



Positive Principles Newsletter



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Welcome new *Positive Principles* subscribers.

Most of my work with clients falls in the areas of leading teams, building teams, and team dynamics. One common issue almost always surfaces as I work with my clients – conflict between team members. So, I spend lots of my time addressing conflict. Not legal conflicts. Not “in-your-face” confrontations. And not “shouting matches.” Rather, I see lots of low-level, nagging conflicts that seem to stay between people over time.



With that thought in mind, this month I’m starting a series of articles targeted at one specific issue: conflict resolution. I plan to explore this topic over the next few months as I share principles, insights, techniques, and mindsets that I hope will help if you see these types of conflicts. My experience indicates that few teams can achieve their true potential until they learn to effectively address and resolve conflicts between team members.

In this month’s article, I’ll address a “mindset” issue. I have often seen that the mindset, or thinking, with which we approach a conflict can make a significant difference in the outcome of our conflict resolution efforts.

Thanks for subscribing to *Positive Principles*. I hope that this series of articles will help you and the people that work with you grow in your ability to address and resolve conflict.

Have a great day,
Guy Harris
The Recovering Engineer

Key Quotes:

“The aim of argument, or of discussion, should not be victory, but progress.”

- Joseph Joubert (French Philosopher, 1754-1824)

“If you would convince others, seem open to conviction yourself.”

- Earl of Chesterfield

This month's tip – **Decide to RESOLVE conflicts rather than to be RIGHT**

Many conflicts begin with small irritations that grow into major blow-ups. This often happens because of the mindset of the “combatants.”

As a conflict builds and you begin the process of confronting the issue, I have found that you really only have two options. You can choose to prove that your perspective is **RIGHT**, or you can choose to **RESOLVE** the conflict.

The person who chooses to be **RIGHT**

Really
Insists on
Giving
His (or Her)
Thoughts.

They focus on being heard rather than on hearing. By contrast, the person who chooses to **RESOLVE** the conflict:

- R**espects the other person
- E**ngages in productive dialogue
- S**eeks to understand the other person
- O**bserves carefully
- L**istens actively
- V**oices their concerns, and
- E**valuates possible solutions.

They focus on understanding the other person first. As Stephen Covey says in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, they “seek first to understand and then to be understood.”

I’ll illustrate with a story from my experience.

My wife and I met while I served as a submarine officer in the U.S. Navy and she worked as a school teacher in Charleston, South Carolina. We got married as my naval commitment ended and my civilian career began. Three days after our wedding, we moved from South Carolina to New Jersey. We both felt the excitement and anticipation of our new life together.

In the process of moving the last pieces of clothing from my closet to the vehicle we were driving to New Jersey, we hit the first major conflict of our married life. I wanted the clothes on the right side of the vehicle. She wanted them on the left side. As we made alternating trips from the closet to the car, both of us rearranged the items in the vehicle every time we returned to it. I placed my load of clothes on the right side. Then I moved everything from the left to the right in a neat stack. She did the same except that she placed everything on the left side.

As this process continued for three or four trips between the closet and the car, we each became increasingly agitated. When we passed in the apartment hallway, I think we actually glared at each other a bit. She thought I had lost my mind, and I thought the same of her.

Eventually, the showdown came as we met at the closet in the bedroom. There we stood, toe-to-toe and nose-to-nose, ready to “have it out.” We needed to settle this issue, and we both thought that we were “right.”

In that moment of near explosion, with emotions high over this critical issue in our lives together, I walked away to stop myself from yelling at my new wife. With about 30 or 45 seconds of separation, we both realized how truly ridiculous the situation had become. We decided that working to **RESOLVE** the conflict took priority over either of us being **RIGHT**.

That experience – as silly as it sounds eighteen years later – opened the door for a great dialogue about what we both thought and felt in that moment of conflict. Our choice to find the common ground in our perceptions kept the situation from spiraling totally out-of-control.

The process that almost created a blow-up between my wife and I happens in work teams every day. One co-worker says or does something that irritates another. A supervisor forgets to notify people of a schedule change. Or any number of other frustrations that happen when people work together. Each person formulates their own perception of what happened, what the other person intended or thought when they did the “offensive” action, and how they should solve the problem. Then the two parties engage in a discussion with both people defending their positions in an effort to be **RIGHT**. As each of them tries to prove how **RIGHT** they are, the conflict intensifies. Unlike the happy ending in the scenario between my wife and I, the end often comes with one or both parties angry to the point that they withdraw feeling a sense of hopelessness or frustration. As both of them seek to “win” the argument, both of them lose.

Alone, the **RESOLVE** it mindset will not address all conflicts. Many other skills also come into play. However, the mindset we take as we approach the other person plays a critical role in the overall

process. Great team members, great leaders, and great communicators make the choice to **RESOLVE** issues instead of insisting that they are **RIGHT**.

So for now, I encourage you to remember this month's tip . . .

Decide to RESOLVE conflicts rather than to be RIGHT

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