

Tips and Tools for Constructive Conflict Resolution

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When we act, we often act in relationship to others. When considering which actions may be most constructive when acting amongst others, the following tools may be helpful.

LARA Action Steps¹

When engaging with others, often the best thing we can do is to listen, and to affirm what is being said. Too often when we are not speaking, we are also not listening with an intent to understand – we are simply waiting our turn to speak, then we jump to respond without affirming a single thing we heard.

Listen

Listen with an intent to understand. Listen for underlying principles, cultural values, emotions, and issues behind what is being said. Listen for commonalities. Observe body language and tone of voice which may provide additional meaning. Listen for inherent needs and interests, not just what is said.

Affirm

Affirm the principles or issues in what was said, or simply the feelings or emotions that were expressed (“you care strong about this”). Affirming is not agreeing, it’s acknowledging or recognizing what is shared. This can be done by simply repeating or rephrasing what was said.

Respond

Respond to the issues that were raised and the underlying needs behind them. Ask questions about what was said.

Add

Add information to the conversation. After seeking to understand, seek to be understood.

Assertion Statements (also known as “I” Statements)

¹ Reference

Barker, T., & Landrum, C. (2012). Office of Student Conflict Resolution, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Gordon, T., (2001). *Leader effectiveness training, L.E.T: Proven skills for leading today's business into tomorrow.* (1st Perigee ed.) New York, NY: Berkley.

Tinker, B. (2004). *LARA: Engaging Controversy with a Non-violent, Transformative Response*, workshop handout available by request from info@LMFamily.org.

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One way to engage conflict constructively is to communicate our desires and interests to others and share the rationales behind those interests. When we are affected by others, it can be extremely helpful to give feedback on how we were impacted. The assertion statement framework is especially effective when used in the “Add” part of the LARA method (above) but can also be used on its own.

“I feel _____ when (you) _____ because _____. What I’m hoping we might try is _____.”

The formula above is best used by adapting it to your communication style, “voice” and culture. What’s most important is that all 4 key elements are included in your communication, regardless of the order.

- Identify and share your *feelings and emotions* about the situation.
- Identify and articulate the *cause* of those feelings.
- Provide lots of context and explanation for *why* those feelings are caused – the more the better!
- Identify and articulate what your needs and desires are – what your ideal looks like – and frame it in a way that invites others into a conversation about how that might be achieved, what their role in your vision might be, and how their own interests might be satisfied as well.

Problem-Solving Steps to Assist in Determining Appropriate Action

- Identify and Define the Issue or Question
- Analyze the Situation and Gather Information
- Generate/Identify Possible Action Steps (minimum 3!)
- Evaluate Possible Actions
- Select the Best Action (s)
- Develop an Action Plan, Identify Next Steps, and Implement the Action
- Analyze and Assess Action Effectiveness (and repeat process if necessary!)