

Managing Conflict through Communication

Fifth Edition

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PREFACE

DEALING WITH CONFLICT REMAINS CHALLENGING

As we coauthors worked on revising our textbook for the fifth time, we reflected on all that has gone on in our lives since we started collaborating so many years ago. A lot has happened to each of us over these many years. These significant events jolted us into reality and forced us to consider our subject from new perspectives resulting in the fifth edition of our textbook.

While much has changed for us in recent years, one principle has held steadfast throughout all editions of our book: Many people still have a strong need to study conflict. People tend to feel negatively about conflict, and they do not handle confrontations well. We believe that the common mismanagement of conflict explains the bad name given to the subject. We intend to help you learn more constructive attitudes and more positive conflict management and resolution skills, so that you feel less apprehensive about engaging in interpersonal conflict and better able to manage and resolve it.

Conflict continues to be one of the “grand challenges” of our time, occurring because of deep divisions in our society that carry over into our interpersonal relationships. There are cultural divides between ethnic, racial, and religious groups. There are political and value barriers that separate conservatives and liberals. There are gender gaps between the sexes. There are economic and power divides between upper and lower economic and social classes. There are age barriers between our younger and older citizens. When these divides carry over into interpersonal relations, even people of similar backgrounds find differences difficult to overcome.

Where there is a divide, we communication teachers and researchers look for bridges. It is no surprise then that we have identified communication as the essential bridge in overcoming conflicts. As a first step the conflicting parties must meet to deal with the issues that divide them. They must take time out of their busy schedules, allocate resources they may find limited, pay attention to matters they may consider unimportant or frustrating, and listen in order to learn how to bridge the gap that separates them. Meeting together and paying attention to the issues and each other is an important first step, but more is needed. In this next step, the conflicting parties must communicate. How do they do that? What do they say? How do they say it? Because they have thoroughly researched the communication processes in conflict situations, communication scholars have a great deal to offer students interested in studying conflict. They

- offer a wide variety of tools for successfully managing conflict situations.
- are sensitive to ethical concerns as they create solutions to challenges such as conflict.
- view communication, conflict, the management of conflict, anger, stress, forgiveness, negotiation, and mediation as processes.

- study the role of stress and negative attitudes as key contributors to conflict—anger as an escalator of conflict and emotional residues as barriers to reconciliation.

The purpose of this textbook is to apply these contributions to the effective management of conflict. While the challenge of conflict initially appears enormous, the subject is divisible into more manageable parts or learning modules. Moreover, as a discipline, communication has identified many principles and techniques that prevent conflicts from turning violent and damaging the conflicting parties and their relationship. Some of these principles and techniques are preventive in nature; others repair channels of communication and restore relations.

WHAT IS NEW IN THIS EDITION?

If we just consider all that has happened to us since our last edition, we are surprised at how much we wanted to change and add for this edition. Meanwhile, our students have caused us to realize that revising is necessary to better relate to them. They wanted more clarification, less redundancy, and longer treatment of some topics and less on others. They expressed their confusion to us and need for our help as they waded through the complex and challenging subject of interpersonal conflict. So what is different this time around? A lot!

- We have added a new chapter on interpersonal violence (titled Chapter 5: Managing Violent Tendencies), a topic that is receiving more attention in the study of communication and conflict.
- The theory chapter has been moved forward in the book and is now Chapter 3.
- The chapters on negotiation and mediation have been moved to Part III as Chapters 10 and 11.
- We combined the previously separate chapters on anger and stress into Chapter 8.
- Many chapters have been strengthened by adding theories and the findings of recent research studies that relate specifically to that topic.
- To make the text more useful to instructors who use classroom activities or teach in a discussion format, most chapters now include an exercise that captures the key idea of the chapter and a discussion assignment that applies the chapter's key ideas to a case study.

Our readership presents a challenge. While most college students continue to fall into the 18–22 single group who are interested in conflict issues related to dating, teachers, parents, and roommates, there are increasingly more “nontraditional” students taking college courses online and who reflect an older group, married or divorced, with children, and long-term employment, planning soon to retire, or presently serving our country in the military. They are more interested in issues related to their marriage, family, retirement, and military or workplace. We have tried to include issues and conflict examples that reflect the diversity of our students.

However, regardless of their age and marital status, we are struck by the fact that our students continue to come to us with little previous conflict training. Students of

all ages would like to know exactly how to confront someone they know personally and how to better manage their present conflicts. They want to know specifically what to say and exactly how to say it. Introducing the S-TLC system for responding to conflict, six steps to successful confrontation, and how to create effectively worded I-statements in Part I of the text responds to the students' need to learn immediately how to effectively deal with problems and issues they are presently facing.

As in the previous edition, Part I is intended to serve as an introduction to the study of conflict. Part II continues to emphasize the factors that escalate conflict and techniques for de-escalating it. However, we changed Part III to the idea of broadening the study of conflict to include negotiation, mediation, workplace conflict, and social conflict. Thus, the new edition addresses a wider variety of social contexts of interest to our students.

Throughout the textbook, we continue to provide practical advice concerning conflict along with theoretical notions about it. Each chapter is a learning module, beginning with specific objectives, followed by instruction including a summary clearly tied to the opening objectives, and finally ending with practical exercises that apply key ideas in the chapter to learners' lives and case studies. Our thinking is that successfully doing the exercises is an indication that our students have mastered the content.

As you use this book, remember that conflict often results in personal change. Expect to question thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that you have taken for granted in the past and to add new ideas and actions to your ways of thinking and behaving.

LEE'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although I am officially Dudley Cahn, I am known to my students, colleagues, and friends by the nickname of Lee. As in previous editions, I have my students to thank for their help and input. This is probably due to the fact that I now teach this course entirely online, which is quite a different experience from teaching face to face. Students seem more open to express themselves online, revealing what they don't know as much as what they do. From their comments, I am able to determine their needs and problems reading the text, doing the assignments, and discussing the key ideas. Because I found myself explaining more to my online students, I feel that there is a better way to organize the chapters and explain some of the key concepts and principles. Thanks to my students for their input and encouragement, the end result is a clearer work with a broader perspective than our earlier editions.

As I have done in earlier works, I would like to express my appreciation to the many scholars who have shared with me over the years their ideas on interpersonal conflict. Among them (in alphabetical order) are William Benoit, Nancy Burrell, Daniel Canary, Steve Duck, Sally Lloyd, Loreen Olson, Michael Roloff, Ray Ross, Teresa Sabourin, Stella Ting-Toomey, Steve Wilson, and Dolf Zillmann. Although my mentors have passed on, I want to acknowledge the important role they played in my life: Charles Brown, Donald Cushman, and Clare Danielsson. A day doesn't go by that I don't reflect on the influence these people had on me.

As a result of recently editing a scholarly book on family violence for SUNY Press, I learned a lot about conflict from my contributors. I would like to thank

Nancy Brule, Jessica Eckstein, SuZanne Enck-Wanzer, Loreen N. Olson, Felicia Roberts, Angela Swanson, Mari Elenar Villar, and Steven R. Wilson for helping me better understand how interpersonal conflict can lead to violent behavior.

Obviously, I have my coauthor to thank for her willingness to again work with me. The first edition was her textbook alone, but I have been privileged to work with her starting with our second and subsequent editions. We alternate the role of senior author, so that each of us has an opportunity to take the work in a little different direction and run with it. I am pleased that Ruth Anna let me pilot the ship this time around, while she monitored and approved the changes I proposed. Although we alternate senior authorship, we continue to collaborate and take mutual responsibility for each revision.

I also have my spouse to thank for her patience, understanding, and willingness to put up with my mood swings and occasional fuzziness she could see in my eyes as I would swing from attention to inattention, which occurred as I reflected on what I had recently written or realized that I should have written instead. Sharon has strongly encouraged my writing efforts and allowed me a lot of time and the necessary space to accomplish this project as she did for the ones before. I appreciate the fact that, while we have learned how to collaborate as our marriage evolved, she did not see these revisions as issues for family conflicts.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the role our adult children, Leanne Richards, Cort Happle, and Katherine Karpinski, have played in our lives and our four grandchildren, Jessica and Daria Richards, and Ethan and Kolby Karpinski.

RUTH ANNA'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Finally, I thank my family for all they do to help me be the person I am: my adult children, Kathy and David Lulofs, my dogs, Elisa and Jacques, and my sister, Vicki McGuire.