

Day 7: Beyond Polarization and Into Freedom: Developing Fluidity in Conflict Work

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Below are a set of skills which you might find useful in working with conflict and cultivating fluidity:

Awareness & Fluidity in Conflict

When we are in a conflict we often experience ourselves as being stuck and may not realize we are stuck in a particular role. A key to working with conflict is to develop your awareness and fluid ability to step in and out of the various roles/sides/positions involved in the conflict.

In a conflict:

- It is helpful to **become aware of what side you are on:**
 - your own side
 - the other person's side, or
 - outside – in a more neutral position

and **stand in that position congruently** until you feel you have **expressed yourself fully**, including your **deepest feelings and experiences** in that position (the essence of your experience).

- Once you have done so, you might **notice an organic role switch happening** and find yourself feeling for the other side, or feeling for both sides – being in a more outside/neutral position from which you can care for the whole. This position often contains within it a sense of wholeness and our own deep wisdom and eldership.
- **Stepping into those positions too and fully expressing their viewpoints** can help deepen the interaction and resolve a conflict.

This awareness procedure is based on the belief in our wholeness. It makes use of the observation that nearly everyone changes roles in a conflict; this role change shows itself in double signals (signals that one does not intend on sending) which usually go unnoticed. By practicing awareness one develops over time fluidity to step in and out of the various positions/roles involved in a conflict.

Escalation and De-escalation

Escalation (an intensification of the conflict) happens when:

- each side makes stronger and stronger accusations of the other side
- their non-verbal signals suggest mounting aggression

What escalates a conflict?

- Use of third parties and unconscious coalitions (“George is irritated with you”)
- Being unconscious of your double signals (“I’m fine” said with an angry tone of voice)
- Denying accusations (An accusation is often a statement about an aspect of yourself you don’t usually identify with so it manifests in double signals. You’re being accused about a piece of your wholeness and it can be useful to own it and bring it into the momentary

interaction. Try to find and pick up the 1% of the accusation that may be true. If it's not true in the moment, where or when could it be true?)

- Stereotyping (Blanket and often prejudiced generalizations about others are often a projection of a marginalized part of ourselves.)
- Not reacting when you are hurt (Trying to be strong or cool and not showing when you are hurt indirectly supports the attacker, who keeps attacking because there's been no sign that his/her feelings have been heard. Showing hurt may actually de-escalate the conflict.)
- Not being open to feedback (Continuing to attack even after the person has congruently apologized can be inflammatory.)
- Being indirectly hurtful and vengeful (Snickering when someone is hurt, using sarcasm, irony, being aloof, gossiping and making coalitions can escalate conflict.)
- Acting one-sidedly like a helper, therapist/healer, social activist, someone above conflict, or being patronizing and/or condescending towards other person escalates the conflict
- Being unconscious of your rank escalates the conflict ("Just stick up for yourself" said to a person who has low self-esteem due to social marginalization.)
- Staying rigidly on one side of an issue – not willing to switch roles or see the "other" – over a long period of time will escalate the conflict.

Signals which may indicate edges to escalation:

- incomplete forward body movements
- sarcasm, mimicking, smirking
- body symptoms (like perhaps a tight stomach, a pounding headache, etc.)
- other double signals (like perhaps tight fists, hands behind the back, etc.)

De-escalation is signaled by:

- lowering of voices
- looking down or away
- stepping back or turning away from one another
- a loss of interest or boredom
- fear
- body symptoms
- giggling or smiling,
- a moment of quiet
- a moment of understanding

- **Noticing escalation and commenting on it** may be crucial in avoiding physical violence and injury.
- **Noticing signals indicating a person may be at an edge to escalate and helping the person to unfold them** may also be needed in order to help deepen and complete a conflict situation.
- **Noticing de-escalation signals and helping the person to unfold them** may help two people leave a conflict which they have not noticed is already over.

What might help you resolve a relationship conflict?

- **Rank Awareness:** There are power differentials in all relationships. Rank is always present but we are not always aware of who has it, how its being used, and what effects it is having on the relationship. Be aware of your own social, psychological and spiritual rank in a

