

Communication and conflict



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Conflict Metaphor Nobody likes conflict. If there is one ment that is universally true, it should be this, that nobody wants to be embroiled in conflict. Well, on second thought that is not entirely true - lawyers love conflict, they thrive on it, and they won't have a job if there were no conflict. Little wonder, then, why nobody likes lawyers. Jestng aside, conflict is unsavoury to most people; it is best avoided, and when it cannot be avoided, it is best gotten over as quickly as possible. This is because conflict is painful. It smarts and sings. It is hot and pounding and threatens to deform our lives. Conflict is a blacksmith's forge. It is the process of going through searing fire and being hammered and pummelled and twisted into shape. It is struggling at the hand of the blacksmith but being helpless to defend oneself. It is undergoing tribulation to the point where one feels he could go no further, and then getting his second wind and finding he could go a bit further. But there is something good about going through the forge and suffering the blacksmith's blows. The searing heat burns away the impurities to expose the glowing metal beneath. The blows shape and the grind sharpens until a metallic masterpiece materializes from the shapeless clump of matter. The challenge is to be brave enough to go through the forge. In this sense, conflict is good because it brings out the best in us. It makes us aware that we can go as far as we can, and then a bit further. It tells us that to be shaped into a work of art or a samurai sword, we have to first be malleable and compliant, and allow change to happen. Finally, conflict is beneficial, because it means we trust the Blacksmith to create a thing of beauty out of us that initially only He can see, and trust that He shall not pass us through the forge more than is necessary to bring out the remarkable strength hidden within us. Frank and Reno Frank and Reno are

both competent and well-meaning, but they approach conflict and interact with people differently. Frank's viewpoint of conflict is a negative one. Conflict is not good, and therefore should be avoided at all cost. Harmony is normal and conflict is viewed as abnormal, therefore to be avoided at all cost. In fact, if one ignores the disagreement, the problem will resolve itself and the conflict will go away of its own accord. This was evident in the case when Frank commented that he was taught that "given enough time, these kinds of problems will work themselves out." Furthermore, Frank equates conflict with anger. As he told Linda his boss, he could not talk with Reno because "he seems so hostile toward me and everyone else in the office," and that if he and Reno had a one-on-one they would "end up screaming at each other." From the conversation of Reno with his boss Sam, it is evident that his approach to conflict is one of opening up lines of communication that are obscured in routine interaction. This is apparent from his line: "I wish he would confront me, one-on-one so we could clear the air. I was raised to believe that we should deal with our problems mano-a-mano." Reno comments that Frank is "too polite"; this supports the earlier assessment of Frank as following a negative approach to conflict, and therefore tries to avoid all conflict by being polite and orderly in their conflict interaction. Reno's approach to conflict shows that he regards conflict as inevitable, and a good way of 'bringing problems to the table'. Reno is interactive and flexible in his approach to conflict. Frank, on the other hand, is rather rigid in his expectations, as when he expected Reno to simply follow his instructions because he (Frank) outranks Reno. Between them, Reno adopts a more relaxed and probably effective approach to conflict on the job.