

Section 2: RESOLUTION ROAD MAP

2.1 - Identifying issues and needs

- The **resolution road map** is a framework comprised of five steps that can be used to resolve any conflict.

Let's focus on the first step, **identifying the issues and needs**. When we're in a blaming state of mind, acknowledging the conflict and being willing to talk about it may be far more difficult than all of the other steps combined. But pointing fingers keeps you in an endless cycle of blame and nowhere near uncovering the real issue, let alone resolving it. So, the fix? You have to work on yourself first.

To find out the nature or subject of the disagreement, think of a current or recent situation and ask yourself:

- Is it relational, something having to do with your relationship?
- Is it substantive, a disagreement about content or process?
- Is it perceptual, a disagreement about how you're viewing a situation?

Let's say Mark is under pressure at work. He's been getting to work late and missing deadlines and doing shoddy work on a special project. Mark is worried that his boss Lily will fire him if he doesn't get his act together. Add to that the fact that Mark thinks Lily is hypercritical, and her strategy and process are keeping them from getting the results they really want. How do Mark and Lily move from avoidance and blame to "Houston, we have a problem"? This classic line from the movie Apollo 13 was not phrased, "Houston, you have a problem." If it had, things would have turned out much more dire than they did for everyone. For Mark, the disagreement is around process, the strategy guiding the deliverables of the project. But because he thinks Lily is hypercritical, they're also having a relational disagreement.

The next layer of identifying the issues in a conflict is to investigate your own needs and behaviors. You might want to pause the video and use the **note-taking tool** here.

1. What do my actions and behaviors demonstrate what I want for myself, for others, for the relationship or for the organization?
2. How would I behave if I was really committed to what I want for myself and others?

If Mark is being honest with himself, his behavior is demonstrating that he's not committed or invested in the project. What he really wants is to share his ideas about how he'd treat the process to produce the best possible outcome for the project. Now digging a little deeper, it's also likely that Mark wants a little more autonomy and for Lily to value his expertise and contributions to the project. And if Mark was committed to all of that, he might start behaving differently by sitting down and talking things through and sharing his ideas with Lily and others on the project. He'd stop showing up late and grumbling about things and take some positive action to turn things around. The first step in the resolution road map is not about assigning blame to yourself or others. You're simply taking stock of what's driving your feelings and actions, your motives. If you can understand your motives, you can change your motive

2.2 - Distinguishing fact from fiction

- In a conflict, there are two things operating.

1. What actually happened
2. How people interpret what happened

Said another way, it's **facts versus fiction**. Distinguishing between the two is the second set on the resolution roadmap, our framework for solving everyday problems.

Now let's take a look at a conflict between Mark and Lilly. First the facts, Mark stays up all night finishing a draft of a proposal and gives it to Lilly, his boss. A few hours later Lilly hands the proposal back to Mark with red pen edits on every section and every page. Those are the facts, that's what happened. Now for the fiction. Mark starts seething about Lilly's critique and blurts out, you never appreciate any of the work I do. If you did, you wouldn't be so hypercritical. This is the name, blame, claim cycle in action.

Something happens, your **feelings** get the best of you, you tell a **story** about why it happened, and you **react** by saying something that places blame on the other person, and you're now in the middle of a full-blown **argument**.

What gets us into trouble when something happens that upsets us is not the facts, but the story we tell ourselves about those facts. It wasn't the red pen edits; it was Mark's interpretation of what the red pen edits meant. To make things worse, when something happens, we say things like, "she made me so angry". The truth is nobody can make you feel what you feel, you make you feel what you feel. Take that in. That isn't to say your feelings shouldn't be felt, but very often our unexamined feelings lead us into unproductive behaviors. So, I wanna take you through the fact from fiction exercise. A set of five questions to help you examine your stories and feelings. And you can use these questions as a template to prepare for any conflict resolution conversation.

Now you can pause the video here after each question and use the notebook tool.

So, think about a situation that's bothering you.

Question number one is how are you behaving about the issue? Are you stewing on it? Or reacting with anger or sarcasm or blame? Just notice and write it down.

Question two is what stories are you using to justify your behavior? Our stories usually begin with phrases like I never or I always or you never or you always. So, write down your story.

Now question three, what feelings do your stories generate? If you have a story like you never listen to me, what feelings get stimulated? Anger, rejection, betrayal? Whatever it is, feel it and name it.

Question four, what might also be true? This question is all about finding new perspectives to view a conflict. Alternative stories. So, when Mark said Lilly never appreciates the work he does might it also be true that Lilly is being pressured by her boss? Or is it possible that Lilly wants to help Mark do his best? So, think about the subject of your conflict and the stories you're telling and see if you can come up with alternate versions that create some wiggle room for empathy with your conflict partner.

And question five, how can you take your part in the conflict? Before you attempt to resolve a conflict, you need to take responsibility, not blame, responsibility for the part you've played. Have you been disengaging because you disagree with the strategy or process? Have you been triangulating to get people on your side? The fact from fiction exercise is not easy stuff, but if you take the time to noodle through your thoughts and feelings and stories you'll give yourself the clarity you need to find your way back to cooperation and workability.

2.3 - Opening the conflict conversation

- **Opening a conflict resolution conversation** can be the hardest part of this entire process. And this brings us to the third step in our resolution roadmap, our framework for solving everyday problems. The good news is that all the investigation you've done on yourself, identifying the issues as you see them, locating where you can take your part in

the conflict, and separating fact from fiction has given you enough clarity to move from avoidance to conversation. Your job in opening the conversation is to express yourself in a way that makes it safe for your conversation partner to engage.

Here are the key elements to a successful opening.

- State the facts as you see them.
- Tell your story and own it as your story.
- Ask your conflict partner for their perspective.

Now, to demonstrate the key elements, let's take a look at a situation between William, a VP of engineering, and Gina, a senior product engineer. The company is a young, successful startup experiencing the challenges of exponential growth. Here's Gina and William. - Sit. What is going on? I spent months developing the financial protocol and when I asked for research decisions and timelines, I just get a couple of nods and a bunch of hostile questions. - Yeah, that was a rough meeting. What was your sense of what was happening in the room? - Stonewalling, avoiding eye contact, and I know they're upset about something, but nobody's talking. - Would you like to hear my take on it? - Yeah, let's get to the bad news. - Well, um, here's the issues as I see them. It's your use of I versus we. - Um, okay. - For the last nine months, the team and I have been working really hard on building the strategy. And we are understaffed by six engineers. We feel that we don't get any credit for the hard work we're doing. - C'mon, I, you, we, whatever, we are over-delivering; that's what I know. - I, you, we, whatever. - I'm irritable and in a hurry. I get your point. Is there anything else? - Yes, your full attention or we're going to have a mutiny. - What are you talking about? - Before the acquisition, I like to be fully acknowledged and recognized for taking on almost workload of a VP. and the staff needs to be recognized for working around the clock, or your most senior engineers will be headed for the exit. - Okay, I'm sorry if you feel unappreciated. - You're sorry that I feel unappreciated? - Let me rephrase. I'm sorry. I didn't realize people weren't feeling appreciated for their contributions. It's just this acquisition has been consuming all of my time. -

Okay, that was a pretty challenging opening for Gina to get through. William was resistant and snarky, and Gina really had to stick with it, repeatedly pulling things back on track to get the facts out and tell her story. The truth is, not everyone you attempt to resolve a conflict with will have the same skills you're learning right now. They won't play by the same rules. And you might even feel like you're the adult and your conflict partner is the teenager throwing a tantrum. But if you persist calmly like Gina did and don't let your conflict partner's reactions trigger you, you'll be able to state your facts, tell your story, and ask questions that make it safe for your partner's facts and stories to emerge. You can do this.

2.4 Gaining Alignment and Brainstorming

- Step 4 in the resolution roadmap, our framework for solving everyday problems, is **Gaining Alignment and Brainstorming**.

I want you to think about a conflict you're dealing with. You very likely have an idea or several ideas that would solve the problem. But, if you try to go from identifying the issue and straight into solution, you run the risk of gaining false consensus, a fake yes for the purpose of getting out of the conversation as quickly as possible.

So, you have to step into the messy part and hear the other person out. Hear their facts and stories and ideas. So, they're not just part of the problem, but part of the process of getting to the solution. One thing that can help you through the messy part is asking yourself what I call the **big deal question**. *What are we committed to? Or, what goal are we all trying to accomplish?*

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The purpose here to find a common theme to anchor or focus your problem-solving process and keep you on track. So, let's take a look at this part of the process with our conflict partners Gina, a senior engineering director, and her boss, William, as they get into and out of the messy part. -

Thank you for the apology. It seems like you're being stretched in every angle yourself. - Exactly, and honestly, the engineers are not the only ones with one foot out the door. - I'm so sorry. I didn't realize how difficult this must have been for you. It would be a great loss to see you go. - Yeah, so look, we need to stay focused and aligned. - I completely agree. What does alignment mean to you? - We need to exceed our targets to prove the value of our strategy and to protect the team. - Okay, great. That would be in the long run, but what kind of assurance do I have that my senior engineers will be staying intact while we meet the target? - Look, I wish that I could wave a magic wand and say that I am going to hire more engineers, but we have a lot of eyeballs on our budget. - I understand. And it seems like you're worried about getting into the politics of it all for an acquisition? You don't wanna get tangled in that. - That's right. - Well, I may have a couple of strategies that may help. Can I show you? - Yeah, go. - We just completed the performance reviews and here's a list of accomplishments and deliverable of every engineer in the building. I think it's time for you to show them how much they mean to you and show your appreciation in the next meeting. - Yeah, okay, I can do that, but that still doesn't solve the staffing issue. - Well, here's another idea. Why don't we do some resourcing from other teams so we don't have to hire six new people? - Okay, yeah, that might work. You've probably already thought of this, but how about we allow the senior engineers to tackle the resourcing plan? - Yes, I think that's a great idea. And I think it will work if you sign the salary increase that I sent you last week. - All right. - Just to clarify, I'm only doing this for the team and we can talk about me at a later time.

- Okay, what I want you to notice about the messy part of the conversation is that finding and staying true to the big picture outcome they both wanted, helped Gina and William find solutions and next steps.

Circle back to the conflict you most need to resolve right now and ask yourself the big deal question, what are you committed to? Or, what goal is everyone trying to accomplish?

Answering those questions and finding alignment will bring shape and focus to your brainstorming and ultimate solutions and move you from self-centered outcomes to shared purpose.

2.5 - Getting to agreement

- You might think that once you open the conflict conversation and get through some of the issues and challenges, and start identifying solutions, that **Getting to Agreement** is the easy part. But what I've noticed in my own disagreements, is that sometimes I'm just so glad to be done with the hard part, that I'm kind of spent emotionally and skip over what my conflict partner and I are actually agreeing to. And that is a recipe for having the same conflict over, and over, again. So, **Getting to Agreement** is the fifth step in the resolution roadmap, our framework for solving everyday problems.

Let's take a look at how Gina, a senior engineer and director, and her boss William, define and commit to specific accountabilities to move their agreement forward.

- Okay. No promises. I will take a look at the request on my flight to New York tonight. - Okay, great. Why don't I recap all the key points that we discussed, then I'll email you later today. - Yep, okay. - Oh and, when do you think you'll get back to me about the salary increases for the team? - Let's say Friday. Yeah, and listen, I want to apologize for not being more available. Honestly, you're doing incredible work. - That's great, thank you.

- All right, even though the salary increases are not a done deal, William and Gina are on the same page and have worked out accountabilities and next steps. Most importantly, Gina and her team will be acknowledged for their hard work, which was the main source of irritation in the first place. So, stay the course, be diligent about identifying next steps, and nail down the what, who, and by when, to avoid a repeat of the conflict.