

# DIG IN

## Resolving Conflicts Creatively

*Understanding Your Role in Community and Coalition Conflicts*

“Out beyond ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.”

—Rumi

### Understanding Your Reaction To Conflict

Being aware of our default (and often not so clear) reactions to conflict is always the first step in being prepared for conflict and being able to address it and leverage it successfully.

*Ask yourself:*

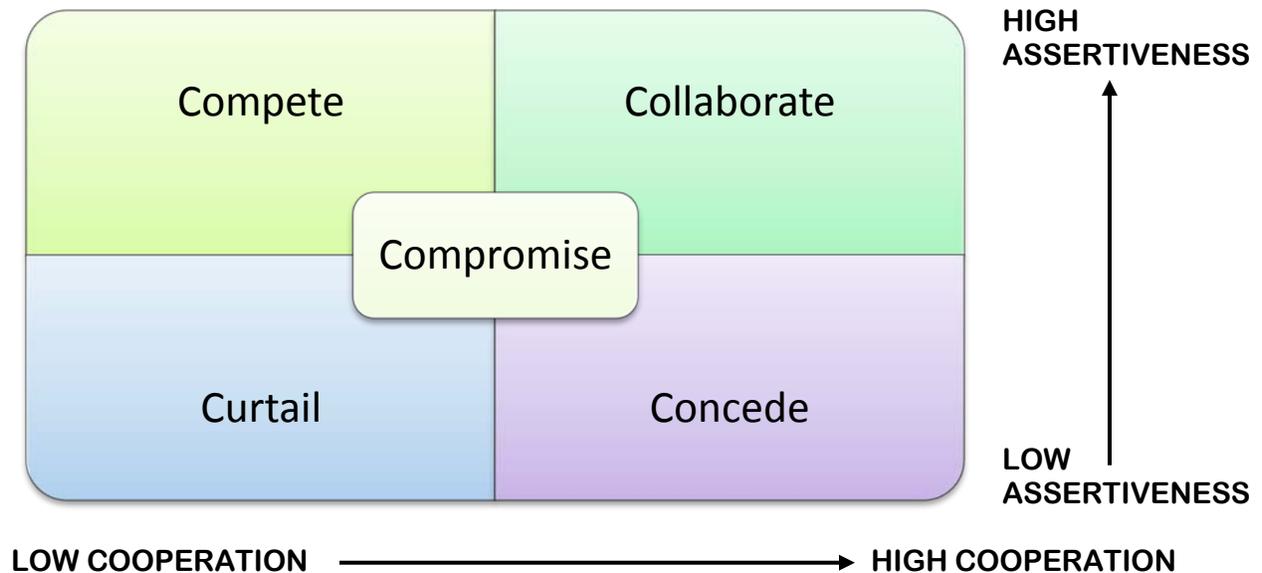
- What are my associations with the word conflict? How does it feel?
- What have I done in the past when faced with conflict?
- Do I react differently in different kinds of conflicts? How? Why?
- What have been the results of how I have handled conflict in the past?

“If it’s predictable, it’s manageable.”

—Omwale Satterwhite

### What Is Your Conflict Resolution Style?

There are many ways we can react to conflict, and they are appropriate or inappropriate dependent upon the situation and the level of assertiveness and cooperation demonstrated.



*Adapted from Thomas and Kilmann*

## **Tools for Managing Conflict (and Our Reactions to It)**

There are a number of ways that we might manage conflict, depending upon our default style and what is appropriate to the situation.

### *General Guidelines*

- Always speak with a calm but firm voice
- Don't get into a back-and-forth power struggle
- Be prepared to acknowledge the conflict and still move ahead, as appropriate

### *"An ounce of prevention..."*

- Understand your default reaction to conflict and style
- Assume an "attitude of resolution"
- Prepare for your meeting with an agenda and sense of your audience
- Develop a set of strategies with allies
- Be clear about boundaries (what are you willing to do or not do?)

### *Handling Intense Emotions (yours, or another's)*

- STOP: Stop-Take 3 Breaths-Observe-Proceed
- Use a "50-50" practice: half of your awareness should be on the conflict and half on your reaction to it
- Assure the other person they are being heard: acknowledge them and express your understanding of their concern
- Mirror, Don't Mock: legitimize their concern without condescension or judgment
- Develop Clear Next Steps

## **Where Do You Go For Help?**

*It's not knowing what to do, it's knowing what to do when you don't know what to do.*

It is absolutely critical that you have at least one other person in any meeting you are running who understands the structure you are proposing, the community, the potential conflict you might face, and the strategies you are considering for addressing those conflicts.

It is often the case that you can develop allies in a public meeting context as well, if they are engaged in the topic and you can connect with them in a positive way and to encourage them to remain calm in the face of conflict as well.

Raising the bar by appealing to people's core values and a desire to have a voice in building a healthy community is a time-honored and very effective conflict resolution technique.

## **Additional Resources**

Beyond Intractability ([www.beyondintractability.org](http://www.beyondintractability.org))

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation ([www.ncdd.org](http://www.ncdd.org))

Conflict Resolution Network ([www.crnhq.org](http://www.crnhq.org))

Carpenter and Kennedy. Managing Public Disputes: A Practical Guide. 1988.

Yankelovich. The Magic of Dialogue. 1999.

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