

THE CONSENSUS BUILDING PROCESS

The best way to learn the process is to experience it in a situation that is personal to you. I am assuming you have an interest in, or a difficulty with, confronting and resolving conflicts. They probably cause you some continuing pain. You would like that pain to go away, without much effort, if possible. It is best if you confront, with some awareness of your own life situation, and explore how you can address a personal situation successfully.

It helps to write this activity down to help you to capture your thoughts and feelings. You will bring your unresolved conflicts out into the open where you can see them. You will be amazed how much that will help you. It is a way of acknowledging to yourself that these conflicts really exist, to get over denying them. You are also creating a sense of realness about them by making them visible.

The most important way to develop or build consensus is to ask the "RIGHT" questions. The consensus process has been designed to provide you with these "right" questions. We are going to focus on conflict and the ramification it has on your life, just as we will with the groups in your real life situation.

Begin by answering these questions:

1. What are the unresolved conflicts that confront you in your life, and, how do you feel about them? List all the conflicts that are unresolved in your life. If you desire, you can break this into four areas: personal, family, work and community. The personal conflicts are those you have with yourself that go on in your own mind.

Write the feelings you have as a result of these conflicts, again using complete sentences. Read through this when you finish.

2. What is conflict, and how do you feel about it? In your own words, define what conflict is. Write as many definitions as you want. The more definitions, the richer your collective statement will be.

Then write down how conflict makes you feel. Be thorough with this part of the question. Your feelings will generally disclose your old beliefs about conflict. You may want to refer to the situations you described in question 1.

3. What are the worst possible outcomes of confronting these conflicts? Refer to the situations you described earlier. You can answer this in a general way

because the statements will probably apply to more than one category. List as many worst outcomes as you can think of.

Do not hesitate to write the worst of the worst. Don't hide anything from yourself. Nobody else will see this. The more you disclose to yourself, the more likely you will learn how to resolve the situation.

4. What are the worst possible outcomes of NOT confronting these conflicts? You will not confront conflict because of the fears listed under question 3. This question lets you explore the worst possible outcomes if you *don't* confront the conflict. This is the opposite of the previous question. You know that at some level there is a cost for avoiding the confrontation.

Write down as many as you can think of. Don't be surprised if you have similar statements to question 3. That is part of your learning.

5. Pause: This is a good time to share with others the information you have written down?
6. What are the best possible outcomes of confronting and resolving these conflicts? How would you feel if you did that? This question helps you decide what you want to have happen from confronting these conflicts that are causing you pain.

This is the question that you probably never ask yourself. You are trying to determine *how* to resolve them, instead of identifying your outcomes. This is defined as "Ready... Fire." You haven't aimed, and so you won't get what you want.

This question helps you determine the outcomes you want and the feelings that would be associated with those outcomes.. This is known as "Ready.... Aim..." We will do "Fire" in the next question. Write down all the best possible outcomes you desire. Again, refer back to your question 1 list. Answer generally, because best outcomes will also apply to more than one issue.

Read the best possible outcomes. Become aware that these are just as possible as the worst outcomes. Since you have not confronted the conflicts yet, your worst fears are future imagined events. The fears that you have are merely possibilities. They haven't happened yet, there is NO assurance they will happen. Since it is a future event, it is just as possible that you can foster a best possible outcome.

By writing the best possible outcomes you have at least balanced yourself and added "Hope" in the equation. Read how you would feel if you were to be successful. Best possible outcomes have entirely different feelings than worst possible outcomes.

Now lets explore how to make the best outcomes happen:

7. What new beliefs and behaviors will foster these best possible outcomes? If you have been avoiding conflicts in the past there are reasons for it. Avoidance is probably based on some old belief systems. If you want to be successful with conflict resolution, you may need some new beliefs and behaviors. What would these be? Give careful thought to this question, because your answers will help you move ahead.

Beliefs and behaviors are different than strategies and actions:

8. What resulting strategies and actions will foster these best outcomes? This question allows you to move beyond your new beliefs to putting them into action. You can establish specific strategies or actions for any of the unresolved conflicts you described under question.
9. How do you feel about this activity? What did you learn that will help you confront and resolve your conflicts? This last question will help you to learn from the experience. It is a closure for what you have done.

This is the basic process. Applying it however is more complex and rich than this simple activity. There are reasons for each of the questions. As you gain this insight, you will become more willing to create the conditions to confront your conflicts.

Note: The material contained in this document is an excerpt from the Managingwholes.com/conflict website. This website contains the Learning Manual for the Beyond Conflict to Consensus Workshop: Confronting Conflicts, Building Consensus and Community Through Partnerships and Collaboration.