

**Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada
Annual Meeting June, 2026
Self-awareness and Effective Communication in Co-op Conflicts
Participant Notes**

Self Reflection

Think of a specific instance of conflict or a time when you were angry with someone and they with you.

What were you thinking and feeling (your physical feelings)?

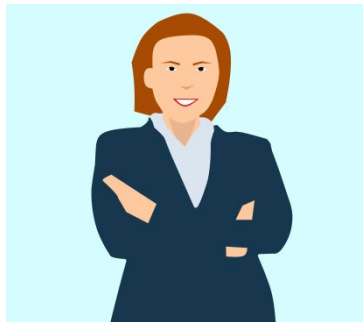
What did you *feel like* saying or doing... and what, in fact, did you do?

What are your default responses to accusations, demands, put-downs and hostility?

Conflict is...

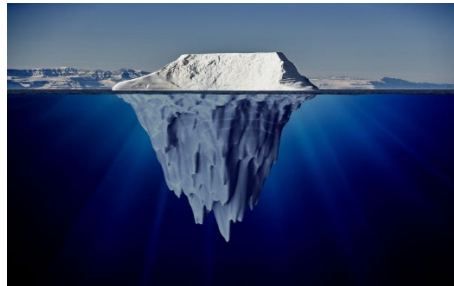
- A continuum from mild disagreement to physical aggression
- It's inevitable
- There are approaches and techniques for de-escalating and managing conflict
- Whether conflict is an asset and an opportunity or a liability and something to be avoided depends on how you relate to it
- It is an opportunity for understanding, transforming relationships and community development

APPROACHES TO MANAGING CONFLICT AND DIFFICULT PEOPLE / SITUATIONS



- Power-based: use of coercion, authority, etc.
How effective is this approach in your co-op?
- Rights / Rules-based: use of laws, standards, moral codes, etc.
How effective is this approach in your co-op?
- Interest-based: discovering the underlying needs and interests of people and creating solutions to meet as many needs as possible.

Interest – based Approach Listening for interests beneath positions, claims, demands



Positions, demands, claims are above the waterline.

Interests are below the waterline:

Needs	Concerns
Values	Feelings
Beliefs	Assumptions
Intentions	Hopes

KEY QUESTION: What's deep down important to the other?!

Without attributing intentions or making assumptions, how do you know?

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT OUR BRAINS & THE DYNAMICS OF ESCALATION



- Through evolution we have learned to protect ourselves whenever we sense a threat. Our basic impulse to protect ourselves is automatic and unconscious.
- The amygdala is a part of your brain. It can be called the brain's smoke detector. It is what tells us to come up with an emergency response, the so-called fight or flight.
- When we perceive a threat, a cascade of chemicals is released in the body. Our instinctive function takes over, our ability to think rationally is hijacked.
- We notice immediate changes: increased heart rate, sweaty palms, shallow, rapid breathing as we take in more oxygen, preparing to bolt if we have to.
- We can become disoriented or muddled in a heated conversation. Access to multiple perspectives is reduced.
- We dig in - - to protect ourselves and focus on the one perspective that makes us feel the safest: "I'm right and you're wrong," even though we ordinarily see more perspectives.

THE DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT ESCALATION

When people hear another person's position, complaints or demands, it makes them fear that their needs will not be met. People then feel they must protect their needs by:

- Defending their *behaviour* ("I'm not doing anything wrong.")
- Defending their *character* ("I'm being reasonable.")
- Getting others to take their side, *forming alliances*
- Attacking the source of the threat by threatening, insulting or humiliating ('you're incompetent'), minimizing the other's complaint ("What are you getting so upset about?") or finding other things to criticize or to complain about.

When the other hears the attacks, they respond similarly by defending themselves and attacking the other. This escalates the conflict as both people shift their attention away from the problem and focus on defending themselves and attacking the other.

Dealing with a conflict is not necessarily the same as resolving a conflict. One definition of resolution is reaching a **mutually satisfactory outcome**.

On this definition, it is more likely that your efforts will result in something that is more **sustainable**.

The Rules Approach

Rules are of course vital. Keep them as your last resort. Angry people do not like to be subdued or silenced. At a minimum, I suggest you try an interest based approach. But keep the rules in your back pocket.

Put to rest the idea of directing people into submission, into behaving according to the rules.

The approach and techniques below are in line with *resolving* conflicts not merely dealing with them.

Calming Your Brain and Parking your impulses

Recall that you are escalated. Even if you walk away from an escalated interaction, you may still be triggered – angry, resentful, frustrated, irritated, stressed...

How do you stop and recognize what you are feeling and then shift behaviour in the moment? Requires self-awareness but also willingness to be vulnerable...and the habit of stopping the internal commotion long enough and mindfully enough to begin engaging effectively.

How do we get control of our brains?

- Focus on your body
- Notice you are activated: stay present
 - Breathe
 - Centre yourself
 - Let go of the story
 - Be curious

SHIFT YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Your success in managing conflict begins with self-awareness and centring yourself.

Your Toolbox: The Basics of Presence, Attitude and Parking your first reactions

1. Pause when think of your first or default reaction
2. Let go of the story in your mind
3. Let go of the thinking and judging mind
4. Focus on what is important to the speaker
5. Adopt an attitude of neutral curiosity: lean in

BRAINSTORM: Why is this hard?

Your Toolbox: Deep, reflective listening

1. Set the table: Encourage with your attitude of curiosity and openness
2. Listen for what's important to the other person
3. Restate, summarize what you heard
4. Acknowledge interests and what's deep down important
5. Ask open-ended questions
6. Connect for total meaning
7. Be willing to be corrected

Another approach is with C.L.A.I.M: Responding to a perceived opponent or angry person

- Centre yourself
- Listen for what's important to the other person
- Acknowledge & summarize what you heard
- Invite more information
- Move to problem-solving

NOTICE you do not try to solve problems until the person feels acknowledged and has de-escalated.

The Zigzag Effect

SHIFT YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Taking a few minutes to respond with reflective / active listening is the foundation for success in managing and resolving conflicts.

DELIVERING UNWELCOME NEWS: I MESSAGING

1. Prepare your approach and how you will respond to anger or distress.
2. Choose your intervention and timing thoughtfully.
3. Find a positive opener
4. Explain the context of your message.
5. Give your message clearly or describe the difficult behaviour in neutral language, the feeling it created, and the effect on you.
6. Listen actively and acknowledge impact of your message.
7. Be collaborative in resolving concerns and issues arising and ask to discuss or negotiate a solution.

Avoid the use of “You” or describe the other’s behaviour in neutral language.

Some Examples

“I feel upset people do not let me finish what I am saying because it is hard for me to hold on to my ideas.”

“I feel upset when you begin speaking when I am speaking because it is hard for me to hold on to my ideas.”

“I find you a persuasive speaker though I feel stressed when you raise your voice because it makes it difficult to collect my thoughts.”

“I feel angry and disregarded when you do not let me know beforehand that you will be bringing up additions for the agenda on the spot.”

“I become irritated when members let their dogs poop on my lawn and do not pick it up immediately. I spend a lot of time with my children on my lawn.”

SETTING BOUNDARIES

There may be occasions when you need to set a clear boundary regarding someone’s behaviour because it is aggressive, intimidating, racist, misogynist, etc.

You need to use a directive statement and get the other’s agreement to stop behaving that way. Then you can return to listening reflectively etc.

Steps:

- Prepare yourself and avoid escalating the situation
- Acknowledge their concerns and express willingness to help
- Use Directive Statements
- Get their agreement to behave / communicate differently
- Return to dealing with their concerns

Example

“I can see you are upset about your work order and I would like to help. In order for me to continue speaking with you I need you to stop shouting / stop swearing / stop referring to my background (gender, orientation, etc.)?”

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Practice & Notes