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Turning
Conflict into
Peace of Mind

THE
CONFLICT
PIVOT

THREE SIMPLE PRACTICES TO DISSOLVE
CONFLICT AT WORK AND HOME

The Conflict Pivot Worksheet

BY TAMMY LENSKI

A conflict pivot is a purposeful change in the direction you're focusing during conflict in order to achieve better results. The three conflict pivots outlined here help you dissolve conflict in ongoing personal or professional relationships by uncovering why the conflict has snagged your attention and how to free yourself from its grip. They will also help prevent some conflict from occurring at all.

The Three Conflict Pivots

1. **Pivot away from your Stuck Story and toward the message.** Your stuck story is trying to tell you something. Discover what it is.
2. **Pivot away from their behavior and toward your own hooks.** They aren't the source of your discomfort, you are. Discover what's hooked you and why.
3. **Pivot away from the past and toward the now.** Choose your freedom by discovering solutions you have the power to fulfill.

Pivot 1: Away from your Stuck Story and toward the message

The first conflict pivot is to stop ruminating on your Stuck Story and attend instead to what your Stuck Story is trying to tell you.

When you experience ongoing tension or conflict, you mentally replay what's happened as you attempt to understand it and figure out what to do. Over time, these replays lead to a shorthand story of the conflict that becomes polished in memory.

Like a movie trailer, your Stuck Story of the conflict is a montage of the most powerful and noteworthy moments, with certain scenes selected and others omitted. It's not the story of the conflict; it is your story of the conflict.

Your Stuck Story is rich with meaning if you know what to look for. Let's look now.

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1. Who is the tension or conflict with and what is it about?

I have ongoing tension or conflict with _____ about _____

Example: I have ongoing conflict with my husband Jim about the way he leaves me out of major financial and home decisions.

2. To what have you reacted most strongly in the conflict?

In the conflict, I have reacted most strongly to _____

Note: This question is not about what interpretation you reacted to strongly, but what thing(s) that *happened* most caused a reaction in you.

Example: In the conflict, I have reacted most strongly to hearing that Jim was meeting with realtors and he hadn't even told me he wanted to buy a new house! I've also reacted strongly to finding out he has his own checking account separate from our joint checking account.

3. When you tell your story of the conflict to others or yourself, what do you focus on most?

When I tell my story of the conflict to others or myself, I dwell on _____

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Example: When I tell my story of the conflict to others or myself I dwell on the way Jim repeatedly makes important purchasing and financial decisions without me, how little regard he must have for my intelligence, and how much he likes to have power over me.

Pivot 2: Away from their behavior and toward your hooks

The second conflict pivot is to stop dwelling on the things they are doing or not doing and attend instead to the reasons you're hooked by the conflict.

States of conflict occur when something important feels threatened or insulted. The things you dwell on are hints about the true source of your unease in the conflict. You must attend to them to free yourself.

The list below, adapted from work by Dr. Stella Ting-Toomey, describes some of the most common "conflict hooks," those underlying reasons a conflict has snagged you. Conflict hooks are connected to your identity, the way you see yourself and want others to see you. When someone appears to challenge or dismiss what you hold dear about yourself, you get hooked (snagged by your discomfort).

While you may be hooked by any of the sources below, most of us tend to have one or two that are particularly strong and the most common source of frustration, tension, and conflict for us.

- **Competence:** Our need to be recognized as capable, intelligent, skilled, or having expertise.
- **Autonomy:** Our need to be acknowledged as independent and self-reliant, and having our boundaries respected.
- **Fellowship:** Our need to be included and to be viewed as likable, cooperative, and worthy.
- **Status:** Our need to be admired for tangible and intangible assets such as attractiveness, reputation, power, and material worth.
- **Reliability:** Our need to be seen as trustworthy, dependable, and loyal.
- **Integrity:** Our need for others to respect our dignity, honor, virtue, and good character.

While it is not necessary that the insult or threat you experience fall neatly into one of the above categories in order to have success with your conflict pivot, most people find that when they reflect deeply enough, one or more of the above applies.

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4. Why do the things you listed in Questions 2 and 3 bother you?

I'm bothered because _____

Example: I'm bothered because I don't like being left out like a second-class citizen, I don't think a husband should have financial power over a wife, and I want to be seen as the smart person I am.

5. What are the ways you see yourself that you suspect the other person may not?

I suspect that _____ doesn't view me as _____

Example: I worry that Jim doesn't view me as smart, capable of contributing to good financial decisions, or as his intellectual equal.

6. What conflict hooks have snagged you in this conflict?

I have been hooked by _____'s apparent disregard for or challenge to my (circle those that apply) competence / autonomy / fellowship / status / reliability / integrity / other (name it here: _____).

Example: I have been hooked by Jim's apparent disregard for my competence, my desire to be included in decisions (fellowship), and maybe also by my wish that he see me as his equal (status).

Pivot 3: Away from the past and toward the now

The third conflict pivot is to stop focusing on the past and attend instead to where your freedom lies – in what you do now.

Conflict thrives in the unknowable past – who said or did what, who’s to blame, what really happened. Memory is very unreliable, even in instances where you feel quite certain you remember with great accuracy. Conflict resolution and choosing your freedom from a conflict are present- and future-focused acts.

Conflict also thrives in your reliance on the other person to set things right. When you rely on the other person to change what they’re doing, and connect their actions to your happiness, you hand over power. The third pivot is about taking back your power, and rewriting your story of the conflict.

7. What are you protecting yourself *from*?

I am protecting myself from

Example: I am protecting myself from my fear that Jim views me as “the little woman,” that I’ve married a man who does not see me as his equal. I’m protecting myself from the discomfort of admitting that I’m not as smart about finances as I pretend to be.

8. What do you want for yourself from here forward in this situation?

I want _____

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Example: I want to feel responsible and capable financially. I don't want to wonder all the time what he really thinks of me. I want there not to be constant tension and bickering about money. I want to be in a real partnership with my husband.

9. What will you do to make this possible for yourself? List only those things that do not require the other person's actions or thinking to change.

I will _____

Example I will take a personal financial management class and tell Jim I'm doing so. I will talk to Jim to find out whether it's even possible for him to view me as his equal and what it would take. I will not squabble constantly about the ways he leaves me out and will instead ask to be part of some decisions and build from there. I will use all of these experiences to determine whether or not this is the right marriage for me to remain in.