



Changing the Conversation

A Joost Elffers Book

▶ **THE 17 PRINCIPLES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

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Conflict



You can't change how other
people act in a conflict, and often
you can't change your situation.

But you can change what you do.

By choosing the approaches discussed here, you can change your conversations.



By changing your conversations,
you can resolve conflict in your life.

This book provides 17 principles for conflict resolution:
practical tools for individuals in difficult situations.

*see conflict
as a moment
of opportunity*

The practice of these principles helps transform how conflict is expressed. It offers a way to resolve conflict from the inside, in a manner that works for everyone involved. The principles provide encouragement to see conflict as a moment of opportunity. They urge us to recognize that we have the ability to call up the curiosity and courage needed to step away from cycles of attack and counterattack and to move, instead, with as much grace and skill as we can muster, toward resolution.

Whether or not you read the chapters in this book sequentially, I recommend taking the time to do the exercises. The ability to engage conflict effectively is a matter of practice. Anyone who wants to develop this capacity can do so.

**Conflict can be both useful and inevitable.
Destructive conflict is neither.**

conflict

the anti-principles



Make Listening and Speaking Difficult

- 1 Hear attack. Ignore any additional information being offered.
- 2 Attack the other person. Create and support destructive patterns.
- 3 Provoke the other person's worst self.
- 4 Confuse needs, interests, and strategies.
- 5 Ignore emotions or act them out destructively.
- 6 Assume acknowledgment implies agreement. Don't acknowledge.
- 7 Make suggestions instead of listening.
- 8 Judge people. Try to pass your evaluations off as observations.
- 9 Act on your assumptions without testing them.

Ensure Stagnation or Destructive Escalation

- 10 Adopt a rigid stance. Don't try to understand other viewpoints.
- 11 Assume useful dialogue is impossible.
- 12 Ignore your contributions to the problem. Make things worse.
- 13 Pin the blame on someone. Prevent full understanding of the situation.

Prevent Positive Developments

- 14 Ignore conflict. Talk to the wrong people. Avoid the real problem.
- 15 Assume there are no good options. Settle for unsatisfying solutions.
- 16 Make vague agreements or no agreement at all.
- 17 Ignore the possibility of future conflict. Have no plans for dealing with it.

resolution



the principles

Facilitate Listening and Speaking

- 1 Don't hear attack. Listen for what is behind the words.
- 2 Resist the urge to attack. Change the conversation from the inside.
- 3 Talk to the other person's best self.
- 4 Differentiate needs, interests, and strategies.
- 5 Acknowledge emotions. See them as signals.
- 6 Differentiate between acknowledgment and agreement.
- 7 When listening, avoid making suggestions.
- 8 Differentiate between evaluation and observation.
- 9 Test your assumptions. Relinquish them if they prove to be false.

Change the Conversation

- 10 Develop curiosity in difficult situations.
- 11 Assume useful dialogue is possible, even when it seems unlikely.
- 12 If you are making things worse, stop.
- 13 Figure out what's happening, not whose fault it is.

Look for Ways Forward

- 14 Acknowledge conflict. Talk to the right people about the real problem.
- 15 Assume undiscovered options exist. Seek solutions people willingly support.
- 16 Be explicit about agreements. Be explicit when they change.
- 17 Expect and plan for future conflict.

facilitate listening

and speaking

My great-aunt Marie taught me that when you are knitting and the strands of yarn get tangled, it is a mistake to try to undo the knot by seeking to free only one strand.

The strands of yarn are in a complex relationship to one another. Trying to solve the problem by extracting one strand will likely increase the complexity of the knot and make it more difficult to undo.