

Handling Conflict

Conflicts are an inevitable part of life. Throughout our history on earth, we human beings have struggled with one another. Although philosophers and religious leaders have urged us to embrace peace and quiet, we continue to argue and clash—and sometimes we even seem to enjoy it.

This book is not about the major battles involved in war and politics. Rather, it is about the kinds of conflicts you experience on an almost daily basis, at work and also among your friends and family. The way you handle these conflicts can have a major impact on your success, your happiness, and your fulfillment in life. There are two basic assumptions behind this book:

1. Some ways of handling conflict are more effective than others—that is, more likely to result in positive outcomes.
2. The skills for handling conflict can be learned. Even if you're not adept at them now, you can improve through understanding and practice.

In the workshops that follow, you'll explore several different aspects of conflict and learn important skills that can help you manage conflicts effectively. You'll see how to get a handle on conflict so that it can

work to your advantage. In fact, you'll discover how to make many conflicts work to the mutual advantage of both you and your opponents.

To get a sense of your current approach to conflict, try the self-assessment on the next page. For each statement, mark the response that best applies to you.



Introduction

Peace is not the absence of conflict. It is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.

— **RONALD REAGAN**
U.S. President

To get a sense of your current approach to conflict, try this self-assessment. For each statement, mark the response that best applies to you. Don't spend a long time pondering each answer. Just choose the answer that seems most appropriate right now.

	Often	Sometimes	Never
1. I'm unhappy about the conflict at my job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I'm upset when people criticize me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. People get annoyed when I give them good advice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I find it hard to assert my own rights and opinions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. When people disagree with me, the argument gets personal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I raise my voice in arguments.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I get frustrated and angry, even though others may not know it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. In a dispute, people tell me I've misinterpreted the situation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. To avoid a fight, I just give in.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. If it comes to a showdown, I make sure I win.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. If someone shows anger toward me, I get really upset.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. When other people are fighting about something that doesn't involve me directly, I make a point of ignoring the trouble.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How many times did you check “Often” or “Sometimes”? Although there are no absolute rules that apply in every conflict, each of the twelve statements describes a response that tends to produce a negative outcome. Usually there are more productive ways to think, feel, and behave during a conflict.

In this book you'll find many suggestions and activities that can help you identify productive ways of handling conflict and put them into practice in your own life.