

Peaceful Life Radio

Show Transcript

Understanding Your Conflict Style

David Lowry: 0:36

Hello everyone. This is David Lowry and alongside me is my good friend Don Drew. Don let's give our listeners a preview of our show today.

Don Drew: 0:44

I'm excited to be here because our show will examine a concept of conflict styles. Each of us have a preferred way of managing conflict. And sometimes they work for us, but sometimes they don't.

David Lowry: 0:56

We're going to talk about key dimensions of our conflict styles, and we're going to define the five most common styles that people use.

Don Drew: 1:05

So, it's going to help us out a lot if you download subscribe and like our Peaceful Life Radio podcast. It'll only take a minute and it's going to really help us out. David let's get going.

David Lowry: 1:15

Don, the first thing we need to do is to describe what a conflict style is and why it's important. What do you say?

Don Drew: 1:23

That sounds good. I think that's a great place to start.

David Lowry: 1:25

Well, what is a conflict style?

Don Drew: 1:27

A conflict style generally refers to an individual's preferred approach or pattern of handling disagreements, disputes, or conflicts. Each person tends to exhibit a consistent way of engaging with conflict influenced by various factors such as their upbringing,

culture, personal experiences, and communication skills. Understanding conflict styles is crucial for several reasons. David, why don't you talk about the first one.

David Lowry: 1:50

Don, one of the things that people do is use the same style over and over again. And there's so many to choose from. You don't have to pick just one. By understanding your conflict style, you can learn more effective ways of managing conflict. It's important to recognize your dominant conflict style because it'll give you self-awareness and help you identify unhealthy styles that won't work under certain conditions.

Don Drew: 2:14

Conflict styles impact the way we express ourselves, listen to others, and collaborate. So, knowing a little bit more about our style can help us communicate more effectively during conflict. It enables us also to adapt our communication approach based on the situation and the people involved.

David Lowry: 2:30

Effective communication is another reason why you should care about conflict styles. It has to do with your relationships because conflict styles are going to influence your family, friends, colleagues, or romantic partners. Everybody at some point or another will encounter you in a small conflict, maybe a large conflict. And it impacts how you move forward, right? Conflict will either strengthen or strain your relationships. And if you're aware of your style, you can begin to navigate that conflict in a way that promotes better understanding, empathy, and hopefully resolution.

Don Drew: 3:07

Well, part of that navigation process, David, is the development of strategies for conflict resolution. Each style you might choose will have its own strengths and limitations. So, obviously, understanding various conflict styles helps us choose appropriate strategies for different situations, and not just rely on a single one, as you've mentioned. For example, collaboration or the integrating style may work well for complex team projects, while compromise, a compromising style, could be useful for resource allocation decisions.

David Lowry: 3:36

Yeah, so just knowing that you have things available to you to try and use can make a lot of difference. And maybe the last reason we'll mention why knowing your conflict style is important is just to say that it impacts your well-being as well. Research says that conflict style has a significant impact on your strength and longevity of your relationship. And it also matters more than the frequency of content or disagreements. In other words, how you manage your conflict is more important than the things you quarrel about.

Don Drew: 4:08

In summary, being aware of your conflict style empowers you to engage in healthier, more constructive interactions and build stronger connections with others. So, David, let's talk about some of the dimensions of conflict style.

David Lowry: 4:20

Now, this is where it gets interesting to me and hopefully to everybody today. Each of us approach conflict a bit differently. We're going to talk about four ways that you and I can approach conflict. Some people are very assertive, Don. Assertiveness as we are talking about refers to the degree that you're willing to assert your own needs and preferences and concerns during a conflict. Some people are timid and don't speak up much, right? Others are pounding away and making demands and that sort of thing. So, it's important to get a feeling for how assertive you willing to be. It represents how strongly you'll advocate for your position or what you desire, your goal. It also has to do with how forthright you're going to be. Are you willing to say what's on your mind -- to stand up for yourself? Some people with low assertiveness, Don use a more passive approach and try to avoid confrontation because they're afraid to say what they want.

Don Drew: 5:17

A second dimension is cooperativeness. And this relates to the extent to which a person tries to meet the needs, concerns, and desires of others during a conflict. Many of us are willing to collaborate, find common ground, and work toward mutually beneficial outcomes. But there are two parts to this. First of all, high cooperativeness can involve seeking win-win solutions, considering other's viewpoints, and valuing relationship harmony. But then there's also low cooperativeness, which may involve prioritizing one's own interests over those of others, even if it means sacrificing relational harmony. Which leads us to the third dimension.

David Lowry: 5:52

The concern for self. Now, some people have a high concern for self and other people have a high concern for others, but let's just talk about this concern for self. If you're concerned about yourself, it means that you'll prioritize your needs over everybody else's. Some people just think about themselves, their needs, their goals, their interests. But some people are low in concern for self. And this indicates that you might be more willing to compromise your personal desires for the sake of resolving a conflict or maintaining harmony. Of course, what we're trying to get at here with all of these dimensions is, you can overdo it either way, right? You can be too highly concerned for yourself or not have enough concern for yourself. It is a factor in the way that you do conflict. Let's go to our last one.

Don Drew: 6:39

This last dimension is called concern for others and represents the degree to which a person attempts to satisfy others involved in the conflict. High concern for others implies a focus on understanding and meeting the needs of others, even at the expense of one's own preferences. Okay, so we've covered the dimensions of conflict style, but

let's get into the meat of this. Let's talk about the five different styles of conflict resolution.

David Lowry: 7:01

All right, these are the most common ones that people use, and I am almost certain you're going to find yourself in one of these descriptions here. Now, when we talk about these five descriptions Don, it's important to understand that we are not saying that one is better than another, although personally, I think some are. What we are saying, given the appropriate situation, each of these have an advantage and a disadvantage. We also want to state, as we talk about these styles of conflict, that nearly all of us have a preferred way of dealing with something but just because it feels comfortable to us doesn't mean we should use it. You have to know when the right style should be used. So, let's talk about the first one, which we call the competitive or the win-lose style. Some people who are on the win-lose style, you can almost imagine, they're very high in assertiveness. They're always willing to tell you what they want. They have their objectives in mind. prioritize their own needs, desires, and viewpoints above all else. And winning the conflict becomes the primary goal. They really are very competitive people. Winning is very important.

Don Drew: 8:12

Right. These individuals are less concerned about maintaining relationships or considering other perspectives. They may disregard the impact of their actions on others.

David Lowry: 8:20

You can recognize a person who's wanting to win at all costs because they're very competitive. And they'll talk directly to you. They can be very confrontive. You'll sense that they want to win, and they use this style to create sort of a power struggle. They'll argue and debate you and use tactics like intimidation and threats or manipulation to achieve their aim. This win style is easy to identify. But in a way, it can be very helpful to know because that lets you change the dance a little bit as you think about it. But before we talk about that, let's talk about outcomes of this.

Don Drew: 8:58

Each of these that we're going to look at has a different end outcome. And typically, the competitive or win-lose style is just that you get a win-lose outcome. In a win-lose scenario, one party's going to prevail and the other loses. The competitive individual seeks to dominate, control, or defeat the other party, and long-term relationships may suffer due to the adversarial approach. When an individual is always wanting to get their way no matter what, and you always feel like you're the loser, that tends to create a lot of relational distance.

David Lowry: 9:27

Now, believe it or not, there is an appropriate time to use this particular approach where you win and the other loses. For instance, if there's an urgent decision that has to be made, it's quick, something's got to be done, there's no time for collaboration, maybe it's life or death, there are times when it is appropriate. Sometimes you have to negotiate from a position of strength because you have a clear advantage, and quite frankly, maybe it's your time to exercise that advantage. But it's not one that we should overuse or overdo because there are a few potential downsides.

Don Drew: 10:04

That's right. First thing that often can happen in these cases is we get damaged relationships. win-lose approaches strain relationships, create animosity, and create distance. Focusing solely on winning may lead to missed opportunities for creative solutions. Also, competing can escalate conflicts rather than resolving them. Remember that while the competitive style has its place, it's essential to balance it with other conflict resolution approaches to achieve more sustainable outcomes.

David Lowry: 10:29

So, there you have the first one, the competitive or the win-lose style of conflict resolution. We're going to talk about one that I'm more comfortable with. It's the collaborative or the win-win style. It's an approach that considers what's mutually beneficial for all parties involved. So, let's look at some of its essential elements.

Don Drew: 10:51

The collaborating conflict style encourages individuals and teams to work through disagreements by fostering cooperation, open communication, and empathy. Unlike compromise, which involves both sides making sacrifices, collaboration seeks win-win solutions. It prioritizes preserving relationships, building trust, and promoting positive long-term change.

David Lowry: 11:12

I tend to like this one because it really wants to give everybody something that they need. It tries to find the essential elements that everybody wants. And it's built upon these key principles of open communication, so that everyone has the ability to say what they need, to get communication and feedback, and it has empathic listening to it, so that everybody gets to express themselves.

Don Drew: 11:37

A second one would be mutual understanding. Collaborators seek to understand the motives and interests underlying the conflict. Rather than viewing conflicts as battles won or lost, they see them as opportunities for growth, learning, and connection.

David Lowry: 11:50

Win-win solutions is a way of finding something that satisfies the needs and interests of everyone involved. And collaborators go beyond surface level compromises to address

root causes. They collectively tackle conflict and consider diverse viewpoints. That's your win-win style. And here's some of the benefits of it.

Don Drew: 12:11

One of the benefits is preserving relationships. Collaboration strengthens relationships by emphasizing understanding and empathy and it prevents conflicts from damaging long-term connections.

David Lowry: 12:21

And it builds trust. Trust grows when individuals work together transparently and constructively. And collaborators build trust by valuing the other's perspective.

Don Drew: 12:32

Finally, it leads to positive change. Collaborative conflict resolution leads to positive change in both individuals and organizations. It encourages innovation, creativity, and shared problem solving.

David Lowry: 12:43

While we like the collaborative or win-win style there is a drawback. And the drawback, Don, is it's a little bit messy to get to sometimes. Some people can be very frustrated by the amount of time it takes to be fully heard, fully understand, to go back and forth and understand what the key points are that everybody needs in order to be satisfied. But the time spent to do all of that, can be very valuable in other ways, getting to know each other better, building stronger bonds, reconciling. It's a good way to go.

Don Drew: 13:14

Well, David, that's a great segue into the compromising style of a conflict resolution, which involves give and take approach where both parties are willing to make concessions to reach an agreement. Here are some key points to that style.

David Lowry: 13:27

The goal of a compromise, of course, is to find, quote, a middle ground. And this middle ground is something that we all say, well, this should be something that satisfies most all of us. It acknowledges that none of us are going to achieve our full goal-- that we're going to all lose a little bit, but we'll all get something we want and here's the thing, many people think that peacemaking is all about compromise. And there's a lot to that. But compromise isn't the only way we can go about making peace. It's just a style. The win-win is a great way to go, but sometimes we can't all get there. Sometimes we have to say, okay, I don't think we're all going to get everything we want, but what is the next best way we can go? So, perhaps it's this compromising position.

Don Drew: 14:17

What I like about compromising is a combination of assertiveness and cooperativeness, but both at a moderate level. Individuals using this style care about their goals but are

willing to compromise or give some. As far as moderate cooperativeness, they're also able to value the relationship and seek a solution that maintains harmony. And they do these two in tandem.

David Lowry: 14:38

Compromisers engage in open dialogue and negotiation. They're a bit more businesslike, right? They're not necessarily looking to be your friend, but they're not trying to be your enemy either. They identify areas where everyone involved can give up a little something in order to find a common ground. And so, it tends to be a pragmatic approach. It's very helpful to use when you have limited time or when preserving a relationship is important.

Don Drew: 15:06

David, what are some appropriate situations for this approach?

David Lowry: 15:09

Well, if you're working under a deadline, sometimes that's exactly what you do. When I do mediation work in small claims courts or in family courts, sometimes that's exactly what we have to go to. It's like, look, we're running out of time. We need to make a decision here or quote, the judge is going to make it for us. And finally, in situations where resources such as budget or time need to be divided, this can be a very effective tool for resolving a conflict. Well, we're moving on here, and now we're going to move into one that might seem sort of strangely one to be avoided, but it has its moments. But here we go, the avoidant, or the lose-lose style of conflict. What's that all about?

Don Drew: 15:55

It has to do with minimizing engagement with conflict often at the expense of finding a satisfactory solution for anyone. Here are the key aspects of this style.

David Lowry: 16:04

Individuals using this style really do all they can to avoid having the conflict. They ignore issues. They may change the subject when somebody brings it up. They withdraw from a situation where they think there's conflict, and it leads to unresolved tension and simmering resentment many times.

Don Drew: 16:23

So, as you can imagine, this is an approach that uses low assertiveness and low cooperativeness since basically the whole issue is being avoided. Avoiders prioritize maintaining peace over asserting their own needs and they may not actively seek to understand other's perspectives or find common ground by this process of avoidance.

David Lowry: 16:43

We've all done this, Don. There have been times, let's say it's the holidays and you just don't want to ruin it with a big argument. Somebody says something that would normally

bait you or get you to react and you just change the subject. You just decide I'm not going to get involved with this. But we do it because we don't want to have that conversation. We don't want confrontation. Maybe we want harmony or time together. There are many reasons why we might avoid this.

Don Drew: 17:11

Right, David. And there, there are however, some pretty serious downsides, okay. So, we have unresolved issues. When we avoid a conflict, we basically perpetuate the unresolved conflict. So, without the resolution, it simmers and stays in place. It also causes us to miss great opportunities. Avoiders miss chances to address underlying issues in a constructive manner. And thirdly, it leaves strained relationships because prolonged avoidance constrains relationships.

David Lowry: 17:37

It certainly can. You've heard the old saying that problems left to themselves don't ever resolve themselves. Honestly, I have found that You keep getting the lesson until you get the lesson. If you keep ignoring your problems, they come back bigger and stronger, meaner. And many times, we find that if we'll just have the courage to face them, they're really a lot easier to solve than we think they will be. So, we can do it. But there are some appropriate times when we might use that. What are some of those?

Don Drew: 18:06

Right. Well, temporary avoidance would be one. When emotions are high, taking a break to cool down can be helpful. Sometimes it helps us to take a breath and slow down and step back for a moment. So, avoiding an immediate conflict may actually be a very useful strategy.

David Lowry: 18:22

I think so. There's a difference between denying that you have a problem and avoiding a problem temporarily. If you're doing it temporarily, you're being wise there, but if you're never going to address a problem what you're telling the other person is you don't matter enough to me to resolve this problem or I don't know how to work with this out with you, so I'm not going to do it. Or you're just not worth it. And I'm just not going to waste my time with you. So, as you can see, there's a lot of downsides to using this.

Don Drew: 18:54

Another area in which this might be appropriate is when you have a lack of influence, or you lack the power to change a situation. We might find this occurring at work quite often. And remember that while avoidance can provide short term relief, it's essential to address conflicts eventually to prevent long term negative consequences. So even in under situations where we might have a relative, lack of power to affect real change, just ignoring or swallowing it, can lead to long term damage.

David Lowry: 19:23

Let's go to our final one, which we call accommodating or lose-win.

Don Drew: 19:29

the accommodating or lose win style of conflict resolution involves prioritizing the needs and concerns of others over our own. Here are a few key aspects of this style.

David Lowry: 19:39

When we think about assertiveness, accommodators are oftentimes willing to say my needs don't matter all that much, or I don't really care. And they do that to maintain harmony. And they're very highly cooperative. They actively seek to meet the needs of others, even if it means compromising their own ideas. So, maybe someone says where would you like to eat today? And you say, well, I would like Mexican food. And they say, no, no, I wasn't thinking of that. I would rather go to a steakhouse. You say, Oh, okay. That works for me. That would be an accommodating person. They're very low on assertiveness, very high on cooperative.

Don Drew: 20:16

Right. And this can generally work if the person doesn't sincerely care that much about a decision such as that. But accommodators are typically conciliatory and flexible. They yield to other preferences, often making concessions to avoid conflict. This style emphasizes preserving relationships and avoiding confrontation, but it doesn't necessarily address the real root of the conflict itself.

David Lowry: 20:38

So, we're not advocating that people do this to be a doormat. It's one thing to want to harmonize. And if you can give up something that doesn't matter to you, why not? Go along to get along sometimes. But if something really does matter to you, being accommodating is a form of self-denial and it's not good for you. There's another one.

Don Drew: 20:57

Yeah, exploitation can become an issue. Others may take advantage of your willingness to accommodate. It's possible that somebody, especially who's taking an aggressive position, can take advantage of that.

David Lowry: 21:08

Well, Don, we've gone through all five of these most common ways of solving and resolving conflict. On the ones that we've talked about today, which do you prefer?

Don Drew: 21:18

I'm sure I prefer the collaborative or win-win style as my favorite followed by the compromise style when that's necessary.

David Lowry: 21:25

We're talking about learning how to make peace in our lives. So, when we talk about making peace it's really, really important that we try to find something that works for all concerned and especially the relationships with us. As we continually say on this program, you matter. You matter, they matter, your relationship matters. So, if you're always giving in, you're violating one of those rules.