
Authentic Storytelling

Session Six Handout

CONFLICT, the Pea Under the Mattress

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OUR DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO CONFLICT can be the source of headache and heartache. We think all too well to be true. And even attempting to reconcile our clashing approaches can be a daunting, confusing and ultimately frustrating task. It's work. And without some hope of success, we lack the energy, the oomph to try.

But... what if we understood where the other person was coming from? Not in what they are saying, but in HOW they are saying it? What if we understood their APPROACH TO CONFLICT? Wouldn't that go a long way in helping us navigate the details? Coming to terms instead of pulling away, or drifting apart?

Often, it's not WHAT someone is saying that bugs us, it's HOW they're saying it. We all approach conflict, problems and pain differently. Understanding our differing approaches can be VERY HELPFUL in moving forward, in cutting through the tangles, no matter how thick (or tiring) they may be.

IF GROWING INTO OUR STORY IS A BIG PART OF LIVING AUTHENTICALLY, of becoming who we are and getting where we're going, then understanding the radically different ways we approach conflict—and not shutting down in face of it—is key. We cannot grow spiritually where we are shut down emotionally, relationally or mentally. And all three areas are affected when we're in conflict we can't handle, or don't know how to handle because we simply don't know how to move forward. It can be a maze that traps and unravels our better instincts. That drives us mad.

Navigating conflict is key to moving forward spiritually, and not getting stuck in the maze of misunderstanding. And knowing the five ways we approach conflict is an excellent place to start. I won't say finish, because I believe it's the work of a lifetime, making peace one with the other. But it's an excellent place to start, and sometimes that's all we need to get unstuck: knowing where to start.

Let's start with the FIVE BASIC WAYS we approach conflict:

Some of us **ANALYZE**, actively working to compute and solve the problem at hand, to get at the root of the conflict. Others **EMPATHIZE** with the pain, trouble and turmoil that comes with conflict as a matter of course. Some of us **ATTACK** a problem of any size, head-on. Others will come alongside, to **COMPANION** the person at the centre; to move things forward one step at a time. And some of us will withdraw, or pause, to **DISCERN** the underlying nature of what is going on, before entering where even angels might fear to tread. All five approaches are a *gift to a community* that seeks to grow together and be true to who they are.

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1. **THERE IS THE RESIDENT SCHOLAR'S APPROACH**, which is to analyze. Pick apart. Understand the components. How did we get here? What is the pattern? How do we change that; let's think it through. This, of course, is the logical, linear teacher's mind at work. This is how they navigate the maze. And they're fantastic problem solvers, as long as everyone involved is on board with solving the problem. When and if they're not, this is often incomprehensible to the Teacher/Scholar/Problem Solver. In. Comprehen. Sible. It doesn't make sense to this type of person that someone would not want to solve the problem, firm up the foundation and build their life on answered questions, closed gaps and rock-solid responses to life's problems.

A Teacher/Scholar-type is 100% committed to removing that pea under the mattress, but not before analyzing it and understanding their own approach to it. This is because they have a deep need to be found trustworthy. They won't act in a way that might make things worse. They are conservative by nature, not radical.

They want to be found response-able. And they are! But this doesn't work for everybody, and this they do not understand, and so, quite naturally, back away from and are suspicious of other approaches.

This is true to who they are. To grow spiritually in this situation, a Teacher-at-heart type must move well out of their comfort zone. This is hard, because *to move out of their comfort zone equates to moving out of their confidence zone*. Their zone of confidence is important to them because this is the place they live and give out of. This is potentially their area of expertise; the source of their knowledge-sharing. So, when personal growth means moving out of their comfort or confidence zone, it can make them genuinely uneasy.

This is where we extend grace to each other. And grace goes a long way for all of us, fellow navigators of the maze.

2. **THERE IS THE PASTORAL-SOCIAL-CONNECTOR'S APPROACH**. They see the pea in context of the princess's plight. The problem at hand is part of the story of the moment. From their perspective, to remove it too quickly would upset the whole and undermine some potentially God-sent opportunity for character development. Suffering does shore up our

empathy for others, without a doubt. And the Pastoral heart is to empathize, without ever glancing at the clock. They are natural caregivers, leisured listeners and people at ease with people's problems. The problems, they know to be true, are part and parcel of a person's story. Part of the human drama.

This is the most dynamic point of connection for a Social Connector; *tell me your problem, I'll listen, and we will bond. I will share your pain, and so enter into your story.*

And this is very much how a community grows deep; they share their problems. They're there for each other. They enter into their conflict in a heartfelt way, and so lend strength for the journey. This is what friends are for, and no one does it better than a Pastoral Social Connector when it comes to empathizing with someone's pain without trying to fix them, or their problem.

What does this mean when an excellent problem-solver, such as a Teacher-type, meets an excellent problem-empathizer such as the Pastoral Socializer? It usually leads to a misunderstanding and not a little frustration, when and where there is a lack of appreciation for the different ways we approach conflict, problems and pain—the harder side of life, the places we get stuck in the maze.

PICTURE THIS... Your friend calls. They're in trouble. Do you ask questions; seek to understand the problem, its extent, scope and depth; to get a handle on it before you jump in with both feet? Or do you listen closely; to focus in on their heart or mental state, and try and assess what they need from a relational point of view?

Both responses are perfectly valid and potentially authentic to you. But you can see how these two approaches might be at odds with each other if and when the stakes are high. Some people approach conflict with a cool head. Others with a warm heart. Both are needful.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN, BY TAKING TIME TO RESPOND TO THIS PICTURE

3. **THERE IS THE EVANGELISTIC CHANGE AGENT'S APPROACH TO CONFLICT & PROBLEMS.**

And it's a very dynamic approach. It's hands-on, feet-first, all-in. It focuses on the solution in a big way, often in a way that helps bring health, hope or healing to a larger number of people than the one person who may be sounding the alarm. This type takes a societal view to solutions. They have their eye on results, the bottom line. They value numbers. Behind the statistics are real people in real situations.

The Change Agent is all about making the world a better place, in a big way. This means their approach to conflict is often not focused on the personal, the empathic or the pastoral. It's not detached or analytical. Instead, the Change Agent takes a systematic approach. They go for the root of the problem, the jugular of their enemy. They see the damage things like oppression, poverty and prejudice cause. And when someone they know and care about is hurting, this type will often be able to frame their trouble in terms of the larger issues in play.

They can frame any problem as part of a bigger problem: they see the pea under the mattress as one of many (making it appear boulder-size). They will rally their energy to remove it. They will build a team to deal with it. They will use their very compelling powers of persuasion to any good end. They are Evangelists at heart: champions of the good.

They work to make the world a better place, to leave no stone unturned in their passion for justice, partly because they're motivated to make God's love and care, his goodness, mercy and truth, felt on the ground. They know he is real. And they know the things they work for, with all of their strength, are founded in him; and so, they are relentless. To make things right. To make God known.

PICTURE THIS... Your heart has just sustained a real blow, a deep disappointment. And you call on a high-energy, enthusiastic, optimistic Evangelist type for help. What is their response? Where is their tenderness? Have you just made your problem better or worse?

We are all equipped to deal with certain kinds of problems well. On the flip side, this means we're not so good when it comes to dealing with problems outside our sweet zone. While the example is an oversimplification and I do not think

Change Agents are heartless (in fact, they are compassion motivated, but on a large scale) I think there is wisdom in playing to our own strengths. And it's good to know each other's core strengths and basic weaknesses. Who to call in what situation.

In many cases, it's simply a matter of learning our roles; valuing what we bring to the table and making room for what other people bring. We all bring a gift. They are meant to serve one another. But often we need wisdom, and not a little prudence in knowing exactly how to deal with our own problems, and recognizing who we might have conflict with, just because. And sometimes, the looser we hold these things, the better.

The Change Agent never backs away from a problem—problem solving is their bread and butter—but sometimes they would do well to assess how much *oomph* to bring to the table; to determine if it's a table for two that needs a more finessed approach, or a heavy-duty board table that needs some real clout. This is their challenge and whatever we can do to help the Change Agent in our life to navigate this tight-for-them corner of the maze will help move the situation forward. Good to know!

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4. **THERE IS THE ADVENTURE-LOVING APOSTLE'S APPROACH.** This approach is perhaps the most effective in terms of balancing the personal with the broader, more holistic elements in play. This type of person thrives on rising to a challenge. There doesn't seem any problem too daunting or any mountain too big to climb.

They have real confidence and contagious optimism when it comes to doing what needs to be done. They're natural encouragers. It comes easy to them to lend their strength to others in their time of need. They're also very good at not overextending themselves or allowing the emotional output to tip their boat. They are steady at the wheel, in charge without taking over, kind of people.

This wonderful combination of helping skills, honed with self-help skills, by definition, needs to be discerning in who they help, when and why.

This is *not* the person there for you at all hours (that would be the Pastor Social Connector). This is *not* the person able to sort through any type of problem you throw at them (that's the Scholastic type). The Adventurous Apostolic type is at their best when helping people with potential overcome their obstacles. They're at home alongside those with the same aim in life: reaching the summit and doing what it takes to get there.

The Apostle *prizes their time and energy*. They are not highly capable thanks to a lack of discipline. They can help others out of life's real jams; overcome tremendous obstacles and serve as life's heavy hitters because they invest. They put time in to be the one ready and able in a time of need. So, if the need is not great, or the person isn't interested in climbing the mountain, aiming high and going long, then likely the apostle won't be the one they need call.

This may sound like the Apostle is a snob, looking down his or her nose at others from their privileged position of being further up the mountainside than most. But that's a positional point of view. *Each of us is at our best when we help, or enter conflict, on our own terms*. The Apostle is probably more aware (or more honest) than the other four types because overcoming obstacles is part and parcel of who they are and where they live. They know what it takes. And they make no apologies for being discerning on how they expend their valuable time and talent.

PICTURE THIS... You have a friend who loves to trail blaze, pioneer new ground, innovate. They're a real risk-taker. And you notice it pay off. So, you ask to come along on their next adventure. You promise to follow their lead, no complaints. No excuses. You vow to succeed. But somewhere along the line, you realize this is not what you really want. There's not enough fuel in your tank to finish well. Going all-out is not your style. You want out. Does your friend the

trail blazer treat you with respect and understanding in this moment? Or make you feel like a failure? A dud? How well do you know this friend of yours?

How well do they know you?

When we try to believe the best of each other, and something goes awry, it's tempting to give up on our picture of the other person as someone worth being in relationship with, sharing our stories. This can be one of those quiet deaths; this loss of faith in one another. We simply lose touch. Stop speaking. The relationship withers, disappears.

This type of conflict is not unknown to us. And it reminds us that not all conflict is messy, loud or violent. It can be silent. But it's still worth our attention. These things that keep us awake at night; show up as physical aches and pains rather than emotional, mental or spiritual. Conflict is conflict. A pea is a pea. Some of us will tackle it head-on and others won't feel up to the task. And the conflict compounds, grows larger, becomes intractable. And still it is silent. There are no words. No place to start.

When this happens, again, an excellent place to start is working to understand each other on an ever-deepening level, in a greater way. In a more generous spirit.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN, BY TAKING TIME TO RESPOND TO THIS PICTURE

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5. **THERE IS THE PROPHETIC-MYSTIC'S APPROACH**, which can be one of the hardest to understand from the other four points of view. The Prophet assumes conflict is a means to personal or spiritual growth. They assume conflict has its place and it's a place of honour. So, they honour it by sitting with it. They don't sit with it to empathize with it or befriend it like the Pastor might do. They sit with it to let it have its way with them.

Where the other four types approach conflict in terms of how the relationship or other people are being affected, the Prophet sees through a holistic lens; seamlessly incorporating the natural/everyday side of life with its deeper meanings, or spiritual implications. This means they act at the conduit between the pea under the mattress, or the problem, and its ultimate removal.

Their willingness to sit with the pain and let it have its way with them becomes an act of intercession. This may also serve to equip them to speak to similar pains and trials in the lives of others, with a note of authentic spiritual victory and therefore confidence in the Lord.

It's very important to a Prophet to spend time with the Lord. To fill their own cup. To have worked through their problems, or pain or points of conflict in a deep way, before engaging others or offering practical advice or help.

This is because they know their inner resources are not their own; they have their source entirely in the wellspring of eternal life that the Bible talks about in the story where Jesus engages with the woman from Samaria; telling her plainly that if she knew who he was, she'd have a constant source of water to slake her thirst. Indeed, she would never thirst again.

This is where the spiritually minded prophetic-mystic lives. They spend their time drinking deep from this wellspring of God's assurance he is with us, and for us.

They are very mindful of seeking God's will first and Man's relief second.

The Prophet, by definition, sees the unseen; this is who they are, and affects how they approach conflict. They do not lean on their own understanding. And if the Lord is leading them and they are faithful to fill their own cup first, then they can be excellent in navigating the deeper in's and out's of a conflict. There's no one like a Prophet to cut through the knottiness of a tough problem. To discern the way forward.

The maze is something they rarely get stuck in. But if they are running dry, then it can be very tricky to “do business” with a Mystic or a Prophetically gifted person, who doesn’t overly value making peace with Man relative to making peace with God.

THESE ARE THE FIVE BASIC APPROACHES TO THE PROVERBIAL PEA UNDER THE MATTRESS. Which one speaks to your approach to conflict, problems and pain points?

- Some of us take a cautious, analytical approach. This is the Teacher’s mind working it through. An important theoretical tack.
- Some of us a heartfelt, empathetic approach. This is the Pastoral heart getting involved. An essential relational tack.
- Some of us are hands-on, get the job done people. This is the Evangelist doing good work. An often-overlooked societal tack.
- And some of us are reluctant to deal with every problem or person with a problem that we meet. This is the Apostle knowing how to govern him or herself. A key governance tack.
- And some of us appear to retreat from the problem, only to deal with it on a deeper level. This is the Prophet exercising their well-honed discernment. A much-needed prayerful tack.

Reviewing these five distinct approaches makes it easier to see how all five might serve to work together, or meet up with each other and find it difficult to even see the other person’s point of view, or fathom their approach to conflict.

Why does it matter? What does how we approach conflict have to do with Authentic Storytelling?

Deepening our understanding of and appreciation for how each other might deal with conflict is key. Because people in conflict have trouble hearing each other. This shuts down the natural gift of storytelling we have as a human community seeking to grow larger, both within and without. There needs to be a level of peaceableness and acceptance before we can tell our stories well, and continue to live into them, with the blessing of those who would receive us—and not reject, or conflict.

Sustained conflict closes us off from each other, regardless of our spiritual gift type. While deeper understanding leads to more grace. And a community of people who are generous not only with their money and resources, but with their inner resources, is a strong one. One that can grow, I believe, without limits! While conflict might be necessary to real growth, being able to resolve how we deal with it is just as important, if not more.

PICTURE THIS... You have a problem. A situation. A sticky, tricky, icky conflict. Someone offers to help you with it. They have time and energy. They are there for you. In response, what do you ask them for, specifically? What do you need to work through it? Who are you, when it comes to approaching conflict; how do you see *the pea under the mattress*? Where are you in this story?

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