Respectful Conversations

Practical Tools for Navigating Conflict with Confidence

Facilitated by:
Deborah Fox
Transforming Leaders, Teams & Cultures

EVOLVE
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Who Am I...

Deborah Fox

Lived: Kamloops, Vernon, Armstrong
Coffee or Tea: Definitely Coffee!
Travel: 41 countries and counting

Book Recommendation:
The Five Temptations of a CEO, *Patrick Lencioni*

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WHAT DRIVES YOU CRAZY!?

Activity

What behaviours tends to frustrate you?

- People interrupting
- Talking over others
- Saying things like: “We’ve always done it this way”
- Not following hospital or site protocols
- Speaking over patients or families
- Volunteers stepping outside their role
- Tension between staff and volunteers
- Last-minute changes without communication

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THINK ABOUT THIS

When conflict happens, what do you usually do?

- Avoid it
- Address it
- Talk to someone else
- Let it build

Does your role as a volunteer or board member influence your choice?

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WHY THIS MATTERS

- Conflict is a normal part of working together
- Avoiding it doesn’t make it go away
- Small issues often become big issues
- In healthcare environments, avoiding small issues can impact team experience, communication, and ultimately those we are supporting

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THE MOMENT BEFORE

Think of a recent situation:

Something bothered you

Something you didn’t address it right away

What held you back?

Did you ever feel like it wasn’t your place to say something?

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TABLE TALK

Activity

What makes conflict uncomfortable?

What tends to make conversations harder than they need to be?

What stopped you from addressing it earlier?

What was the impact of waiting?

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KEY INSIGHT – What we ignore tends to grow

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COMMUNICATION

HOW WE COMMUNICATE

55% Body Language	38% Tone of Voice	7% Words
• Posture • Facial expressions • Gestures • Eye contact	• Pace • Volume • Intonation	• The actual content • What you say vs. how you say it

In sensitive environments, how we say something often determines how it is received.

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REFLECTION – What do you hear

“That’s not how we do it here”

“That’s a staff issue, not ours”

“Just leave it”

“We don’t want to cause problems”

“We’ve tried that before”

“That won’t work here”

“We have always done it this way”

“We don’t need to change”

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TABLE TALK

Activity

Have we heard these before?

What else have we heard that makes us feel unheard?

Have we said them before?

What might we do differently?

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TRUST AND CONFLICT

WHY CONVERSATIONS FEEL DIFFICULT

We often hesitate because we worry about:

- Not feeling it’s your role to address it
- Escalating the situation
- Saying the wrong thing
- Being seen as unfair
- Not wanting to damage relationships in a small community

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WHAT BUILDS TRUST

- Don’t avoid conflict, address concerns early
- Address directly (when appropriate) and respectfully
- Work to maintain relationships
- Be open to new ideas
- Listen with curiosity
- Ensure everyone feels heard

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ACTIVE LISTENING UNDER PRESSURE

When Emotions Rise, People Need:

- To feel heard
- To feel safe
- To understand what happens next
- To know you are calm and steady

Micro Tool: Simple phrases like: ‘Let me make sure I understand…’ AND ‘So what I’m hearing is…’

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THERE IS NO ONE RIGHT WAY

Different situations require different approaches.

The key is choosing intentionally.

The goal is to choose a response that fits the situation and your role.

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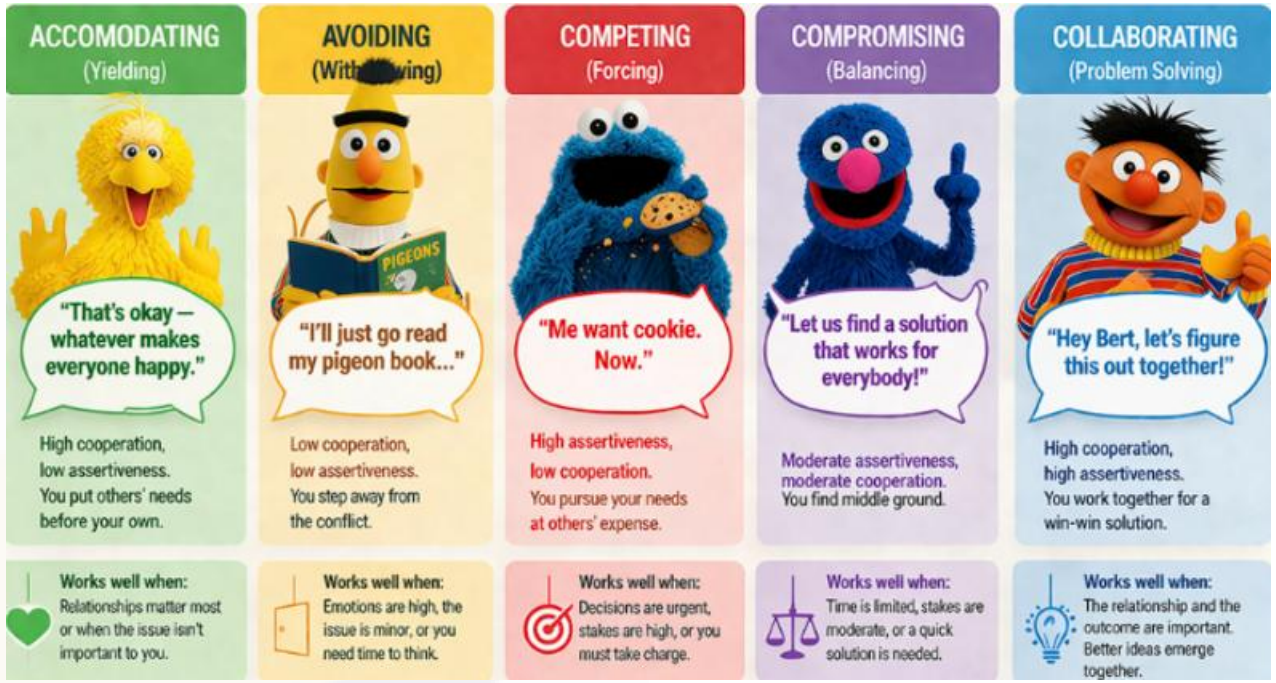
PRACTICAL TOOLS

TOOL #1: FIVE APPROACHES TO CONFLICT



When is this approach helpful?

When does it create problems?

When making important decisions, when does this not work?

We all have a default style.

The goal is not to change who you are,

it's to choose what works best in the moment.

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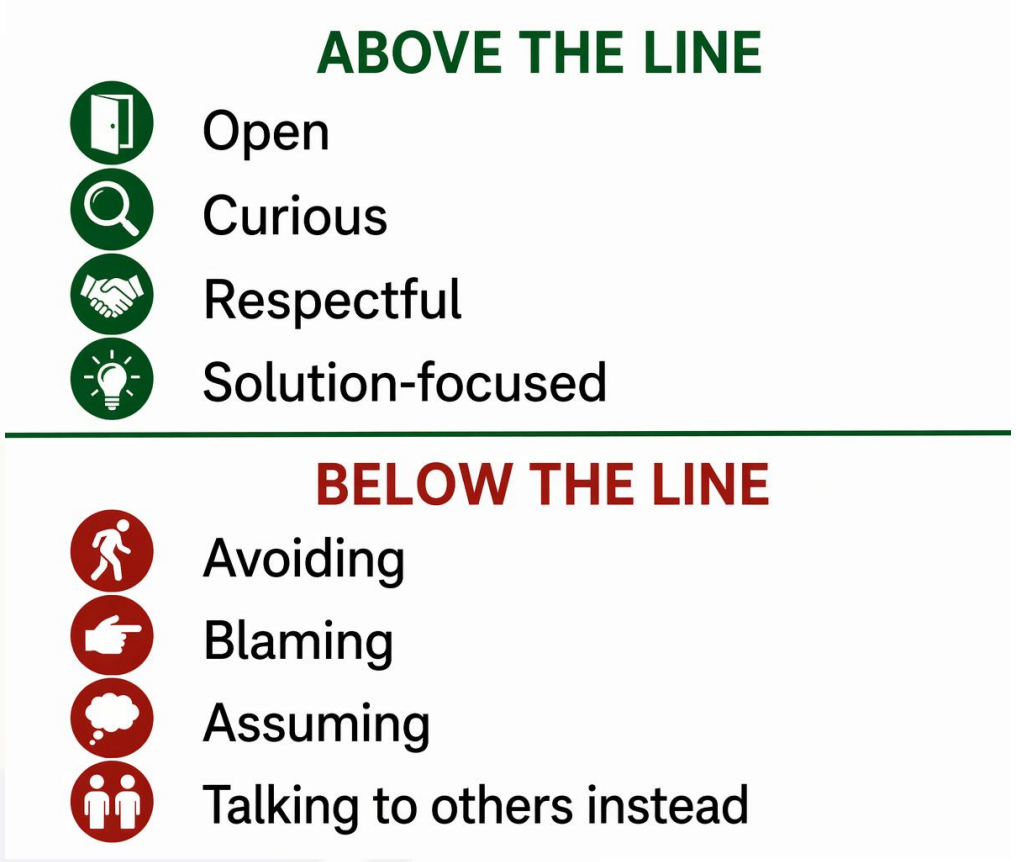
TOOL #2: ABOVE VS BELOW THE LINE



Asking directly, clarifying, staying open

Assuming, talking to others, avoiding

TIP: Pause → Notice → Choose a different above the line response

The skill is noticing quickly and shifting back above the line.

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SO, WHAT DO WE ACTUALLY DO?

When something doesn’t feel right…

What’s your next move?

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TOOL #3: A SIMPLE CONVERSATION STRUCTURE

Step 1: Open respectfully

"Can I check in about something?"
"I may be off, but I wanted to share something I noticed"

Step 2: Describe the behaviour (no judgment)

"I noticed in the meeting you spoke over Mary a few times"

Step 3: Share impact (optional, light)

"I think it made it harder for her to share her thoughts"

Step 4: Get curious

"I just want to check, was that your intention?"
"Can you help me understand?"

Step 5: Align

"How can we handle that moving forward?"

If they get defensive:

- "I'm not blaming, just wanting to make sure we're aligned"
- "I may be misunderstanding, that's why I wanted to ask"
- "I think we might be getting off track, can we pause and come back to the main point?"

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TOOL #4: FOCUS ON INTERESTS, NOT POSITIONS

Position = What we say we want

Interest = Why it matters to us

When we argue positions: → we get stuck

When we understand interests: → we find better solutions

Ask:

"What matters most here?"
"Why is this important to you?"

Example:

Position: "We shouldn't change how we're doing this event"

Interest: "I'm concerned that if we don't evolve how we do things, we may struggle to engage and retain younger volunteers"

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WHEN TO ADDRESS VS ESCALATE

Address directly when:

- It’s a behaviour issue
- It’s low-risk
- You feel safe to do so

Seek support or escalate when:

- It involves policy/safety
- It feels beyond your role
- You’ve tried and it hasn’t improved

When in doubt, seek guidance. You don’t have to navigate alone.

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TABLE TALK

Activity

Think of a real situation you've avoided

Write one sentence you could use to start the conversation.

- Use the sentence starter from Tool #3 if helpful

Turn to partner and say it out loud

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YOUR NEXT STEP

What is one sentence you will use in your next conversation?

Final Note:
Not every situation needs to be addressed.
The goal is to notice, assess, and choose your response intentionally.

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Facilitated by:

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EVOLVE

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Deborah Fox,

Deborah@evolveleadership.ca

250.503.7786

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