Leveraging Conflict Resolution Approaches to Support Civil Society Resiliency:

(*Not Just Back, But Better*)

Kenneth Cloke

"It demands great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater whose foot is on your neck, and an even greater miracle of perception and charity not to teach your child to hate."

James Baldwin

"There is nothing in the world, I would venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions, as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life."

Victor Frankl

"If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea."

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Alternative Approaches to Resilience

1. As an *attitude* – for example, toward problems, conflicts or changes

2. As a *process* – for example, in the way we approach problem solving

3. As a *relationship* – for example, in how we respond to difficult behaviors

4. As a *practice* – for example, in mediation and restorative justice

5. As a *dialogue* – for example, in addressing family, community, and workplace, or social, economic and political issues

6. As a *search* – for example, in seeking authenticity, open-hearted communication, or closure

Some Obstacles to Resilience

- Dogmatism and rigidity in response to stress

- Demonization and victimization, blaming and self-blaming

- Chronic, unresolved conflicts

- Ongoing prejudice, bias and stereotyping

- Dysfunctional systems in couples, families, organizations and civil societies

- Interruption, denial or suppression of emotional processing

- Neurotic, obsessive or pathological states of mind

- Political, religious and other forms of repression and intolerance

- Judgmental, accusatory attitudes toward self or others

- Fixed ideas, beliefs or principles in ethics, values and morality

- Barriers to collaboration and consensus, transformation and transcendence in problem solving and conflict resolution

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Some Post-Pandemic Roles for Mediators

- Zooming, Online Mediations, and Building Virtual Empathy/Intimacy
- Mediating Health Care Issues with Providers, Patients and Families
- Mediating Hospice and End of Life Conversations
- Mediating Grief and Loss
- Facilitating Communications, Dialogues, Storytelling, Problem Solving, Collaborative Negotiation and Consensus Building in Communities
- Trauma Informed Mediation/Collaborative Practice Consortiums
- Mediating Spousal Battering Issues, Visitation and Co-Parenting Conflicts
- Mediating Return to Work/School Mediations
- Labor/Management Disputes and Control over Working Conditions
- After-Shock of Mental Illness, Empathy Fatigue
- The Multi-Door Courthouse and Institutional Capacity Building
- Facilitating Political Dialogues and Large Group Consensus Building
- Mediating Social and Political Divisiveness in Political, Environmental and Social Justice Organizations, Civil Society and Public Institutions
- Global Collaborations and Conflict Resolution Systems Design

Four Ways (Among Many) of Using Conflict Resolution to Increase Resilience

1. Learn the Subtle Art of Asking Questions

2. Shift the Language, Rhetoric and Logic of Conflict

3. Transform the Narrative Structure of Conflict Stories

4. Design Interest-Based Approaches to Chronic, Systemic, Organizational and Political Conflicts

Learn the Art of Asking Questions

"We are all partners in a quest. The essential questions have no answers. You are my question, and I am yours – and then there is dialogue. The moment we have answers, there is no dialogue. Questions unite people, answers divide them. So why have answers when you can live without them?"

Elie Wiesel

"One's life, viewed as a whole, is always the answer to the most important questions. Along the way, what does it matter what one says, what words and principles one chooses to justify oneself? At the very end, one's answers to the questions the world has posed with such relentlessness are to be found in the facts of one's life. Questions such as: Who are you? … What did you actually want? … What could you actually achieve? … At what points were you loyal or disloyal or brave or a coward? And one answers as best one can, honestly or dishonestly; that's not so important. What's important is that finally one answers with one's life."

Sandor Marai

Some Questions about Asking Questions

1. Who wants to know? Who, *exactly*, is asking the question?

2. *Why* do you want to know? What is driving your curiosity?

3. Why do you care what the answer is?

4. Is the question *dangerous* enough?

5. What question does the other person most/least want to answer?

6. What, in your life or theirs, could change based on the answer?

7. What is the *meaning* of the question, to you and to them?

8. What is the type and quality of *energy* contained in the question?

9. How much audacity and kindness are represented in the question?

10. How willing are you to ask the same question of yourself?

11. How prepared are you to be shocked by the answer?

12. How might you turn the answer into a deeper question?

Some Internalizing Questions in Conflict

- Have you ever experienced this kind of conflict before? When? With whom?
- Can you imagine letting it go and releasing it forever? If not, why not?
- What kinds of conflicts have you experienced in your life? What do they have in common?
- What are some things you *haven't* do but should have. What kept you?
- List some things you *have* done but shouldn't have. What compelled you?
- What part of your past controls your present? What if it were different?
- How much of what you have done in this conflict do you think was chosen by you? How much by others?
- Who wrote the script for what you did or did not do? When? Why?
- What myths and assumptions do you think shaped this script?
- What is this conflict asking you to learn or let go of?
- Is there any difference between what you thought or felt and what you said?
- What are the most important things you have learned in your life?
- What judgments do you have about yourself based on your life choices?
- What were your peak experiences? What were your greatest failures?
- What do you never, ever want to experience again? What do you think will prevent you from doing so?
- What do you imagine your life will be like in 5 years? Your relationships?
- What epitaph would you write for yourself? How would you like it to read?

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A Few Dangerous Questions (1)

- What have you done to create the very thing you are most troubled by?

- What have you been clinging to or holding onto that it is now time for you to release?

- What are you responsible for in your conflict that you have not yet acknowledged to the other person?

- What do you most want to hear the other person say to you that you still haven't mentioned?

- What do you long for in your relationship with the other person?

- What is the refusal, or "no" that you have not yet communicated?

- What is the permission, or "yes" you gave in the past that you now want to retract?

- What is the resentment you are still holding on to that the other person doesn't know about?

- What is the promise you gave that you are now betraying?

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A Few Dangerous Questions (2)

- What is it they or you did that you are still unwilling to forgive?

- What price are you willing to pay for your refusal to forgive?

- How much longer are you prepared to continue paying that price?

- What promise are you willing to make to the other person with no acknowledgement or expectation of return?

- What lessons have you learned from the other person in this conflict? What have they taught you? Would you give that up?

- What gift could you give the other person that you continue to withhold? What might happen to them if you didn't withhold it?

- Why do you continue to withhold it? What would happen to you if you didn't?

- Who would you become if you let go of your anger/fear?

- What are you prepared to do *unconditionally*, without any expectation of recognition or reciprocity by the other person?

[Based partly on work by Peter Block]

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Some Questions We Can Ask in Conflict

Some questions each of us can seek to answer, personally, relationally, professionally, organizationally, socially, economically and politically:

- What are the most important lessons we can learn from our conflict and how we handled it?

- What has changed for the better? For the worse?

- What most needs to change, but hasn't?

- How might we combine our differences to produce a better result?

- How could we build a better world out of the ashes of the old?

- As a person, how will you be different as a result of this experience?

- Looking back at your most difficult or desperate moments, what helped you get through?

- With 20/20 hindsight, what do you wish had been done differently?

- How will your life and work change as a result, and will you like it?

- What question would you most like to be asked by me right now?

- What question are you most afraid of being asked? Why?

- What could we have done to prevent this, or made it easier to handle?

Questions on Organizational Culture

1. *Work Rules:*
   - What are the explicit rules in the organization?
   - What are the implicit rules? What is the ideal? What is the reality?
2. *Values:*
   - What are the ideal values, concepts and beliefs? Which of these are real?
   - How is success defined? How is failure defined?
3. *Heroes and Villains:*
   - Who are the positive role models? What did they do?
   - Who are the negative role models? What did they do?
4. *Rites and Rituals:*
   - What are the day to day routines or rituals?
   - What does the organization stand for in its ceremonies?
5. *Communication and Power:*
   - What are the primary formal and informal means of communication?
   - How is the hidden power organized?
6. *Relationships and Conflict:*
   - What happens when there is conflict?
   - How does collaboration occur?

(Based partly on work by Deal & Kennedy, *Corporate Cultures*

Shift the Language,

Rhetoric and Logic of Conflict

"War is what happens when language fails."

Margaret Atwood

"We human beings belong to language. In language, we love and hate, we admire and despise. We interpret our crises as individual and social. We suffer, and exalt, and despair. In language, we receive the gift of being human. All the feeling, the thinking, the action, and the things of this world as we know it are given to us in language. "

Fernando Flores

"Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see."

Mark Twain

Conflict and Communication

- The *context* of adversarial conflict interferes with the usual ways we have of assessing meaning, generating an overarching distrust of ordinary meanings.

- Adversarial conflict also produces a set of *contrary* meanings and negative interpretations, even for common, conflict-free words such as "hello."

- Because of distrust, nothing spoken is likely to be accepted in terms of its ordinary meaning.

- Instead, meaning is supplied by association with memories gathered from fear, anger, grief, guilt, jealousy, and similar emotions.

- These meanings become self-reinforcing, creating a cycle from which there is no obvious escape.

Interpreting Conflict Communications (1)

- The most important part of conflict communications is not what is said but what is meant.

- Most meanings are ambiguous, uncertain, over-determined, non-linear, and susceptible to more than one interpretation, and the same communication may have different, even opposite meanings to different people.

- The greater the ambiguity in the communication, the greater the potential gap between the speakers' meaning and that described by the listener.

- Metaphors, symbols, myths, parables, and rituals that are often hidden or disguised and organized beneath the level of conscious thought, invest ambiguity with meaning.

Interpreting Conflict Communications (2)

- All words have hidden emotional meanings that become more powerful the more emotional they are, and the less they are revealed.

- Meaning in conflict stories is communicated through words, body language, tone of voice, and facial expression, among others. Indirect forms of communication communicate meaning more accurately than words.

- Meaning is established by the intention (frequently emotional and unconscious) of the speaker, the receptivity and attitude (also emotional and unconscious) of the listener, and the larger context in which the communication takes place.

- The speaker, the listener, and the context therefore form a system that interacts with itself to create the meaning of conflict communications.

Pronouns and Conflict Resolution

Pronoun	Form of Communication	Predictable Result
They [Example: They are lazy and irresponsible.]	Stereotype	Prejudice
You [Example: You are lazy and irresponsible.]	Accusation	Counter-Accusation/ Denial
He, She [Example: He/She is lazy and irresponsible.]	Demonization/ Victimization	Blame and Shame/ Disempowerment
It [Example: There is a lot of work here – how shall we divide it so we pull our own weight?]	Objectification	Problem Solving
I [Example: I feel overworked and would like to take time off but won't let myself and am jealous when you do. / Could you give me a hand with this?]	Confession/ Request	Listening/ Responsiveness
We [Example: We haven't been clear about how to share our joint responsibilities. How would you suggest we share them?	Partnership/ Collaboration	Consensus/ Ownership

"You Always …" "You Never …"

Merely by using these words, we:

- Camouflage our requests as statements of fact

- Exaggerate the truth

- Stereotype the other person as unreasonable

- Not take responsibility for communicating our needs

- Ignore others' needs, explanations, or reasons for acting in their own self-interest

- Fail to accurately describe what we really want from others

- Miss opportunities to become vulnerable and invite others into more intimate conversation and relationship

- Suggest that it is not acceptable to express deeper emotions directly

- Infuse frustration and disappointment into the conversation

- Convert desire into anger and hurt feelings into annoyance

- Miss opportunities to collaboratively negotiate the satisfaction of mutual needs and diverse interests

- Create a source of chronic conflict within our relationship

Reframing Communications

- Frame statements to express what you want from the other person, rather than judging that person's attitude or behavior.
- Frame problems as questions or issues, rather than as statements of opinion.
- Frame questions so they cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no."
- Frame issues so that multiple solutions become possible.
- Separate problems from people, and depersonalize the problems.
- Frame issue so that they can be seen as joint problems.
- Frame issues in terms of future relationships, rather than past ones that entail guilt or innocence, blame or validation.
- Frame issues so they are within an area where the person has the skills, authority, and resources to make a decision and implement it .
- Frame issues in a way that does not threaten anyone's self-esteem or dignity.
- Frame issues in an objective and unbiased manner.
- Frame issues in terms of details and specifics, rather than generalities.
- Frame larger, broader issues as smaller, more easily resolved sub-issues.
- Frame issues in ways that encourage creative thinking and problem solving.
- Ask if you framed the problem accurately, and improve your reframing.

(Some ideas drawn from work by Howard Gadlin)

Syntax and Conflict

The sentences we use in conflict are generally structured as follows:

PRONOUN + VERB + ACCUSATION (JUDGMENT)

These can be elaborated into:

"THEY/HE OR SHE/YOU" + "DID/ARE" + ACCUSATION

The accusation portion of the sentence can be broken down into three or four distinct components, revealing several potential interventions:

1. AN INDIRECT NEGATIVE STATEMENT OF INTERESTS

2. AN INDIRECT NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL COMMUNICATION

3. A DEEP-SEATED RELATIONAL FEAR

4. A DEEP-SEATED SELF-DOUBT

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Aristotle's Forms of Advocacy/Persuasion

1. *Logos*: Arguments based on logic or reason, or on evidence such as facts or figures. Yet is it common for lawyers to play fast-and-loose with logic and with facts and figures, and for fact checking and corrections to go unnoticed.

2. *Ethos*: Arguments based on character or ethics, or on credibility or expertise. Yet legal arguments often place a premium on character assassination, ignore ethical violations, and discount both credibility and expertise.

3. *Pathos*: Arguments based on emotion or feelings. Yet powerful negative feelings like fear and anger can easily be stirred up by adversarial legal processes, and overwhelm rationality.

Five Other Forms of Advocacy/Persuasion

1. *Personal Experience and Empathy*, chiefly through storytelling, dialogue and empathetic listening

2. *Vision and Values*, chiefly through leadership, commitment and modeling

3. *Synergy and Syntheses*, chiefly through conflict resolution and the integration of competing ideas

4. *Beauty and Symmetry*, chiefly through the arts, sciences and mathematical equations

5. *Love and Caring*, chiefly through kindness, heartfelt interactions, shared intimacy and reciprocity in relationships

What's Better than Advocacy/Persuasion?

A dialogue, sparked by a finely honed question that can lead to:

- Self-discovery
- Profound realization
- Fresh insight
- Heightened awareness
- New ways of thinking
- Increased ownership of the problem
- Creative problem solving
- Discovery of complex, multi-sided truths
- Transformation or transcendence of the problem
- Improved capacity for communication and collaboration
- Better, more trusting and more satisfying relationships
- Learning and wisdom
- Greater humility and increased skills
- Personal, relational and systemic change

Aristotelian Logic and Mediation

1. *The Law of Identity:* A statement is what it is. A is identical to A. Yet we know there are times when A is not entirely A. For example, a pen is something that writes, but when it is out of ink is it still a pen? Light may contain darkness, and truth may conceal falsehood.

2. *The Law of Non-contradiction:* A statement and its contradiction cannot both be true. If A is true and B is the opposite of A, both A and B cannot be true. Yet we know there are times when A and B are both true and opposites. For example, when love and hate are present in the same person at the same time, do they love or hate? Is light a wave or a particle? Physicist Neils Bohr called these "complementarities," or "a great truth whose opposite is also a great truth."

3. *The Law of the Excluded Middle:* A statement is either true or false, and cannot be both true and false at the same time. For example, A must either be true or false and cannot be both at the same time. Yet we know there are times when a statement is both true and false at the same time. For example, are the stories we tell about our conflicts true or false? Clearly they are both.

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Transform the Narrative Structure
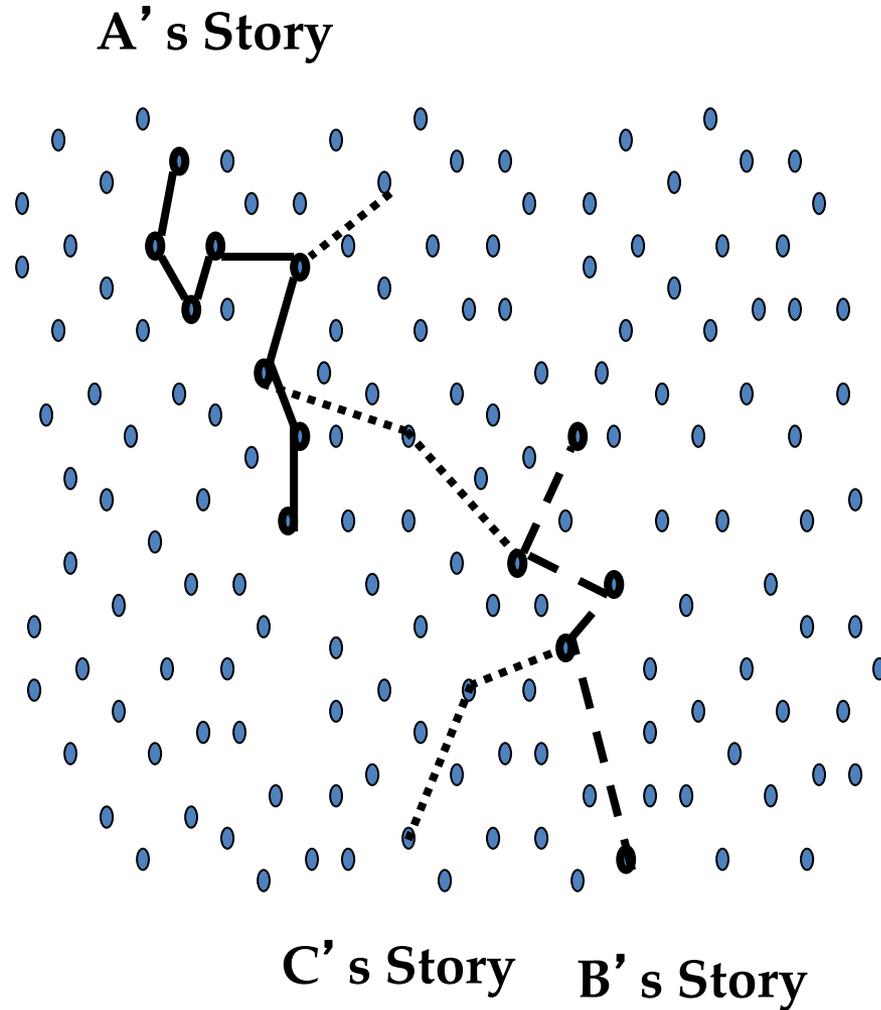
of Conflict Stories

"Telling the story helps to dissipate the pain. Telling your story often and in detail is primal to the grieving process. You must get it out. Grief must be witnessed to be healed. Grief shared is grief abated. Tell your tale, because it reinforces that your loss mattered."

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler

"[Story]telling is almost always done as a gift, even when the story contains and injects some poison, it is also a bond, a granting of trust, and rare is the trust or confidence that is not sooner or later betrayed, rare is the close bond that does not grow twisted or knotted and, in the end, become so tangled that a razor or knife is needed to cut it."

Javier Marais

The Field of Conflict Stories

A's Story

C's Story

B's Story

The Narrative Structure of Conflict Stories

The Princess
(victim)

The Villain
(perpetrator)

The Hero
(rescuer)

Victim

Rescuer

Perpetrator

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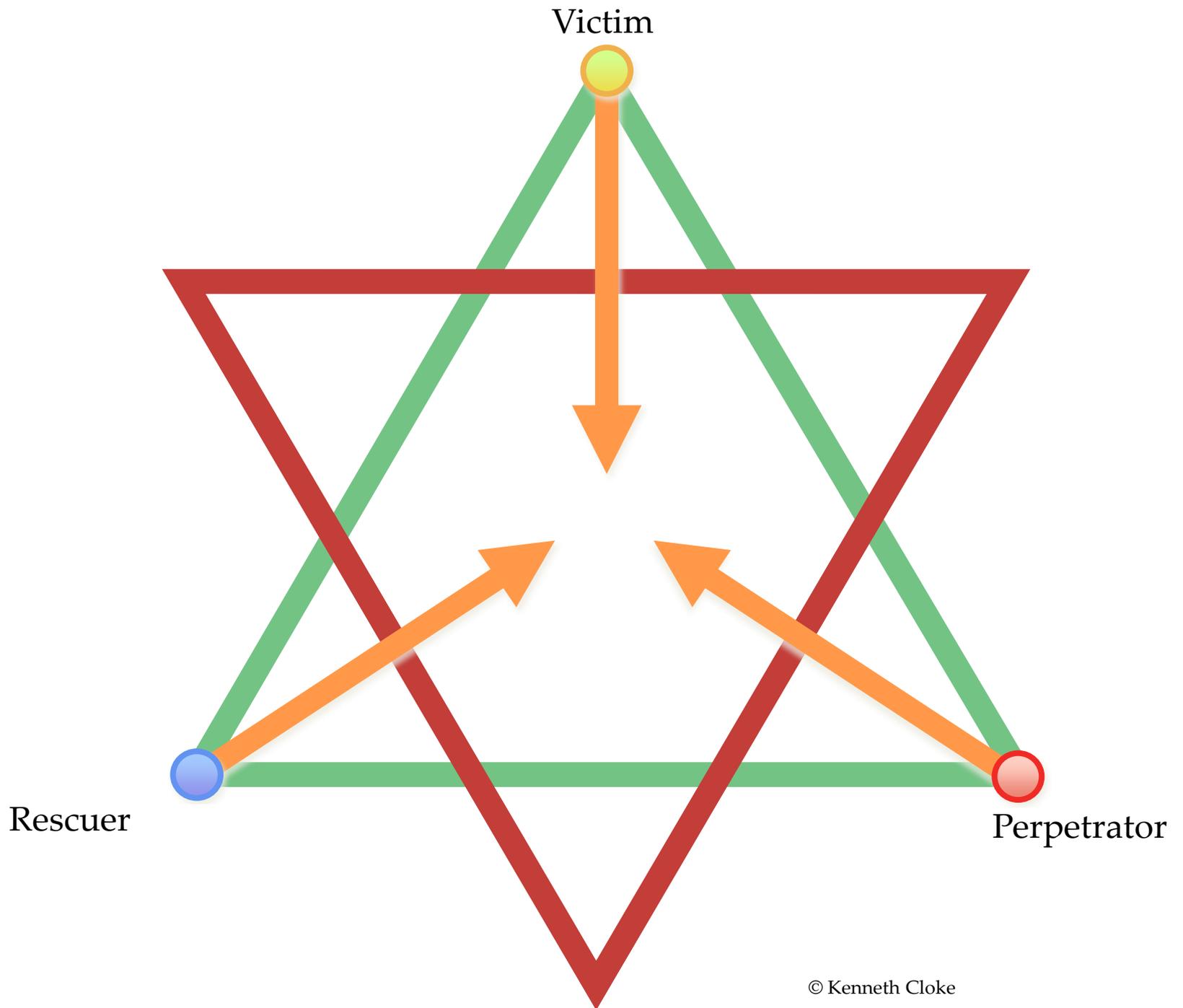
Some Elements of Conflict Stories (1)

1. The storyteller is a victim who is more acted upon than acting.
2. The other party is the creator, initiator or cause of the conflict.
3. Whatever the storyteller did is related as rational and just.
4. Whatever the other party did appears irrational and unjust.
5. The symbolic and metaphoric content of the story points to its real meaning to the teller.
6. The story that is told collapses all other perceptions, possibilities and versions into one. It appears to exclude all other stories.
7. All stories about conflict are metaphorically true.
8. The stories people tell create their lives. As they tell the story, it happens.
9. Stories are rituals designed to comfort the teller with their familiarity.
10. The more the story is repeated, the more it is believed to be true. As Lewis Carroll had it: "I've said it once, I've said it twice, I've said it thrice--it must be true!"
11. The central purpose of conflict stories is to maintain the self-image and self-esteem of the storyteller.
12. Conflict stories merge emotionally charged symbols with action and events so that it is nearly impossible to separate them.

Some Elements of Conflict Stories (2)

13. Stories help fulfill wishes or dreams, or explain why they failed to occur.

14. Conflict stories are organized around a central unstated myth about the other which is subconsciously perceived to be only partially true.

15. Conflict stories link together perceived facts to favor the teller. Inconsistent facts are denied, dismissed or disconnected from the story.

16. Most conflict stories reveal in their imagery and language a set of emotional assumptions that have more to do with the conflict than the story itself.

17. Most of the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves are compensatory, revealing in their satisfaction the existence of an underlying need.

18. Most of the stories we tell ourselves about others are relational, creating others as a way of creating ourselves through our relationship with them.

19. Thus, even the stories we tell about others often end up being about ourselves, about what we admire in others because we lack it in ourselves, or what we dislike in others because we reject it, yet are simultaneously drawn it to in ourselves.

20. Stories create listening and a powerful bond with the listener, even when the listener is an opponent or adversary.

Interpreting Conflict Stories

1. All stories and interpretations are potentially and relatively true, though none is exclusively or absolutely true. In other words, there are degrees and varieties of truth and all metaphoric truths are relative to the observer.

2. If the meaning is believed, that makes it true, to the extent that it is believed. Or rather, believing and truth are the same for the listener.

3. A deeper level of meaning is one that arises when we ask why the story is told. What are we trying to convince ourselves of by telling this story? Our own innate goodness? Our lack of self-control? Our suffering? Our innocence? Our guilt or "original sin"?

4. Another layer of meaning is derived by looking at who the story is told to. For example, if the Adam and Eve story is told by a parent to a child, or a religious leader to a congregation, the message is clear: "Obey the rules or you will be punished and lose my affection and protection."

5. Between any two stories, a synthesis can be created that is also true.

The Deep Structure of Conflict Stories

1. Every conflict story takes the form of an *accusation*, often in the form of a "you" or "they" statement

2. Beneath every accusation is a *confession,* often in the form of an "I" statement

3. Beneath every confession is a *request,* often in the form of an "it," "I" or "we" statement

An Example:

1. *"You are lazy."*

2. *"I am working hard and would like to take time off but don't give myself permission, so when I see you taking time off I feel jealous and disrespected."*

3. *"Can you give me a hand?"*

2 Meta-Resolutions of Conflict Stories

The two most common resolutions that are implied or suggested by the

adversarial structure of conflict stories are:

1. Victory over one's external enemies, vanquishing one's foes,

    triumphing over evil, plus a *retributive* form of justice that punishes

    the evil-doer;

2. Victory over oneself, vanquishing one's weaknesses and

    temptations, triumphing over our own selfishness, anger, and

    willingness to be taken advantage of, plus a *restorative* form of

    justice that returns the parties to a more equal, fair and non-

    adversarial relationship.

Transforming Conflict Stories (1)

- Summarize what is true and useful in each party's story, leaving out the portions that demonize or victimize the other party;

- Ask each party to write their own story, then the other person's story, and then combine them;

- Ask them to tell a story that is positive and acknowledging;

- Ask them to change the pronoun in their story to it or I or we;

- Ask each party to clarify the context in which their story occurred;

- Offer a contrary, empowering interpretation, i.e., if the person says "I was frightened," you say "You were brave." Or if they say "I am so angry," you say "You must care a lot";

- Clarify expectations. Ask: "What did you want him to say?"

- Identify the hidden judgments in the story;

- Map the evolution of the conflict, identifying steps 1, 2, 3, etc.;

- Ask the parties to correct the conflict step by step;

Transforming Conflict Stories (2)

- Ask the parties to compare the cultural influences on their perceptions and responses to each others stories;

- Contrast their stories with what they want to achieve, with their goals;

- Ask them to jointly or separately investigate their factual assumptions;

- Identify the gaps in their stories. Ask them what was left out?

- Reveal their assumptions about causation and suggest a joint need to improve skills and responsibility for outcomes;

- Identify the larger systems, processes and conditions that impact their story, i.e., the absence of peer mediation, gender inequalities, etc., and extend the mediation to include the field" in which the conflict took place;

- Clarify the" ghost roles" including organizational policies and procedures, parents, people who are apathetic;

- Clarify the *meaning* of the story to each party;

- Separate facts from interpretations;

- Create a third story without demonization or victimization.

Transforming Conflict Narratives (1)

1. Conduct interviews and/or a written survey in which you ask each group or side to identify the narratives, stories, stereotypes or words and phrases used in their group to describe the *other* group, and the narratives, stories, stereotypes, or words and phrases used by the other group to describe them.

2. Separate the two groups and ask each group to review the narratives, stories, stereotypes, etc. that the *other* group has listed about them, discuss each one, and present to each other their top answers to the following questions:

   - What is one thing you would like to acknowledge or thank those in the other group for? One thing you believe they add or contribute to you, or to the whole?

   - What are the "it," "I" and "we" statements contained within each narrative or story?

   - How might you reframe their narratives, stereotypes or misunderstandings of your group as *requests*, or as suggestions for improvement?

   - What deeper, underlying, subjective or emotional truths do you feel are being expressed through their narratives or stories?

   - What legitimate interests, needs, expectations and desires do you think the other group is trying to communicate through its narratives or stories?

Transforming Conflict Narratives (2)

- What specifically are they asking you to understand or acknowledge about their group, their culture, or the context in which they are working?

- What do you most want those in the other group to understand or acknowledge about your group, your culture or the context in which you are working?

- What questions would you most like to ask those in the other group, in order to better understand and collaborate with them?

- What reciprocating promises and commitments are you willing to make in response to their requests?

- What agreements and expectations remain to be negotiated between the groups?

- What might your group do to make sure that no one will be able to construct similar narratives, stories or stereotypes about your group in the future?

3. Joint Presentation: Ask each group to present their lists to the other group and ask them for feedback, corrections and answers to its questions.

4. Evaluation: Ask each group to identify the lessons they learned from this exercise.

Design Interest-Based Approaches to Chronic, Systemic, Organizational and Political Conflicts

"The fact is that all the power in the world cannot transform someone who hates you into someone who likes you. It can turn a foe into a slave, but not into a friend. All the power in the world cannot transform a fanatic into an enlightened man. All the power in the world cannot transform someone thirsting for vengeance into a lover."

Amos Oz

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

Desmond Tutu

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

What is an Organization?

- A place where people work
- A diverse group of people committed to a common goal
- A system
- An organism
- A variety of interlocking activities and processes
- A set of relationships and processes
- A group of conversations
- A culture or mind-set
- A way of diffusing responsibility
- A compact, agreement, or contract
- A mix of unspoken expectations and desires
- An evolving set of values and purposes
- A way of resolving conflicts, a mediation between its diverse parts
- A method of group learning based on assessment and feedback
- A figment of our imaginations

10 Strategies to Resolve Conflicts at Work

Strategy One: Understand the Culture and Dynamics of Conflict

Strategy Two: Listen Actively, Empathetically, and Responsively

Strategy Three: Search Beneath the Surface for Hidden Meanings

Strategy Four: Acknowledge and Reframe Emotions

Strategy Five: Separate What Matters from What Gets in the Way

Strategy Six: Solve Problems Creatively and Paradoxically

Strategy Seven: Learn from Difficult Behaviors

Strategy Eight: Lead and Coach for Transformation

Strategy Nine: Explore Resistance and Negotiate Collaboratively

Strategy Ten: Mediate, and Design Systems for Prevention

Change, Conflict and Community

ATTITUDE TO CHANGE	CONFLICT STYLE	FORM OF COMMUNITY
Apathy and Cynicism	Avoidance	Isolation/ Non Community
Obedience and Passivity	Accommodation	Civility/ Pseudo Community
Resistance and Reaction	Aggression	Hostility/ Negative Community
Acceptance and Compliance	Compromise	Tolerance / Legal Community
Affirmation and Ownership	Collaboration	Synergy/ Creative Community

Mediators and Politics – Introduction (1)

- We have all watched political conversations degenerate into angry quarrels, pointless personal attacks and antagonistic power contests. We have all seen people sink into screaming matches, shaming and blaming, and personal viciousness, often over the loftiest ideas, deepest passions and most profound political principles. We all know that these tirades can easily descend into senseless violence and appalling acts of brutality. And we have all participated in them, fanned the flames, or stood passively by and done nothing.

- Yet political conversations matter; they concern our future, our values and integrity, our ethics and morality, our beliefs and behaviors, not only as individuals and nation states, but as *human beings* who are responsible for the world our grandchildren, and our grandchildren's grandchildren, will inherit.

- Successful political decision-making requires not silence or pointless rage, but dialogue; not apathy or aggression, but collaborative negotiation; not passivity or accommodation, but courageous, constructive, *creative* contention. Silence in the face of critical issues signifies not merely the absence of speech, but the loss of learning and *integrity*, and therefore of self, of values, of citizenship, of democracy, of community, of humanity.

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Mediators and Politics – Introduction (2)

- As mediators, we have largely been silent about political events. In part this may be because we do not know how to express our political views without slipping into adversarial attitudes and assumptions that define most political communications -- yet we know from practice that both can be transformed and overcome.

- Many of us think of ourselves as "not interested in politics." Yet, as Pericles declared over two millennia ago, "You may not be interested in politics, but politics is interested in you."

- Whatever our justifications for treating each other as enemies or remaining silent when political ideas are discussed, our ability to address the highly complex, increasingly challenging issues that characterize modern political life is no longer optional. What happens in the world politically has an impact on our work in conflict resolution, expanding or contracting the willingness to seek peaceful options. Is it possible that the opposite might also be true? Could mediation have an impact on politics?

- Politics has been called the art of *compromise*, but what if we think of it as the art of *conflict resolution*, in which compromise, as in mediation, is merely one of many possible outcomes?

- What, then, would a *mediative*, interest-based, collaborative form of politics look like? What skills are required for democracy to work?

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Some Classical Purposes of Politics

- Search for the highest common good (Aristotle)

- Provide for the general welfare (Aristotle)

- Make sure that laws are fairly conceived, wisely interpreted and justly enforced (Aristotle)

- Make the citizen "as good as possible." (Socrates)

- Search for justice (Plato)

- Support "… not the disproportionate happiness of any one class, but the greatest happiness of the whole." (Plato)

- Promote democracy (Democritus)

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What's Wrong with Politics as Usual

- It is unnecessarily divisive and adversarial

- It is nearly always win/lose and winner take all

- It is power-based, yet "all power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely;" or rights-based, yet controlled by power

- It takes too long, costs too much, and is exercised too personally

- It is increasingly ineffective in solving global problems

- It is controlled by wealthy individuals, military and industrial elites, corporations and special interests

- Global political collaborations, as in the United Nations, are perceived as reducing sovereignty and imposing alien ideas

- It is grounded in domination, inequality and disrespect

- There is little interest among elites in openness or direct democracy, and great interest in secrecy and amassing power

- It easily slips into autocracy and boosts social inequality

- It generates bureaucracy and corruption, stifles change and increases chronic conflict

Power, Rights and Interests

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Power

Military, Hierarchy, Autocracy

Orders, Adversarial Negotiation, Chain of Command

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Rights

Bureaucracy, Law, Formal Rules, Policies and Procedures

Adjudication, Arbitration, Decision, Positional Negotiation

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Interests

Democracy, Civil Society, Values, Needs and Desires

Informal Problem Solving, Mediation, Dialogue, Collaborative Negotiation

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Three Interest-Based Definitions of Politics

1. *Politics is a social problem-solving process.* As a result, a diversity of views about the nature of the problem and alternative ways of solving it will predictably result in better, more sustainable solutions.

2. *Politics is a large group decision-making process.* As a result, the greater the consensus, the stronger the democracy, and the more people agree with a decision, the more likely it is to be effective.

3. *Politics is a conflict resolution process.* As a result, the amount of chronic, on-going, systemic conflict can be dramatically reduced by assuming there is more than one correct answer and a complex, egalitarian, interest-based approach can result in no one having to lose so that that others are able to win.

Three Elements of Political Conflict

1. *Diversity*: In the first place, there must be two or more distinct individuals or groups of people, each with diverse beliefs, ideas, opinions, needs, and interests. Without this, there cannot be conflict.

2. *Inequality*: In the second place, there must be an inequality in power between these individuals or groups, reflecting their ability to implement their diverse beliefs, ideas, opinions, etc. Without this, the conflict will not take a political form.

3. *Adversarial, win/lose process*: In the third place, there must be an adversarial, win/lose process for problem solving or decision-making that pits diverse groups against each other, allowing only one to win. Without this, the conflict will not become polarizing.

How to Talk about Hot Topics (1)

1. By creating an atmosphere, attitude and context of unconditional respect for each other, regardless of our opinions or positions on the issues

2. By being sure to include people who do *not* agree with each other

3. By reaching consensus on a set of ground rules or shared values that will guide our conversations

4. By agreeing to use skilled facilitators to keep conversations on track, and skilled mediators to intervene if necessary

5. By agreeing not to suppress anyone's experiences, reflections, ideas, beliefs, passions, or emotions, while at the same time focusing on the problem as an "it" rather than a "you," and doing our best not to personalize the problem

6. By asking questions that do not have a single correct answer, but invite people to offer their own unique answers

7. By consistently coming from a place of curiosity and learning, and probing to discover the deeper meaning of the issues to each person

How to Talk about Hot Topics (2)

8. By acknowledging and validating everyone's deepest interests and concerns, intentions and experiences

9. By expressing gratitude and thanking people for their dissent and diversity, their courage and willingness to learn

10. By breaking large groups up into smaller groups where everyone can participate

11. By sharing responsibility for group process, and modeling openness and honesty, empathy and compassion, listening and acknowledgement

12. By asking each small group to select volunteers to perform important tasks, such as facilitation, recording, process observation, critique of content, presentation to other groups, time-keeping, etc.

13. By stopping the process when it isn't working, talking openly about what is not working, and agreeing on what can be done to improve it

How to Talk about Hot Topics (3)

14. By designing questions that will draw people on opposite sides into dialogue with each other

15. By asking people in small groups to brainstorm possible solutions and present them to each other

16. By reaching consensus on recommendations for action, and setting aside for future discussion all points on which there is no consensus

17. By seeking ways for those on opposite sides of an issue to agree on specific, practical steps that could improve their communications and relationships in the future

18. By inviting people to consider how they might continue and expand the dialogue

19. By applauding everyone's efforts and acknowledging their contributions

20. By eliciting feedback, jointly evaluating the process, and making improvements

Some Questions to Encourage Dialogue (1)

- What life experiences have you had that have led you to feel so passionately about this issue?

- Where do your beliefs come from?

- What is at the heart of this issue, for you as an individual?

- Why were you willing to participate in this dialogue?

- Why do you care so much about this issue?

- Do you see any gray areas in the issue we are discussing, or ideas you find it difficult to define?

- Do you have any mixed feelings, doubts, uncertainties, or discomforts regarding this issue that you would be willing to share?

- Is there any part of this issue that you are not 100% certain of or would be willing to discuss and talk about?

- What questions or points of curiosity do you have for others who have different views?

- Even though you hold widely differing views, are there any concerns or ideas you think you may have in common?

- What underlying values or ethical beliefs have led you to your current political beliefs?

Some Questions to Encourage Dialogue (2)

- Do the differences between your positions reveal any riddles, paradoxes, contradictions, or enigmas regarding this issue?

- What fact, if proven to be true, might cause you to think differently?

- Is it possible to view your differences as two sides of the same coin? If so, what unites them? What is the coin?

- Can you separate the issue from the person you disagree with?

- Is there anything positive or acknowledging you would be willing to say about the person on the other side of this issue?

- What processes or ground rules would help you disagree more constructively?

- Instead of focusing on the past, what would you like to see happen in the future? Why?

- Are you disagreeing over fundamental values, or over how to achieve them?

- Is there a way that both of you might be right about different aspects of the issue? How?

- What criteria could you use to decide which idea or approach works best?

Some Questions to Encourage Dialogue (3)

- Would it be possible to test your ideas in practice and see which work best?

- How might you do that?

- What could be done to improve each person's ideas?

- Could any of the other side's ideas be incorporated into yours? How?

- Is there any aspect of this issue that either of you have left out?

- Are there any other alternatives to what you are both saying?

- What other information would you like to have in order to answer some of these questions?

- What have you learned from this conversation?

- Do you think it would be useful to continue this conversation, to learn more about each other and what you each believe to be true?

- How could you make your dialogue ongoing or more effective?

- What could you do to improve your process for disagreeing with each other in the future?

- For encouraging future dialogue?

- Would you be willing to do that together?

Some Questions for Advocates and Supporters of Political Candidates

- What principles do you believe the candidate you support stands for?   Why are those principles important to you?

- What are your goals for this election, other than to elect the candidate you support? Why are those goals important to you?

- How might you extend those principles and goals to conversations about which candidate to support?

- What does the word "democracy" mean to you? Why is that important?

- Do you believe that democracy is an issue in this election?

- Do you believe that diversity is an issue in this election?

- What do democracy and diversity require of us, in terms of the way we treat and talk about other candidates and their supporters?

- What forms of political support are ineffective or encourage you to resist?

- What forms of political support are effective or encourage you to think?

- What ideals or principles do you think the candidates you support share?

- What do you think will happen if your support becomes too adversarial?

- How might you work together to prevent that from happening?

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Four Ideas to Keep in Mind

1. We can distinguish advocacy for particular candidates or proposals or solutions from advocacy for mediation, democracy, and other collaborative processes and relationships;

2. We can acknowledge, encourage and support everyone in advocating and feeling passionately about their favored candidates, proposals or solutions, and do not seek to minimize their preferences, but bring them into creative, problem solving dialogue with one another.

3. We can recognize that democracy, like mediation, *inherently* requires processes and relationships that are inclusive, diverse, egalitarian, and collaborative; that encourage and support joint problem solving, dialogue, consensus building, collaborative negotiation, mediation, and interest- rather than power- or rights-based communications; and become far less effective where processes and relationships are hierarchical, discriminatory, unequal, and adversarial or highly competitive.

4. We can therefore use conflict resolution processes and relationships to enable and encourage democracy to evolve to higher *orders* of participation and collaborative engagement (and *vice versa)*; indeed, it is the inability to resolve intensely adversarial political disputes that keeps democracy (and conflict) from evolving, and fuels the desire for an autocratic or dictatorial leader (or judge) to stop it by deciding for one side and against the other, suppressing diversity and crushing dissent.

"Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
What you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness…

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.
Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend."

Naomi Shihab Nye