and water, are closed system conflicts because the resources are limited.

<u>**Open System**</u>: one where the resources are not limited, but we aren't getting what we want or need—such as love, respect, appreciation.

Examples of open system:
- If you already have one child, and a second child is born, you don't have half as much love to give. You can love each child equally and more. (But you do have limited time, money, and other resources—which are part of a closed system. So the first child might equate love with how much time you spend on him/her. If you are spending more time on the new child, the first child may feel like you love him/her less and may resent the second child.)
- You don't feel that your work is appreciated.
- You don't feel that you are getting the respect you deserve.

Resolving a conflict in an open system is often a matter of letting others know that you feel underappreciated, disrespected, or unloved and let them know what you need or want in order to feel appreciated, respected, or loved. It may not be money, but simply more praise, more time spent with you, specific examples being given of how you are appreciated.

Is the conflict a closed system or an open system?

_____

If it is a closed system, what is the limited resource?

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If it is an open system, what is the want or need that is not being met?

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Collaborative Conflict Resolution

In collaborative conflict resolution, it is important to first establish the goals. It happens often that the parties involved will express similar goals, which then enables us to find common ground early. The goals are future oriented so the discussion about them takes us away from the present, which may be filled with tension and sometimes a lot of anger. What then follows is listening, paraphrasing, and finding common ground. Refer to the goals that you established in Round 1.

Five Conflict Management Styles

According to K.W. Thomas and R.H. Kilmann, there are five conflict management styles:

1. **Avoiding** – This is when you avoid the issue and avoid having the conversation. You aren't helping the other party reach their goals, and you aren't assertively pursuing your own.
2. **Accommodating** – This involves cooperating to a high-degree, and perhaps even at your expense, meaning you may not get what you want or meet your goals, objectives, or desired outcomes. Sometimes, however, it is more important to you to resolve the conflict than get what you want.
3. **Collaborating** – This is where you partner with the other party to achieve both of your goals—to win as much as possible for each party. This avoids the "win-lose" option and seeks a "win-win" outcome.
4. **Competing** – This seeks a "win-lose" outcome—with you being the winner. You act in a very assertive or aggressive way to achieve your goals, without cooperating with the other party, and often not being concerned about the other party's desires. Your win is often at the expense of the other party.
5. **Compromising** – This is sometimes described as the "lose-lose" scenario where neither party really achieves everything they want. This requires a moderate level of assertiveness and cooperation. In some situations, getting some of what you want is more important than getting none of what you want.

Using the Five Conflict Management Styles to Their Best Advantage

1. **Avoiding**: Choose your battles. It's not always worth it to create a conflict just to fight a battle, especially if it is over something that doesn't really matter to you. If the outcome matters to you, then this is not the style to use. This works when the issue is trivial or when you have no chance of winning.   It can also be effective when the issue would be very costly. It's also very effective when the atmosphere is emotionally charged and you need to create some space. Sometimes issues will resolve themselves, but hope is not a strategy, and in general, just avoiding a conflict is not a good long-term strategy.
2. **Accommodating**: This works when the other person is the expert or has a better solution. It is also useful if it is more important to preserve the relationship than get what you want on this issue.
3. **Collaborating**: This can be effective for complex scenarios where you need to find a new solution. This can also mean re-framing the challenge to create a bigger picture approach with room for everybody's ideas. The downside is that it requires a high degree of trust and a willingness to work together. Reaching a consensus can require a lot of time and effort to get everybody on board and to find the win-win solution.
4. **Competing**: This approach may be appropriate for emergencies when time is of the essence, or when you need quick, decisive action, and people are aware of and support the approach. This may also be the only approach that is appropriate if for example, there are limited resources or options (either I win or you do). In this case, try marrying this conflict to another limited-resources conflict, so that each party wins something.
5. **Compromising**: It may be appropriate for scenarios where you need a temporary solution, or where both sides have equally important goals.   The trap is to fall into compromising as an easy way out, when collaborating would produce a better solution.

If the conflict is in a closed system, competing often becomes the conflict management style that is used. It does not have to be. Accommodating, collaborating, and compromising could also be used. If you use accommodating, you give the advantage to the other person. This can be made to be more equal by "marrying" the conflict to another that exists in a closed system. For instance, you cook, and I'll do the dishes. It could also be resolved using a compromise: you do the dishes this week, and I'll do them next week. You could also use collaborating: you bring the dishes over, and I'll put them in the dishwasher. If the conflict is in an open system, since there is not a limited resource, competing is not necessary. Accommodating, collaborating, or compromising could be used.

Which conflict management style seems most appropriate for this conflict?

Round 4: Brainstorm what solutions are available.

Be sure to get input from all group members as to available and desirable solutions.

Available solutions:

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Consider using a "weighted vote" rather than giving each person only one vote.

One way to do this is to give each person ten pennies. Write the solutions on separate pieces of paper, place these apart on a table, and have each person vote their ten pennies, putting the most pennies on their favorite solution. When voting, people need to split their ten pennies on at least two or three solutions, so that they don't spend all ten pennies on the solution they suggested. For example, they could distribute the pennies as 8, 1, and 1 if they felt strongly about one solution. If they like a number of solutions equally, they could divide the pennies up evenly on those solutions, i.e., 3, 3, and 4 or 2, 2, 2, 2, 2. The more pennies that are spent on a solution, the stronger the commitment will be to making that solution work.

After the pennies have been placed, this also gives the whole group information about how strongly (or not) a solution is supported. If there is an obvious heavy favorite, go with that one. But if more than one solution has good support, explore whether more than one solution can be applied—if not all at once, perhaps over time other solutions could be implemented. This brings about stronger support for the changes being made, and it is a very transparent way to make decisions.

Best solution or solutions:

Concluding the Conversation:

1. Thank participants for sharing and listening.
2. Review what the conflict was that was identified.
3. Review the goals that were set.
4. Review the common ground.
5. Review important points made and what has been agreed to.
6. Review who will be responsible for any actions agreed to and due dates for these actions.
7. Set a follow-up date to check on progress and make sure solutions are working.

Iceberg of Conflict

In his book *Positive Intelligence*, Shirzad Chamine describes a model for *conflict management:* The Iceberg of Conflict. The Iceberg of Conflict has three layers: Positions, Assumptions, and Aspirations.

POSITIONS

ASSUMPTIONS
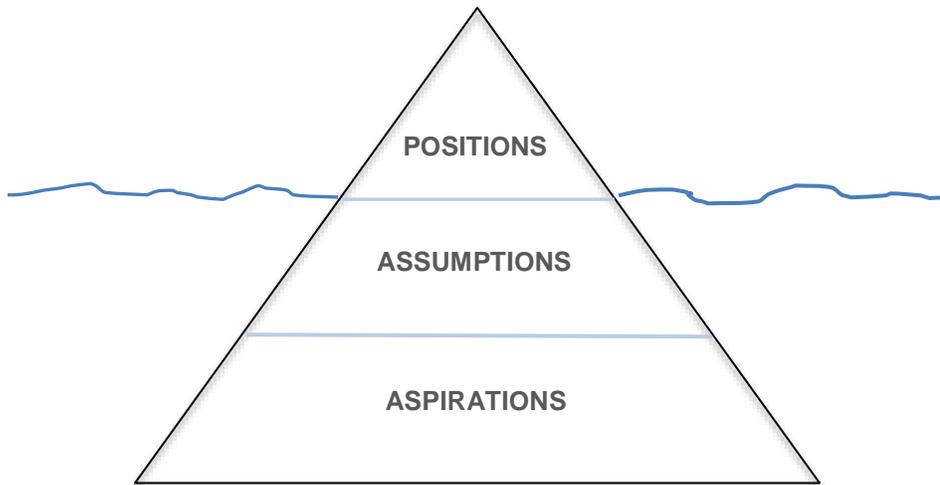
ASPIRATIONS

The iceberg shows that what we see is the **position** that somebody takes, but as with icebergs, we don't see what is under the water—the underlying assumptions and aspirations.

Positions
Position is where conflict often occurs because for every position there is generally an opposite position, and taking a position--especially a strong one--can often generate an automatic opposite position. Resolving a conflict at this level is difficult because it requires one party to give up their position or the two parties have to meet somewhere in the middle (i.e., a compromise).

Assumptions
Explore the assumptions. If you start looking at assumptions, you might find you had the assumptions wrong, or that you misread the intentions. Misreading intentions is a common source of conflict. Be sure to check any assumptions you are making, rather than assuming you know what they are.

Aspirations
This is where the common ground can be found. Aspirations are those big goals we hope to achieve, like world peace. Don't we all want world peace? When we realize we have common ground here, it makes it easier to find common ground in our positions. (i.e., If we all want world peace, it might be easier to agree on a solution to gun control.) You might start by asking, "What do we want to get from this conversation?" or "What do we hope to achieve today by having this conversation?"