

“When you’re furious, you can’t be curious.”

John Gottman,

As an advocate of positive psychology, I am encouraged by the recent research and emphasis on how positive moods can serve as an antidote to the negative emotions that can arise in conflict. According to [Patricia Viscomi](#), Associate Director [Center for Conflict Dynamics](#), “managing one’s emotions, a person can improve their chances of using constructive behavioral responses to deal with conflict”. Before I share techniques to improve “emotional mastery”, let’s explore three common emotional triggers” that may lead to a destructive conflict response.

Three Common Triggers

In my experience working with leaders, employees or teams, there seems to be three dominant factors behind an interpersonal conflict:

1. Personality or communication styles
2. Priorities and values
3. Emotional intelligence

Personality Styles

Some personalities just seem to clash, especially when emotions are more furious than curious. It’s important to determine why two people, when under stress, can rub each other the wrong way. Do they have different behavioral styles? For example, [as measured by the MBTI](#)©, an extrovert, who is naturally open and expressive could, when emotionally stressed, view an introvert as hard to read and perhaps illusive. Likewise, a Judging preference who is time-conscious and highly organized, may judge a spontaneous Perceiving

colleague, as not serious and working from their “own agenda”. Or, someone who is highly analytical and precise (Sensing) might view an iNtuitive person as impulsive and intellectually distant.

Coaching helps to understand personality styles and how to master emotions that may trigger a destructive response to conflict. When coaching on conflict, I use the [\(MBTI\) Step II Report](#), ©, often with the [Conflict Dynamics Profile](#) or [Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument](#) to increase emotional self-awareness and self-management skills. Coaching then explores personality triggers that lead to an emotional hijacking, stressors associated with each personality preference/style, and how to apply MBTI knowledge and conflict modes during conflict conversations.

Expectations and Assumptions

People have different needs, values, beliefs, assumptions and cultural frameworks. Our expectations are fed by past experiences (our iceberg stories) as discussed in [Smart2Smarter](#). In chapter two, the author discusses how it takes years for an iceberg assumption or expectation to develop. Weather shifts, pressure, movement and unpredictable climatic events shape the iceberg’s character, above and below the water’s surface. What may trigger an unhealthy conflict response may be found within our “iceberg” stories”.

Remember, it took years to shape the “iceberg assumptions and expectations of yourself and others. A first step is for leaders and teams to listen and respect each other’s story that has shaped their expectations, assumptions, values and priorities. Behind most emotional conflict is an underlying value, need or priority that goes unsatisfied or misunderstood. Asking

questions like “What’s really important to you? What do you want?, or What do you need?” often allows people to uncover and understand competing values, needs and priorities. Workplaces that engage in more authentic and civil conversations encourage personal assumptions and expectations to be explored, shared, and if necessary, allowed to melt away. As an emotional intelligence expert and coach, I often provide coaching tools to explore assumptions or expectations. These conversations can occur whether in a group or individual session, and by an emotionally intelligent manager or certified coach.

Positive Emotions Matter

Research on positive emotions ([Cohn and Fredrickson 2009](#)) suggest the link between happiness, resilience and life satisfaction is connected to the quantity and quality of daily positive emotional moments. This suggests that happy people seek daily events that have them feel better. These daily events broaden their ability to approach a conflict situation from a position of respect and civility. How can you “prime” yourself to initiate and receive these “positive emotional moments”? ([Read this article for more tips on how to celebrate humanity in the workplace.](#))

Two ways to increase positive emotions is [mindfulness](#) and [tolerations](#). Mindfulness is all about being fully aware in the present moment—without assumptions and expectations --rather than dwelling in the past or projecting into the future. Being mindful involves a heightened awareness of sensory stimuli (breathing,

smells, body sensation, and thoughts. etc.) and being “in the now.” Mindfulness helps quiet your inner dialogue, by focusing on the present.



Another technique is removing [tolerations in your life](#). Removing tolerations is like clearing the weeds in one’s garden. It is hard to grow towards the sun if too many weeds are tolerated. Clearing “emotional weeds” starts by looking for and then pulling out stuff that interferes with nourishing strengths and flourishing into greatness. And, when you combine mindfulness with removing tolerations, your emotional intelligence accelerates. Start by approaching weeding as a positive event and focus, really focus, on what you are doing in the present and nothing else. When I pull the weeds in my gardens, I really focus and let myself feel the sun and breeze, hear the birds and smell the freshly cut lawn.

Mindfulness and tolerations are two techniques to calm or minimize emotional tension - and optimize your ability to approach conflict with curiosity and civility.

How do you or your workplace explore personality differences?

What does your workplace do to increase positive moments of truth

SMARTER solutions combine the passion of the heart with the intellect of the brain and the reciprocity of relationships. We'd love to connect and chat about how to use intelligence of emotions and power of social relationships to thrive, and not just survive, in any workplace or career.

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