

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

relationship, the multiple roles involved and their rank and privileges and the power they generate. Study these interactions and make them the focus of your discussion at the beginning of any conflict you might have.

- **Noticing your double signals & bringing them in.** Experiment with noticing the unintentional [or] uncanny things that are happening to you, and try to discover what they mean. For example, if you find yourself looking away in the middle of a heated argument, take a minute to focus on and unfold that double signal and discover the experience that's at the periphery of your awareness (perhaps you are more detached than you are aware of, or maybe you are shy) and try bringing it into the interaction.
- **Picking up accusations:** Think to yourself there might be some truth in what you are being accused of.
- **Noticing when you're using third parties and/or coalitions:** If you feel weak and in need of support try saying so directly. Alternately, notice your need and support yourself by acting as you would expect from the allies you are using in your third party stories.
- **Bringing in your feelings or finding the pattern to bring them in if you're having difficulty to do so:** Try to bring in your feelings such as fear, jealousy, love, anger, etc. If you can't, visualize someone doing what you can't do, get into their spirit, imagine being them and do what you would like to do the way they would do it.
- **Noticing when you are vengeful:** Revenge perpetuates conflict. Notice when you take revenge or have a desire for revenge after being hurt and talk about it.
- **Experimenting with changing channels:** Most of the time we focus on verbal communication when in conflict. Try other modes of expression (following visual images, movement, etc)
- **Noticing what side you are on in the conflict and being able to be fluid:** (see above)
- **Noticing your edges to escalate the conflict:** Is it difficult to take your own side, express yourself fully? Do you have a tendency to de-escalate in the name of peace and harmony-caring mostly for the other person or the field?
- **Noticing your edges to de-escalate the conflict:** Are you "hooked" on conflict? Try to notice your double signals that might be signaling de-escalation.
- **Going Beyond the Polarization by:**
 - a. **Exploring the "Other" as You:** Notice the aspect/quality/behavior of the other person that irritates you or disturbs you the most. Imagine being someone with this irritating quality/behavior. Walk like such a person would walk and as you're walking notice your feelings and experience and make a gesture that captures it. Then try to capture the essence of it by doing the movement less and less while keeping the sense. How could you use this in your life?
 - b. **Gaining access to the deeper aspects of yourself:** Remember, both of you are hoping for an elder to appreciate and help complete what is going on. You are that

elder. Take a minute and think about the deepest aspects of yourself. Stand and let the earth turn you in its direction. Walk in that direction noticing any sensations, feelings, images, thoughts that come up. Walk in that direction again and again until you have a sense of its meaning. Make a gesture that captures your experience. As you repeat the gesture, sense its world/atmosphere and look at yourself and the person with whom you are in conflict from there, and advise yourself. Go back to the relationship conflict and try to work on it from within this atmosphere.

- **If you are stuck consider your personal history:** Is the present conflict bigger than what is happening in the moment? Are your own abuse issues coming up? Alternatively, enjoy being stuck and perceive what happens then – appreciate the Tao of the moment.
- **If you are afraid in a conflict, check out whether you are able to say “No” to being hurt.**
- **Patience!** Relationships are part of the larger field. Not everything can be resolved in the relationship channel.

Small Group Exercise for Day 7 The Wise Elder

Inner Work Exercise: 15 minutes

1. Think of someone you deeply respect and admire. Someone who you feel is wonderful at worldwork and conflict work. It might even be you in your most skillful and best moments. It could even be something, a spirit, or part of the natural environment.
2. Now put your usual identity aside and shapeshift into becoming this being fully. Take some time to do this, feeling fully the nature of this emerging being.
3. Now from this emerging wisdom spirit, stand and let the earth move you. Walk in the direction you are called noticing any sensations, feelings, images, thoughts that come up. Walk in that direction again and again until you have a sense of its meaning. Make a gesture that captures your experience. As you repeat the gesture, sense its world/atmosphere.
4. What kind of facilitation style emerges from there? What metaskills, skills and wisdom has it to offer on Worldwork and conflict work?
5. Now look at yourself from there. What feedback does it have for your usual identity? What advice does it have for you in bringing your learning of worldwork home with you?
6. Write its advice down so you might look at it again later.

As a small group

1. Now come back together as a group. Share some of your own learnings from this wise self.
2. Begin to interact with each other as a group from this wisdom place.
3. What sharing and feedback would you give each other in your final meeting to take home?
4. Complete time together, goodbyes