

6 Keys to Dissolving Disputes

What can you do when you're embroiled in a conflict?

1. Distinguish facts from fiction

Remember "Dragnet and Sgt. Friday? His famous line was "Just the facts, Ma'am." We all think our view of the world is the "right" one: the only one. Recognize you just have a piece of the 'truth'. Try creating a police or news report that captures both your view and the other person's view. This will release your attachment to the 'right-ness' of your personal perspective.

When we disagree with someone, we're upset over not just the event, but the judgments we made about it and the person, the feelings we had and the story we make up about what it all means. Own your own feelings. The other person didn't "make you feel" a particular way. They did what they did. You chose to feel the way you did. You gave the situation all the meaning it had for you. There was a whole range of emotions you could have felt and conclusions you could have drawn. You picked the ones you did. Notice if they're a familiar theme in your life.

2. Distinguish motive and emotions

We often assume we know what the other person was intending to do 'to us'. The only thing we really know is the reaction we had to the other person's behavior. Recognize that they may not have 'meant' to disrespect (or hurt, or ignore or control) you. Also recognize that if you are the perpetrator, just because your motive was innocent, that doesn't negate the feelings the other person experienced.

3. Convert complaints to requests

Imagine that complaints (yours or another's) are really requests in disguise. When we are in situations we don't like and we feel powerless, the natural response is to complain and blame.

Next time you catch yourself complaining, stop and ask "If something could be different here that I would prefer, what would 'that' be?" Then ask for it! Make the request to someone who has the power to grant it. Complaining or making requests to anyone else is pointless.

4. Start where you are

Sometimes, you know exactly what to say but the words get stuck. You hesitate out of fear, worry or concern about their reaction. Start with where you're stuck. "I'd like to say something, but I'm afraid that I'll... or you'll..." You'll be surprised at how being vulnerable will open up the other person. You'll also be surprised at how easily the difficult message will now come out.

5) Take responsibility for your contribution or role

Recognize that you may be keeping the problem in place. This is the bad news. It's much easier to blame someone else for your problems. It's the "those idiots over there" syndrome. "If they would just..." They won't.

Figure out what actions *you* can take to solve your own dilemma.

6) Forgive and give yourself a gift

Forgiveness is not condoning or even accepting. Forgiving someone who has 'wronged' you, releases *your* agony. It's not for them. Holding on to your grievance just keeps your blood pressure high. If you can't muster "I forgive them", try "I'm willing to forgive them." Then let it go and let your willingness salve your pain.

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