

Section 1 – I'm ready to change Day 2 – Conditioning and conflict

Today we are going to talk about conditioning and conflict. We'll look at what we have been conditioned to believe about conflict and how we were taught to behave during conflict. We'll also look at where this conditioning comes from. You'll see the grip that conditioning has on our beliefs and our behavior. When you are aware of this, you can make the choice to behave and belief as you wish during conflicts.

Your beliefs and conditioning about conflict can come from the below sources, and others:

- Personal values and style
- Family
- Friends
- Cultural background
- Community
- Work
- Country of origin
- Country you live in now
- Religion
- Institutions you are a part of
- Movies
- TV
- News
- Leaders
- Books

Power

Many times our conditioning regarding conflict and conflict resolution has to do with power, and retaining power. In the past, conflicts had a winner and a loser. Also, many conflicts have power and self-esteem issues underlying them, so to lose a conflict can have implications about your power, your identity, your manhood or womanhood, how you would look to your people, etc.

Just look at how international and civil conflicts are handled. Why don't all the parties involved talk first? In a corporation, why do people hold onto their opinions and actions, even if it is not for the good of everyone? Why are people unable to admit they made a mistake, or be vulnerable?

Power. People are conditioned to not share power, and not to hurt their identity and seem weak. We are in a new age, however, and more and more people are turning to mediation, negotiation, dialogue, and conflict transformation rather than fighting. These interest-based methods of conflict resolution involve sharing power and collaborating to ensure that everyone's wants and needs are met.

Victim - Villain - Hero Conflict Triangle

When you get into a conflict, do you automatically think, *"I can't be wrong, I'm right, I'm the Victim, they're the Villain, and maybe there is a Hero that is going to come and rescue me from the situation."* Or maybe you think, *"I was so bad, they were the Victim of me, and I wish someone or something would come rescue me. No, maybe I should be punished, since I am the Villain."*

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This is the Victim - Villain - Hero Conflict Triangle, and it is commonly known in conflict resolution. It polarizes people in conflict. Instead of seeing the issues and the people compassionately, they are seen in terms of purity vs evil, right vs wrong, or innocent vs guilty. This is the either/or mentality. We want to move to a "both" mentality.

Let's look at the roles:

- **Victim** – Weak, has something done to them, wants to be cared for, gives up power or self-image so people will feel sorry for them, others are responsible not them, stuck in whatever they are stuck in
- **Villain** - Aggressive, forces others to do or feel a certain way, wants to feel power, blames and threatens
- **Hero** - Wants to save, wants to be liked, tries to rescue Victim but does not teach Victim how to rescue her/himself, puts themselves between the people in conflict (the Villain and the Victim) and may not be liked for many reasons, can become the Villain instead of the Hero

Once upon a time...choose any fairy tale. Who is the Victim, the Villain, and the Hero?

What we think should happen during conflict, or what we are used to seeing during conflict, is reinforced through fairy tales, movies, songs, TV shows, books, plays, and other sources because conflict is exciting isn't it? Many people do not know how to prevent conflict, or what to do when in conflict, and since we all have conflicts, it makes for an interesting plot. As we watch and listen to conflicts and how they are or are not resolved, we are conditioned further away from a pure state of wanting to help others, to relieve their suffering, no matter what the conflict is or how it started. We are conditioned to stay on the Victim - Villain - Hero Conflict Triangle. In this way, we become or stay weak.

There is a different way, and it is what I call the Conflict Resolver. The Conflict Resolver steps off the triangle and is able to observe him- or herself in the conflict. That way you stay off the triangle. You may have those feelings of being the Victim, Villain, or Hero, but you are able to feel through them, and then work from a different angle to resolve or transform the conflict. This is a position of strength. Those who have been conditioned to believe that conflict has a winner or loser may feel that the Conflict Resolver is weak for sharing power and not pushing to be the winner.

Here are some ways to break out of that conditioning, and start approaching conflict from another angle:

- Use your analysis skills and look at your conflict as if you were an outside observer
- Continue to want to feel and learn more during conflict
- See the other person as a partner, not an enemy, who may have the same goals as you, just a different way to get there (and when you talk and ask questions, you will find out)
- Ask questions before talking
- Own your reactions, emotions, and issues without blaming others for how you feel
- Listen to the other person without needing to determine who is right or wrong, or who is the Victim, Villain, or Hero in the story
- Listen with compassion and trust so that the other person feels safe with you
- Ask questions instead of blaming

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- Instead of feeling scared to talk, be enthusiastic about sharing your feelings with someone who may or may not attack you (this requires courage)
- Waiting endlessly for someone to give you something you need can be replaced with you feeling confident enough to ask them for help or for what you need
- Pay attention to your thoughts and words: are they yours, or what you were conditioned to think and say?

When you drop your conditioning and roles, you may feel that you are betraying their source, whether your family or wherever else you learned them. Know that you are progressing, and in the long run, you will be able to help yourself and others by being a Conflict Resolver.

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Exercises

1. What are my beliefs about conflict?
2. What have I been conditioned to believe I should feel, do, and be before, during, and after conflict?
3. Is this how my family acted?
4. Is this how my gender or culture is supposed to approach conflict?
5. Why do I act that way?
6. If I work for a company, is there a corporate conflict attitude?

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Exercises

7. Do I share power? Why or why not? Are there times when it is or is not appropriate to share power?

8. Write a story about one of my conflicts as if it were a fairy tale with a Victim, Villain, and Hero. Is that how I thought about the conflict at the time?

9. Can I rewrite the conflict from the Conflict Resolver perspective, as if I was an observer of my own conflict, with constructive suggestions, acting from a clean slate and not my conditioning?

10. What did I learn from today's lesson?

11. What am I grateful for about today's lesson?