

In a Nutshell

The seven stages of conflict management are:

- Set the stage
- Define the conflict
- Establish your goals
- Identify and evaluate your choices
- Act
- Evaluate
- Wrap up

Conflict Management Strategies

11.4 Define and distinguish between the effective and ineffective conflict management strategies.

In managing conflict, you can choose from a variety of strategies, which we will consider here. Realize, however, that a variety of factors will influence the strategies you choose (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Understanding these factors may help you select more effective strategies to manage conflict with success.

- **Goals** The goals (short-term and long-term) you wish to achieve will influence your choice of conflict strategies. If you merely want to enjoy the moment, you may want to simply “give in” and ignore the difficulty. On the other hand, if you want to build a long-term relationship, you may want to fully analyze the cause of the problem and to choose cooperative strategies.
- **Emotional state** When you’re sorry, you’re likely to use conciliatory strategies designed to make peace; when you’re angry, you’re more likely to use strategies that attack the other person.
- **Assessment of the situation** Your attitudes and beliefs about what is fair and equitable will influence your readiness to acknowledge the fairness in the other person’s position. Your own assessment of who (if anyone) is the cause of the problem also will influence your conflict style.
- **Personality and Competence** If you’re shy and unassertive, you may want to avoid a conflict rather than fight actively. If you’re extroverted and have a strong desire to state your position, you may be more likely to fight actively and to argue forcefully.
- **Family history** If your parents argued about money or gave each other the silent treatment when conflicts arose, you’re likely to repeat these patterns yourself if you aren’t mindful of your conflict strategies.

Before examining these various strategies, take the self-test “Conflict Management Strategies,” and examine your own patterns of conflict management.

Win-Lose and Win-Win Strategies

As noted in the discussion of conflict styles, you can look at interpersonal conflict in terms of winning and losing. Obviously, solutions in which both parties win are the most desirable. Perhaps the most important



VIEWPOINTS: Social Network Conflicts

How would you compare interpersonal conflicts in face-to-face encounters and on social media sites? Are the issues argued about the same? Are the attempts at resolving the conflict the same?

Test Yourself

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The following statements refer to ways in which people engage in interpersonal conflict. Respond to each statement with *True* if this is a generally accurate description of your interpersonal conflict behavior and *False* if the statement is a generally inaccurate description of your behavior.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. I strive to seek solutions that will benefit both of us. | <input type="checkbox"/> 7. I take into consideration the face needs of the other person. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. I look for solutions that will give me what I want. | <input type="checkbox"/> 8. I advance the strongest arguments I can find even if these attack the other person. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. I confront conflict situations as they arrive. | <input type="checkbox"/> 9. I center my arguments on issues rather than on personalities. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. I avoid conflict situations as best I can. | <input type="checkbox"/> 10. I use messages that may attack a person's self-image if this will help me win the argument. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. My messages are basically descriptive of the events leading up to the conflict. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6. My messages are often judgmental. | |

This self-test was designed to sensitize you to some of the conflict strategies to be discussed in this section of the chapter. It is not intended to give you a specific score. Generally, however, you'd be following the general principles of effective interpersonal conflict management if you answered *True* to the odd-numbered statements (1, 3, 5, 7, and 9) and *False* to the even-numbered statements (2, 4, 6, 8, and 10). As you think about your responses and read the text discussion, ask yourself what you can do to improve your own conflict management skills. That's the overriding goal of this section.

reason is that win-win solutions lead to mutual satisfaction and prevent the kind of resentment that win-lose solutions often engender. Another reason is that looking for and developing win-win solutions makes the next conflict less unpleasant; conflict can more easily be viewed as "solving a problem" rather than as "fighting." Also, win-win solutions promote mutual face-saving; both parties can feel good about themselves. Finally, people are more likely to abide by the decisions reached in a win-win conflict than they are in win-lose or lose-lose situations.

In sum, you can look for solutions in which you or your side wins and the other person or side loses (**win-lose solutions**). Or you can look for solutions in which you and the other person both win (**win-win solutions**). Too often, we fail to even consider the possibility of win-win solutions and what they might be.

Take an interpersonal example: Let's say that I want to spend our money on a new car (my old one is unreliable), and you want to spend it on a vacation (you're exhausted and feel the need for a rest). Ideally, through our conflict and its resolution, we learn what each really wants. We may then be able to figure out a way for each of us to get what we want. I might accept a good used car, and you might accept a less expensive vacation. Or we might buy a used car and take an inexpensive road trip. Each of these win-win solutions will satisfy both of us; each of us wins, in the sense that each of us gets what we want.

Instead of approaching conflict with a win-lose mentality, consider the advantages of win-win possibilities:

- Brainstorm potential win-win solutions.
- Focus on areas of agreement; see the other person's point of view.
- Be willing to give up something (but not everything) for the sake of the other person and the relationship.