

## Moments That Matter – Resolving Conflict by Allen Turley (Part 1) What is Conflict?

If you have been around Teen Challenge very long at all you know there are conflicts; it's a fact of life. Even if you have just been around non-Christians, .... or Christians .....OK – pretty much if you breathe, you know that there are going to be conflicts.

“Shut-up, stop arguing, and get to work,” is not the way to train students to deal with conflict, although, it is often the easy way out that we, as staff, want to take. But we are shirking our responsibility if we avoid conflict.

In a sin-filled, addicted life, two extremes are often observed with regards to the way students handle conflict. One is angry outburst and the other is avoidance. Both are used as an excuse to get high or drink. If students do not learn proper conflict resolution skills they will easily default to, “I deserve a drink,” when they face a conflict. SO, it is very important that we model proper conflict resolution, train students with conflict resolution skills and provide tools (models) they can remember and implement.

### In this Resolving Conflict series we will cover:

1. What is conflict?
2. Consequences
3. Self-evaluation
4. Conflict styles
5. Conflict resolution skills



### **What is Conflict?** Conflict is defined as:

- o Controversy; quarrel
- o Discord or disagreement in feeling, actions; difference of opinion
- o Incompatibility or interference of one idea, desire, event, or activity with another
- o A *perceived* divergence of interest, or belief that the parties' current aspirations (goals) cannot be achieved simultaneously: That is a belief (not necessarily a fact) that if you get what you want, I can't get what I want.

To help us understand conflict let's identify some causes and sources. What are the sparks that ignite controversy? Here are a few to think about and discuss with fellow staff members. You may want to add to the list.

- o Unresolved prior conflicts: Nursing wounds or bruised egos from previous disagreements.
- o Miscommunication : This can have various facets:
  - Lack of information or communication.
  - Message was communicated poorly or incorrectly.

- Misunderstandings: Different interpretation of the same information. Many differences and offenses are the result of misunderstanding rather than actual wrongs. This is probably much more common than we realize.
- Incompatible or overlapping responsibilities or assignments.
- Responsibility ambiguity: Students are unclear about their roles. Students are given jobs, tasks, responsibilities that are not appropriate for them (their skills, gifts).
- Power struggle: The distribution of recourse's and responsibilities is unclear. Ownership, control misunderstood or not respected.
- Stressful conditions: presently or outside of TC.
- Personal differences in values, goals, or styles:
  - Differing goal or desired outcome.
  - Not understanding each other's interests or desires.
  - Or we have the same interests but how to get there is in conflict; that is we want the same thing but don't agree how or when to get there.
  - Stylistic differences not understood or valued. There are different personality types. There are doers, thinkers and feelers; there are those who are task oriented or people oriented.
  - Misunderstand or disregard what is important to the other; their values.
  - My personal misplaced values or goals.
- Unresolved Personal Issues: There is that person that no matter where they go there is controversy. Bad attitude; carrying a chip around on their shoulder.
- Personal offense to hurtful words or actions
- Difference of opinion
- Spiritual Battles

James 4:1-3 says, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

So what is the primary source for conflict? Selfish desires.

When we define conflict and we are able to pinpoint the cause – we are well on our way to being able to resolve the conflict. Use this as a check list next time you observe student conflict, or to analyze your own conflicts for that matter.

### Think about it –

We will never eliminate conflict amongst the students, nor should we try. However, we should ensure we do not have structures, policies or practices that create it. As a team do some ministry self-evaluation. What are some ways you could use this information to prevent conflict? A few ideas:

- Clear job descriptions
- Clearly written policy and procedures manual
- Communicate with family members up front, verbally and in writing

## (Part 2) Consequences

The focus of these articles is to help you equip the students with healthy conflict resolution skills. In the first installment of this series on resolving conflict we discussed, “What is conflict?” In part two we review the consequences of unresolved conflict.

It can be very easy to try to just ignore conflict and hope that it goes away. Some people, like me, don’t like dealing with conflict and hope that it just magically disappears. However, when ongoing conflict is “swept under the rug” especially for long periods of time the consequences can be devastating, often in ways that we don’t even realize. When you don’t change the oil or oil filter in your car but just keep adding oil when it runs low the effects may not be observed or felt immediately, but a slow deteriorating friction that will eventually destroy your engine is taking its toll. Consider the possible seen and unseen “side effects” of unresolved conflict.

- Low moral
- Tension
- Complaining
- Negative confrontation – fighting
- Accusations
- Threats
- Sabotage – retaliation
- Bickering
- Diminishing team spirit
- Absenteeism
- Ministry – atmosphere becomes negative
- Diminished productivity
- Stunted ministry growth
- There is a downward relational spiral between the two involved
- Staff turnover - conflict is the primary reason people leave the ministry
- Relationships deteriorate
- Physical health suffers
- Emotional health suffers
- Spiritual strongholds develop through unforgiveness and bitterness
- Escalation
  - The conflict intensifies and becomes more hostile, more vicious.
  - Then we find more issues to fight about – number of issues grow
  - We generalize our specific problem to the entire relationship
  - We go from specific to general – character accusations
- It goes from, “He forgot to put the van key back,” to “He is a lazy, careless person who doesn’t think about anybody but himself.”
- We continue until we hate each others guts and waste our energy on getting even.



- Finally, we enlist other people to help us fight the battle, fracturing and polarizing the ministry team.
- Attitudinal changes toward the other person are not just temporary, they leave an almost irreversible impression.
  - Selective Reception
  - Once I have decided you're my enemy, I'll look for evidence to prove I'm right.
    - If I think you're a liar, I'll try to catch you in a lie.
    - If I think you're cutting me down, I'll interpret most of what you say as a personal attack.
    - If I think you back-stab and sabotage, whenever I see you talking to someone, I'll think you're gossiping about me.
    - I'll never notice anything good that you do.
    - Once I see you as an enemy, I'll treat you like the enemy I think you are.
- Ceasing to communicate
  - We reach an impasse and establish roadblocks.
  - It is very difficult to re-establish trust.
  - We may work politely together, but we're suspicious and guarded, and bitterness grows. (Forgiveness is key to spiritual mental and emotional health.)

I am sure that you have personally observed and experienced some of these consequences. It is easy to see that the consequences of unresolved conflict can be disastrous. Hopefully this will help open our eyes to the importance of helping the students learn to deal with conflict. The stress of unresolved conflict is often used as an excuse to return to addiction. Observance of these “symptoms” of conflict can bring light to unobserved (hidden) conflict even if you are unaware of any open expression of conflict.

## (Part 3) Self Evaluation

If you want to resolve conflict and develop conflict resolution skills and help our students to do so we must be willing to take the first step of evaluation. As followers of Christ we have a distinct advantage in this process – the Holy Spirit. Of course that means we have to be attentive to his guidance. He is there to guide us. We are not alone. May God grant you a reflective mind and heart, willing to hear the truth about ourselves.



## 1. Ask these questions

1. Who is involved? – specifically
2. What is the source? – the cause
3. What are the long and short term consequences if this remains unresolved?

## 2. Reflection

When talking about conflict resolution the key place we need to start is by looking in the mirror. Do you find yourself at the center of conflict often? (Don't answer that out loud!) If so, that is a pretty good indicator of the need for serious self-evaluation. It's not because you're surrounded by annoying people. Miserable people have miserable relationships.

Although, we still need to self-evaluate in every conflict. We **MUST** be willing to look at ourselves.

- What part do my words, facial expressions, behavior and actions play in this conflict?
- What do I need to take responsibility for and ask forgiveness for?

But I think it is very important to do some “pre-evaluation.” What are some of the precursors that are the underlying coal fires beneath, that are ready to spark and flame-up at the slightest annoyance? Here are just a few for consideration:

### **No-Peace with God**

When the fires of sin and conviction are burring in a person's heart and they are resisting surrender they are often miserable and it comes out in relationships. No peace with God results in no peace with others.

Repentance and surrender brings peace resulting in a much more tranquil attitude that produces healthier relationships.

The starting point — make peace with God

### **Negative Circumstances**

As mentioned in the previous eNewsletter series (Dealing with Disrespect) a student may be experiencing any number of negative emotions, beliefs or attitudes such as anxiety, depression, anger, abandonment, etc. There may be situations that have transpired with family members, probation officers, etc. that we are totally unaware of. They may be going through spiritual struggles or doubts. Try to get to the bottom of what they are feeling. It may be totally unrelated to the conflict at hand.

## **Lack of Maturity**

At salvation you don't automatically handle conflict and stress correctly rather you will tend to handle it in the same way you did prior to conversion until you learn and develop the skills necessary to handle conflict in a positive healthy way. I had one tool, to get in your face and yell or whatever other behavior they have seen modeled learned from parents and others. So we take that tool away – OK now what? Give them a new tool and teach them how to use it and let them practice.

## **(Part 4) Conflict Styles**

The ability to deal with conflict and confrontation with skill and grace is one of the most important skills to learn. As we mentioned previously when we discussed the consequences, it is the primary reason that people leave the ministry – or any job for that matter. By the way we handle conflict we either destroy or buildup relationships. Learning how to deal with conflict is a key to your survival and growth in the ministry. Conflict is a part of life. It is important to deal with conflict in a biblical Christ-like manner WHEN it arises with or between students and within the staff team. What the students see us do is what we are telling them is the right thing to do.

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” Colossians 3: 12-14

Most of us recognize very quickly when we see conflict handled in an improper manner. It is important to identify the basic categories of conflict resolution styles and where we fit in. WE must recognize healthy skills. We can grow and develop our skills.

### ***Typical Conflict Resolution Styles***

#### **Avoidance**

*Low Goals – Low Relationship*

This is a lose-lose strategy.

When one person avoids a conflict, either person has an opportunity to resolve it. Both people lose.

#### **Accommodation**

*High Relationship – Low Goals*

This is a lose-win strategy.

Accommodation is agreement through yielding or conforming to the positions of others; cooperation in an effort to create harmony, even at the expense of your own ideas and values; agreement in the name of peace and tranquility, knowing full well that you don't entirely buy into it. People who accommodate may not always be famous for their creativity, but can often be relied upon for social

tact and diplomacy.

You “lose” because your needs aren’t met. The other person’s needs are met.

When this is not done as an act of humility and character the relationship suffers. You can become resentful when it is done with wrong motives and anger. – AND there was no opportunity to develop a better solution. Sometimes we must accommodate for the sake of unity of the ministry - only after collaboration.

### **Compromise**

*Moderate*

This is a lose-lose strategy.

Compromise involves a search for a solution, which is mutually acceptable.

Compromise involves two or more parties coming together and “meeting in the middle.” With compromise, there will be give and take to get to middle ground. Everybody wins something, but does not get everything. Compromise may be one of the best ways of dealing with conflict when time is short, or when total agreement is impossible. Good chances are, you will end up addressing the same issues later.

### **Competition**

*Low Relationship – High Goals*

This is a win-lose/lose-win strategy. Either you win and the other person loses, or you lose and the other person wins.

This is the offensive aggressive approach to conflict resolution. It is especially attractive to those in power and authority who like to “get things done” and “win.”

In a competitive situation, there is little listening, little information sharing, and little interpersonal reasoning. Leaders who fall into this area often make decisions without any input from others. The results are often negative. It’s the survival of the fittest. But conflicts are not contests, and this style precludes the possibility of finding a fair solution.

### **Collaboration**

*High Goals –High Relationship*

This is a win-win strategy.

Collaboration is a team approach to conflict resolution. All involved have the chance to express their needs and resolve the conflict in a mutually acceptable way. While this strategy may sound simple, it’s actually the most difficult to use because it takes purposeful work.

### **Collaboration:**

- 1) accepts the fact that there is conflict,
- 2) takes time for sharing of values, needs, interests, and resources,
- 3) discovers many possible solutions and weighs the consequences of each,

- 4) selects the alternative that best meets the needs and concerns of each member, and
- 5) forms and implements a plan, and evaluates the outcomes.

Collaboration takes more time and requires higher levels of commitment than other approaches to disagreement, but it generates the most creative solutions, it gets the greatest support and it produces the greatest amount of personal growth.

These are the five collaboration styles. As a TC staff member you will need to use each of these at various times, depending on the situation and the people involved. It takes purposeful attention to work through conflict. It is essential that students observe, and learn healthy conflict resolution.

	Low Personal Goals	High Personal Goals
High Relationship	<p><u>ACCOMMODATING</u> -High Relationship -Low Personal Goals</p>	<p><u>COLLABORATING</u> -High Relationships -High Personal Goals</p>
Low Relationship	<p><u>AVOIDING</u> -Low Relationships -Low Personal Goals</p>	<p><u>COMPETING</u> -Low Relationships -High Personal Goals</p>
	<p><u>COMPROMISING</u> -Moderate Relationships -Moderate Personal Goals</p>	

**Think about it –**

- Where do you place your conflict resolution style at on this diagram?
- Where do your friends and coworkers place you on this diagram?
- What is your reaction to other’s conflict resolution styles?
- What should be the target conflict resolution style for all of us?
- What is one step you can take to be more collaborative?

Understanding your normal conflict resolution style will help you in understanding your interactions with your students and help you see where you can set goals to grow in collaboration skills.



## (Part 5) Conflict Resolution Skills

Coming from dysfunctional backgrounds most of our students have no idea what healthy conflict resolution looks like. Conflict can be an excuse for relapse and as such conflict resolution is a vital skill to impart to them.

As discussed in the previous section the conflict resolution style we should strive for in most situations is collaboration, that is, working together to solve the problem. When we can learn to collaborate we will improve our personal lives and our ministry because the answers we develop are most often an improvement on the status quo. And most importantly we model and teach our students what healthy conflict resolution looks like.

Think of conflict as an opportunity. An opportunity for personal growth for you and all others involved. It is an opportunity for creative solutions.

The most important conflict resolution skill is listening. If you can develop good listening skills you are over half way to being able to resolve conflict. When we listen intently we gain clarity and communicate compassion.

Here are key skills of listening as presented by Ken Sande in the *The Peace Maker*.

**- Wait patiently while the other person talks**

- Don't jump to conclusions
- Don't interrupt
- Be comfortable with silence

**- Keep your mind fully present and concentrating**

- Regular eye contact
- No electronics or other distractions!
- Positive body language

**- Clarify**

- Ask questions to gain clarity – open ended questions not questions that can be answered with a “yes” or “no”

**- Summarize**

- Repeat back what you hear them saying
- Allow them to clarify if necessary
- Be sincere
- Doesn't mean you have to agree with what they are saying

**- Agreeing**

- Listen for truth



“Ready for your first lesson in conflict resolution?”

- Acknowledge what you know is true before going to points of disagreement
- Confess where you see you were wrong

Developing listening skills alone will help resolve many conflicts. See *The Peace Maker* for more information on listening skills.

*The Peace Maker* also includes a tool for problem solving. PAUSE – an acronym for the primary problem solving skills that can be easily remember:

**Prepare**

**Affirm Relationships**

**Understand Interests**

**Search for Creative Solutions**

**Evaluate Options objectively and reasonably**

For a more in-depth explanation of PAUSE, [click here](#). This is only one tool. There are others. The key is to develop a list of competencies you need to develop and begin to put them into practice. You will benefit in your personal relationships and ministry and the students will begin to see a positive role model worth emulating.

### Conflict Prevention Idea

I would like to present a simple tool to prevent some potential conflicts: **Written Policy**

I am a fan of written policy. I believe it can prevent conflict in a lot of situations. If there was a problem my staff team would collaborate and construct a solution. I sent out a memo that clearly stated the resulting policy or procedure. That memo became policy and was placed either in the staff policy manual or in the student handbook – whichever was appropriate.

**NO** memos, signs or posters on the wall! I am always bothered when I walk in a center and see rules and policies posted on the walls, “Don’t do this. No student admittance...” etc. I think it sends the wrong message to students and visitors. Come up with other creative ways to communicate and reinforce policies and procedure. Review them often if you need to but avoid the walls! OK, I’ll get off my soap box!

When an issue arises you can say, “See, here it is in the policy manual.

”The policy may need explaining and justification on my part, or it may need debate in a staff meeting. In closed staff meetings I was open to discussing the policies and letting them evolve to meet the current needs and conditions.