



Conflict

Thoughts on leadership
by Karl Pister



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Kicking off with two quotes:

The first, from one of the best books I have read recently, *Principles*, by Ray Dalio:

"I believe we are much better off preparing to deal with it (a difficult situation) than wishing it weren't true."

And the second, from the tagline of an email I recently received:

"The best things in life are on the other side of a difficult conversation."

An entire industry has been constructed around the fact that most people will willingly walk off the proverbial cliff than have that difficult conversation.

*(In my view, one of the very best books on the subject carries the concern in the title. *Difficult Conversations*, by Douglas Stone and Bruce Patton is superb and is a product of the Harvard Project on Negotiation, the bellwether location on the planet for anything concerning this topic. Their website,*



pon.harvard.edu, is a goldmine for resources, teaching, white papers, or seminars regarding addressing difficult situations.)

But I digress a bit. Back to the quotes. Why is it that such angst is developed when you come up on a situation that is difficult? You know people that aren't phased at all with such a situation.

Why does it bother you and not them?

Why do some of your employees run for cover when a fellow employee makes a stand on something?

Why do you dance around a subject while knowing it needs addressing?

I remember working with a team of charge nurses that were in a specialty where confrontation was a hallmark. I was shocked, early on in the training, when I asked what themes they thought they needed to work on the most and eleven of the sixteen hands went up when someone mentioned 'dealing with conflict'.

Them?!

In their specialty?!



Never would have guessed. What they disclosed is that while they did it, and realized they needed to do it, it came at quite a high emotional and physical cost to them. It was one of the most beneficial topics of our time together.

Remember over the last few months when we have occasionally addressed the power of biology and how it beats psychology any day of the week? How the best of ideas and strategies can be blown up by thoughts and feelings you might not even suspect as a leader?

That is exactly what is in play when people run for cover in a conflict situation. And that is exactly why you need to be so aware of the sensitivity of the topic and how to address it.

Telling someone to 'just go talk with them about it', usually doesn't produce great results.

I would not do you any favor by addressing the specifics here. Even if I spread it out over a few weeks, there are state-of-the-art resources that address it very well. These resources have to be woven into the current fabric of the culture, or a new culture needs to be established if they can't be woven in.



What I can do is list the top resources I use when I develop training or wish to study up on this vital topic. (As always, happy to discuss any of this more in detail. Just respond back to this email with any questions).

Here are my top sources:

As noted earlier, *The Harvard Project on Negotiation* -
pon.harvard.edu

Getting Together - Roger Fisher

Getting to Yes - Roger Fisher

Beyond Reason - Roger Fisher

1. This is a deeper dive into the psychology of conflict avoidance. I would read this first and then the rest of Fisher's books.

Getting Ready to Negotiate - The Getting to Yes Workbook -
Roger Fisher

1. The late Roger Fisher was the founding father of the Project on Negotiation. Brilliant writer and thinker.

As noted earlier - *Difficult Conversations* - Stone, Patton, and
Heen

1. These authors are also from The Project on Negotiation

Thanks for the Feedback - Stone and Heen

1. One of the best books I have read on the topic.



Crucial Conversations - Kerry Patterson, et. al

1. A classic on the topic.

HBR Guide to Dealing with Conflict - Amy Gallo

And, if you have a subscription to Harvard Business Review, get on their site and search "conflict" and you will have access to best-of-class writings. If you don't have a subscription and are in a leadership position, that is a must-do investment. The subscription to both print and online editions is \$149.00 per year. Completely worth it!

Again, you can't lead if you are not learning.

Conversely, if you intentionally focus on learning and practicing in this area, you will see superb results in your leadership success.

Those that can bring people together are invaluable to any enterprise.





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