

Resolving Conflict:

What's *your* style?



Lainie Jenkins

POSITIVE CONNECTIONS, LLC
mediation + consultation + inspiration
lainie.jenkins@positiveconnectionsllc.com

TLC CASA , Program Coordinator
912-663-0131

A photograph of a dirt road winding through a rural landscape. The road is light brown and curves to the right. On the left side of the road, there is a green field with a wooden fence. On the right side, there is a field with tall, dry grass and a wooden fence. In the background, there is a large, dark-colored barn with a light-colored base. To the left of the barn, there is a small, white, domed building, possibly a church. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. A utility pole with wires is visible on the right side of the road.

Once Upon a Time . . .

Yoruba Tribe, West Africa Folktale



“Conflict is a crisis that forces us to recognize explicitly that we live with multiple realities and must negotiate a common reality; that we bring to each situation differing – frequently contrasting stories- and must create together a single shared story with a role for each and for both.”

David W. Augsburger, Conflict Mediation Across Cultures



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Conflict Styles

- Accommodating
- Avoiding
- Collaborative
- Competing
- Compromising

Accommodating

The intent of this style is to preserve the relationship at all cost. Accommodators will deny or conflict wherever possible. When it is no longer possible, he/she will attempt to quickly resolve the conflict by taking whatever steps are necessary in to limit the risk of hurting others. The use of this style requires the person to be assertive in seeking solutions acceptable to others while being unassertive regarding their own interests.

Advantages: It can be done fairly quickly.

Disadvantages: To preserve the relationship, sometimes the individual will “sweep things under the rug” by appealing to all parties to “forgive and forget.”

Sometimes seen as “teddy bear,” “yield-lose,” or “person-oriented.”

Avoiding

The intent of this style is to stay out of the conflict, to avoid being identified with either party. Avoiders often keep their opinions to themselves and when facing crisis are often admired for their calming, quiet presence.

Advantages: ?Hmmm?! Stays disengaged

Disadvantages: Other party feels they are always right (and will get their way). The avoider experiences a cumulative sense of frustration, weakness, hopelessness, and finally, hostility.

Sometimes seen as not caring enough to invest time and energy.

Collaborative

The intent of this style is to get all the parties fully involved in defining the conflict and in carrying out mutually agreeable steps toward resolution. Collaborators welcome differences, build high-levels of trust and mutual understanding in relationships. They learn from and encourage creative problem-solving. Everyone's goals are important.

Advantages: Assertive, yet flexible. Conflict is not ignored, it is approached as a problem-solving situation in which a solution is reached.

Disadvantages: Time can be a factor.

Sometimes known as: activating, total involvement, synergistic, win-win, or the owl.

Competing

The intent of this style is to win. Competers operate on the premise there are only two possible outcomes: winning or losing. They are persuasive and direct and often passionate about their views. Though not trying to hurt others, or damage the relationship, the competitor places prime importance on personal goals.

Advantages: Appropriate style when quick, vital decisions must be made, unpopular policies must be implemented or when the person believes beyond a doubt that his/her solution is the best.

Disadvantages: Acquiescence, increasing covert hostility, decreased goal achievement, half-hearted implementation through unequal relationships.

AKA: the shark, controlling, win-lose, domineering

Compromising

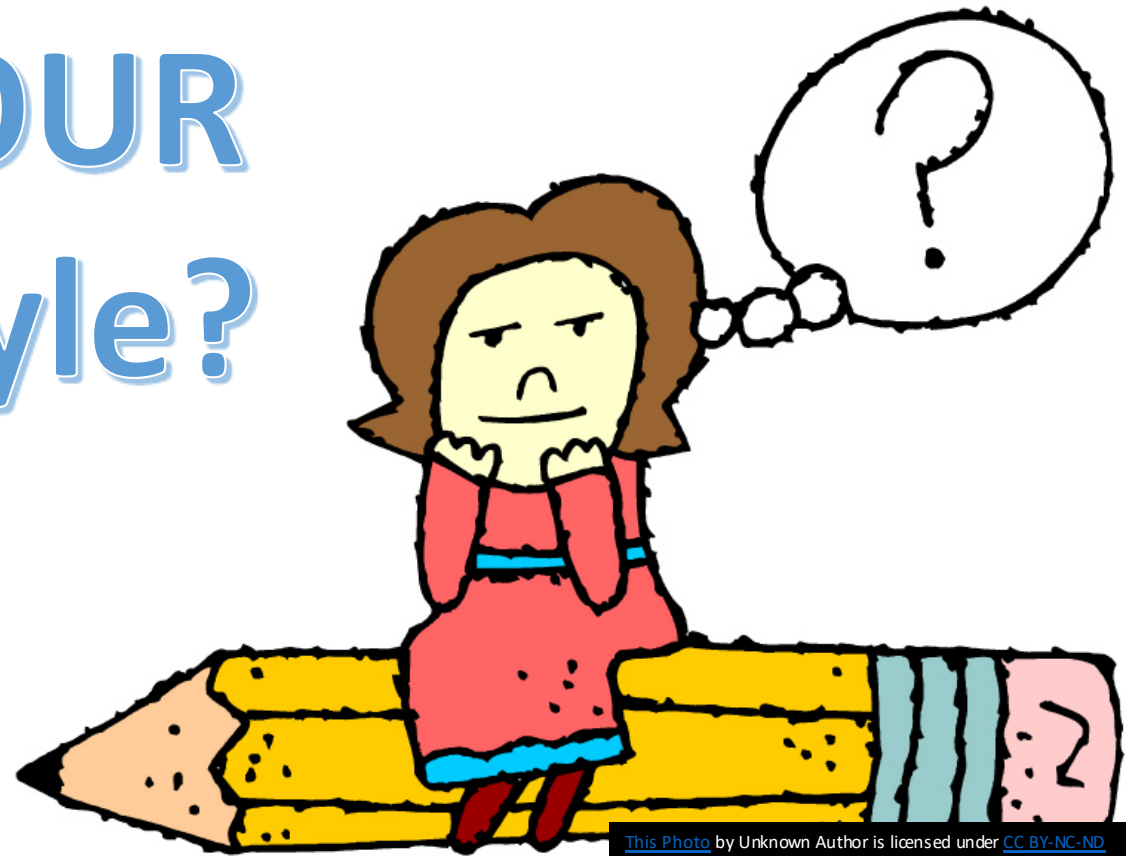
The intent of this style is to provide each side with a little bit of winning in order to persuade each to accept a little bit of losing. The compromiser sees the “common good” is for the relationship to remain intact. This is the style commonly called negotiating or bargaining.

Advantages: works well when the goals of both sides are moderately important and a “standoff” would create greater harm to all parties. Also works well when time constraints are too tight for collaborating.

Disadvantages: possibility of cool or strained relationships, limited goal achievement and recurring conflicts arising from “new” issues.

AKA: win a little-lose a little, conciliation, the fox

What's YOUR Style?



Let's find out!

- The number of times you chose to use each style indicates your preferred style, plus your back-up styles (the ones you fall back on when your preferred style is not effective in managing that particular conflict.
- You tend to enter each conflict with your preferred style. If the conflict progresses and tensions increase, you will fall back into your first back-up style. Then your second, and so on.
- If you have not chosen a style at least twice, it likely is not a back-up style.

“The behaviors you employ in conflict have been learned over time and are consistent enough that others come to expect you to act in certain predictable ways whenever you experience conflict.

Because conflict management styles are learned, they can be altered or replaced by new styles.”

Norman Shawchuck, How to Manage Conflict in the Church

When the conflict is threatening and tensions are growing, it's your back-up style that tells you how you actively behave.



DO YOU

Withdraw?

Give up your interests?

Become more flexible?

Come on strong?

Become rigid?

Soften up?

NOW WHAT?

- Recognize your own behavior for what it is (your dominant style is a habit) and try to recognize the behavior of the other person and their dominant style.
- Recognize your position in the conflict.
 - Are you the *boss*?
 - Are you the *messenger*?
 - Are you the *employee* whose (routine/habits/preferred way of doing business or pleasure) is affected? Take stock of your feelings.
 - Are you feeling weak / trapped?
 - Are you feeling secure enough to engage in solution building?

Then: Develop a



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- Build a relationship of acceptance and trust.
- Establish constructive communications.
- Filter the assumptions, rumors and charges.
- Establish joint collaboration for problem solving and decision making.
- Establish a covenant.

Building a relationship

All parties must gain a sufficient psychic power base on which to stand in relation to the conflict in order to achieve positive results.

- You may need to strengthen your “opponents” in conflict.
- You must share your personal power so that both parties are on equal psychological footing.

Ask yourself: How can I help the other person feel better about herself, to feel she is a full participant in defining the conflict issues and reaching a solution?



Establish constructive communications

Filter the
Assumptions,
Rumors and
Charges

Have You
Heard



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Establish Joint Collaboration

Identify areas of agreement



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What are we trying to accomplish?



Establish a Covenant