

DEEPENING CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS

Module 3.1 - Increasing your Conflict Capacity

Have you ever noticed that what we don't like in others is often what we don't like in ourselves? These dislikes are our triggers. So in this video, we're going to walk through the conflict capacity exercise, and I recommend pausing between each section. Let's start by writing down say five of your own behaviors that you would like to change, especially when you see that behavior in others. These are things like showing up late, not returning emails or calls, talking with your mouth full, interrupting, lying, yelling, defending, demanding. There's a lot of possibilities there, so go ahead, hit the pause button, I'll wait.

Now I'm going to walk you through the conflict capacity scale. To start, think about a recent argument you had with a boss, coworker, or a family member, somebody did something and you got upset, maybe really upset.

1. The first question is what was your trigger?
2. Next, on a scale of one to 10, 10 being the highest level of intensity, how triggered or upset were you?
3. Now identify your capacity to deal with the feelings that come up around that trigger.

A (1) would mean that you have very little capacity to deal with the feelings and a (10) would mean you have a great deal of capacity to deal with the feelings. For example, let's say your boss keeps taking credit for your work. Let's also say that you're a nine on the trigger scale and a three on the capacity scale. This means that you're extremely frustrated and probably angry and don't understand how to deal with your frustration. The gap between how intensely you're triggered and your low capacity for dealing with those feelings suggests that you're not likely to make a run at resolving the conflict. What this means for you is that you need to spend time on the first two steps in the resolution roadmap, identifying the issues and distinguishing fact from fiction. Once you complete those steps let a little time pass, so you can take the temperature down on your feelings. Even then you may be unsure of your ability to open up a conversation with your conflict partner. To help you over that hump find a good friend to roleplay the conversation with until you feel confident enough to lean into the conflict and not away from it. This is one way to close the gap between the intensity of the trigger and your capacity to problem solve. So I'm going to leave you with this thought as a mantra to help you grow your conflict capacity. It's never about the other person, ever, even when it is. Conflict resolution is a discipline, a set of practices you can use to transform your relationships. And notice I said "you." We can't change other people and it's pretty much pointless to try. What we do have access to and control over is ourselves, our responses. We can take the high road; we can do the changing.

3.2 Asking Diagnostic Questions

By far the most important practice in conflict resolution is the art of asking open-ended or diagnostic questions. These are questions that begin with who, what, when, where, how, and why. And they're key to learning your conflict partner's perspectives and getting past resistance and pushback. According to research by social psychologist Adam Galinsky, it was found that 93% of people fail to use diagnostic questions when doing so can dramatically change the outcome. Here's why. When you ask a closed-ended question like do you want to talk about how the meeting went, you'll likely get a yes or no answer. And for the conflict avoider, you're probably going to get a no. But if you were to turn that into a diagnostic question, what are your thoughts about how the meeting went, you'll open the door for dialogue and exploration and uncover the real issues. So let's watch Gina, a senior director of engineering, as she uses diagnostic questions to get at the heart of an issue with her boss, William. - 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 the acquisition. You don't want to get tangled in that. - That's right. - Well, I may have couple of strategies that may help. Can I show you?- [William] Yeah, go. - Okay, notice how Gina's question asking kept things aligned to the big purpose, keeping staff and hitting targets. Those questions also allowed William to regain his agency and control. I want you to notice that the most important aspect of asking diagnostic questions is discovering where the landmines are, where the resistance and pushback is, and where the no's are buried. So be persistent when you run into no and pushback. Slow it down, ask more diagnostic questions, and remember that no is part of the journey to yes. Here's a closing power tip. When you notice you're about to ask a close-ended question, pause. Then restart with a what or a how and finish your sentence. I recommend practicing this, not just in the workplace, but in all your conversations. It will change everything, promise.

3.3 - Listening

- So there you are with your conflict partner. You've closed the door, silenced your phone, and you've opened the conversation and asked a diagnostic question or two. What happens next? Well, this really hinges on your ability to be curious and listen. Karen and Henry Kimsey-House, the authors of the book Co-Active Coaching, introduced the concept of three levels of listening. Level one listening is self-oriented. You're thinking about what you had for lunch, the emails that are piling up, or trying to find a place to interject your opinions and your thoughts. In level two listening, you drop in and you focus on your conflict partner, what's being said, their body language. You're engaged, you're hardwired into the conversation. Now in level three, or global listening, you could say that you've moved from hardwired to radio waves. This is the place where you hear what's being said and what's not being said. In other words, your intuition kicks in, and you're getting cues about the real and buried issues, and how all of it might relate to your shared purpose. So let's watch Gina, a senior director of engineering, as she uses her listening skills. - 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'd 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 am 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 the contributions. It's just, this acquisition has been consuming all of my time. - Alright, Gina was calm and measured, and even when William became snarky, she paused, repeated his words back to him, and showed empathy for his frustration. She picked up signals from William's body language and stayed committed to finding a solution. So here are a few tips you can use to increase your listening ability. Close the door, turn off ringers and distractions, and get present. Breathe and make eye contact. Give cues that you're listening. You can do this verbally by saying things like "uh huh, mm hmm, and yes," and through body language by leaning in and nodding and smiling occasionally. Reflect what you hear, especially things you find triggering or confusing. So saying things like "What I'm hearing is," or "It sounds like you're saying," are excellent starts at getting the clarity. It takes a lot of discipline to listen well. If you attempt to solve a conflict with level one listening and you're just waiting to interject and say your piece, resolution will be much harder, if not impossible, to reach. Bottom line hear your conflict partner out, and you may just transcend the need to revisit the conflict in the future.

3.4 - Labeling, mirroring, and silence

- When you're trying to solve a sticky issue, labeling, mirroring, and silence are three listening skills that help you build tactical empathy. That's a term coined by Chris Voss in his book Never Split the Difference. They're tactical listening skills because they're used purposely to discover information that'll help move the conversation forward. The first tactical listening skill is labeling or reframing your conversation partner's perspective. Labeling always starts with the words it sounds like or it seems like and finishes by naming your conversation partner's dominant feelings, interests, or perspective. To get a sense of labeling in action, let's watch Gina, a senior director of engineering, as she uses this skill to uncover and name her boss William's perspective. - 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

Conflict Resolution Course

Video Transcripts

of my time. - 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 the acquisition. You don't want to get tangled in that. - That's right. - Okay, in that exchange, Gina's use of labeling essentially reframed the conversation and allowed them to noodle on possible solutions. The second tactical listening skill is mirroring. This is repeating the last few words or critical words of your conversation partner's language. Mirroring is most useful when you're confused or triggered. So let's take a look at how Gina uses mirroring to defuse conflict and keep things moving. - 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 - (scoffs) Come on. I, you, we, whatever. We are over-delivering. That's what I know. - I, you, we, whatever. (William sighs) - 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'd like to be fully acknowledged and recognized for taking on almost a 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, notice how Gina's use of mirroring helped William start participating in a more productive way. Let's move on to the third tactical listening skill, silence. Silence is useful when we really have no idea what to say or when our conflict partner has said something so out of bounds you need to take the temperature down. In the last snippet, you saw Gina use silence when William said, "Look, I'm irritable and in a hurry. "I get your point, anything else?" Gina paused before she answered his question very directly, and the result was that Gina was able to get him to really engage in the conversation. I encourage you to add these tactical listening skills to your everyday conversations. Take things slowly, listen, label, mirror, and use silence to nudge your conflicts toward resolution.

3.5 – Reframing

- 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.