

# Effective Conflict Management:

## Dealing with Difficult People and Situations



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# Poll #1

Do you think your 1<sup>st</sup> communication with another person clearly articulates your intent or your message?

- ▶ YES
- ▶ NO

# Statements to Insurance Companies

1. An invisible car came out of nowhere, struck my vehicle and vanished.
2. I was on my way to the doctor with rear-end trouble when my universal joint gave away, causing me to have an accident.
3. The pedestrian had no idea which direction to go, so I ran over him.
4. I collided with a stationary truck coming the other way.
5. I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law, and headed over the embankment.
6. The other car collided with mine without giving warning of its intentions.
7. In an attempt to kill a fly, I drove into a telephone pole.

# Session Goals

- ▶ Improve self-awareness in managing conflict
- ▶ Refresh on when to step away & seek help
- ▶ Practice active listening skills
- ▶ Learn tips or techniques to de-escalate or reduce stressful encounters
- ▶ Brief introduction to assertive messages

# Disclaimer

Though many of you know me from my prior positions within DEP, I no longer work for DEP. This training is my work product and does not represent the views or opinions of PA DEP..... Rita Coleman Graham

# Ugh, learning communication skills.....

Why do we view learning communication skills with such disdain?

- ▶ uncomfortable with communication
- ▶ consider it not a job duty
- ▶ now they want us to be social workers

# Goals when interacting with “Public”

- ▶ Voluntary compliance of regulations
- ▶ Professionalism
- ▶ Problem solving
- ▶ Avoiding conflict & escalating tension
- ▶ Avoiding legal action
- ▶ **Avoiding physical harm**

# When to step away & seek help

**Policy:** threats directed to DEP employees

- ▶ Feel threatened/endangered you leave the area – remove yourself from perceived or real danger
- ▶ You call law enforcement & notify your chain of command as per policy

**These situations are not covered by me.**



## Poll #2a

a. How frequently do you experience medium to severe conflict in performing your job duties?

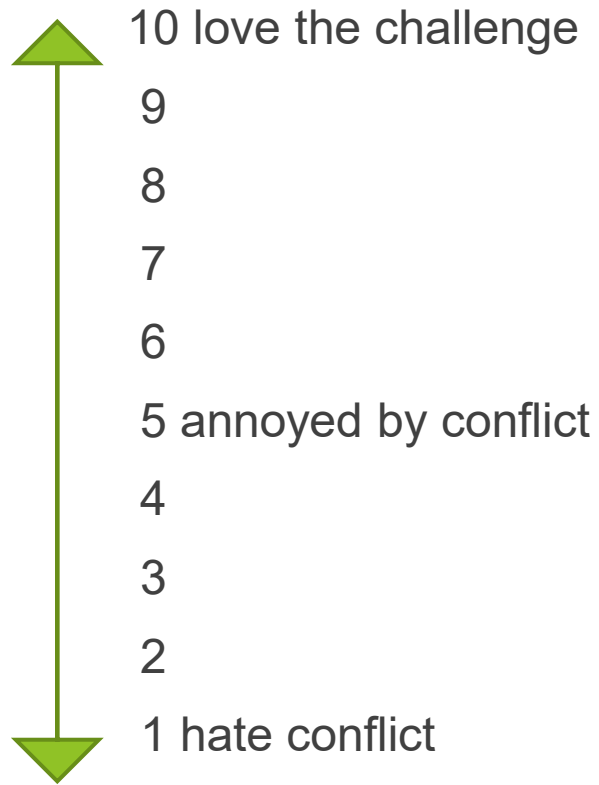
- 1) Rarely
- 2) Once or twice per month
- 3) Weekly
- 4) Multiple times per week
- 5) Daily

## Poll #2b

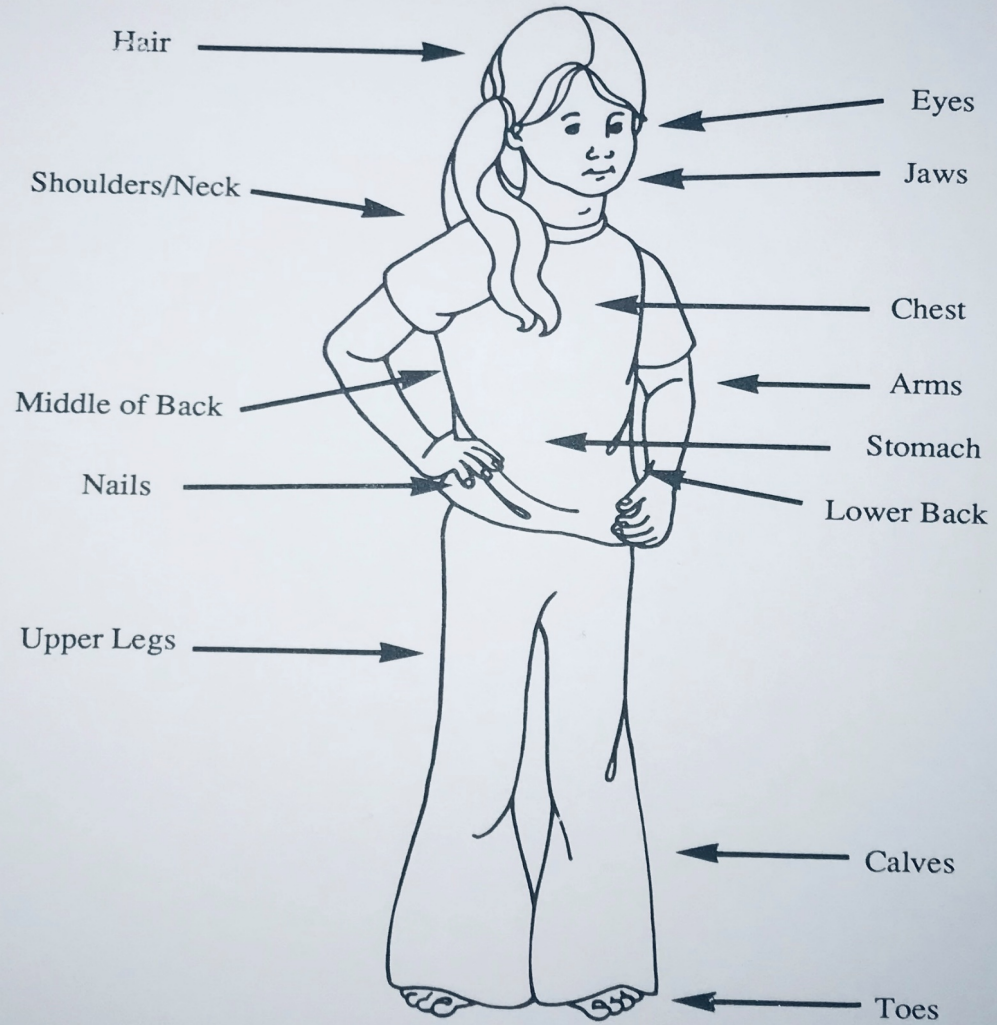
b. Are you medium to severe job-related conflicts mostly occurring...

- 1) During phone calls
- 2) In the field
- 3) During meetings with “clients”
- 4) Internally with coworkers

# How comfortable are you with conflict?



## It's in the Body



## 4 Styles for Responding to Conflict

- ▶ **Avoidance** – repress reaction, look other way, leave situation even if you lose; *avoider loses*
- ▶ **Delay** – postpone encounter, cooling-off or planning time; *left unresolved*
- ▶ **Confrontation by Power** – use leverage, force, punishment; *I am the winner*
- ▶ **Confrontation by Negotiation** – consider needs of each & generate mutual solution; *win/win*

# 4 Styles for Responding to Conflict:

## Advantages and Disadvantages

**Individually:** Write 1 or 2 advantages and disadvantages for each on work sheet 1 in handouts

**Volunteers:** who has one for:

1. Avoidance
2. Delay
3. Confrontation by Power
4. Confrontation by Negotiation

**Follow-up Questions**

# Which Style is Best?

- ▶ All 4 have their place
- ▶ All 4 are acceptable
- ▶ weigh the (+) & (-) of each and accept the consequences of our choice
- ▶ Learn to select our reaction instead of naturally reacting

***A balanced use of styles makes use of Power more acceptable***

# The Persuasion Cycle: Buy In Portion

Source: “Just Listen” by Dr. Mark Goulston

Resistance

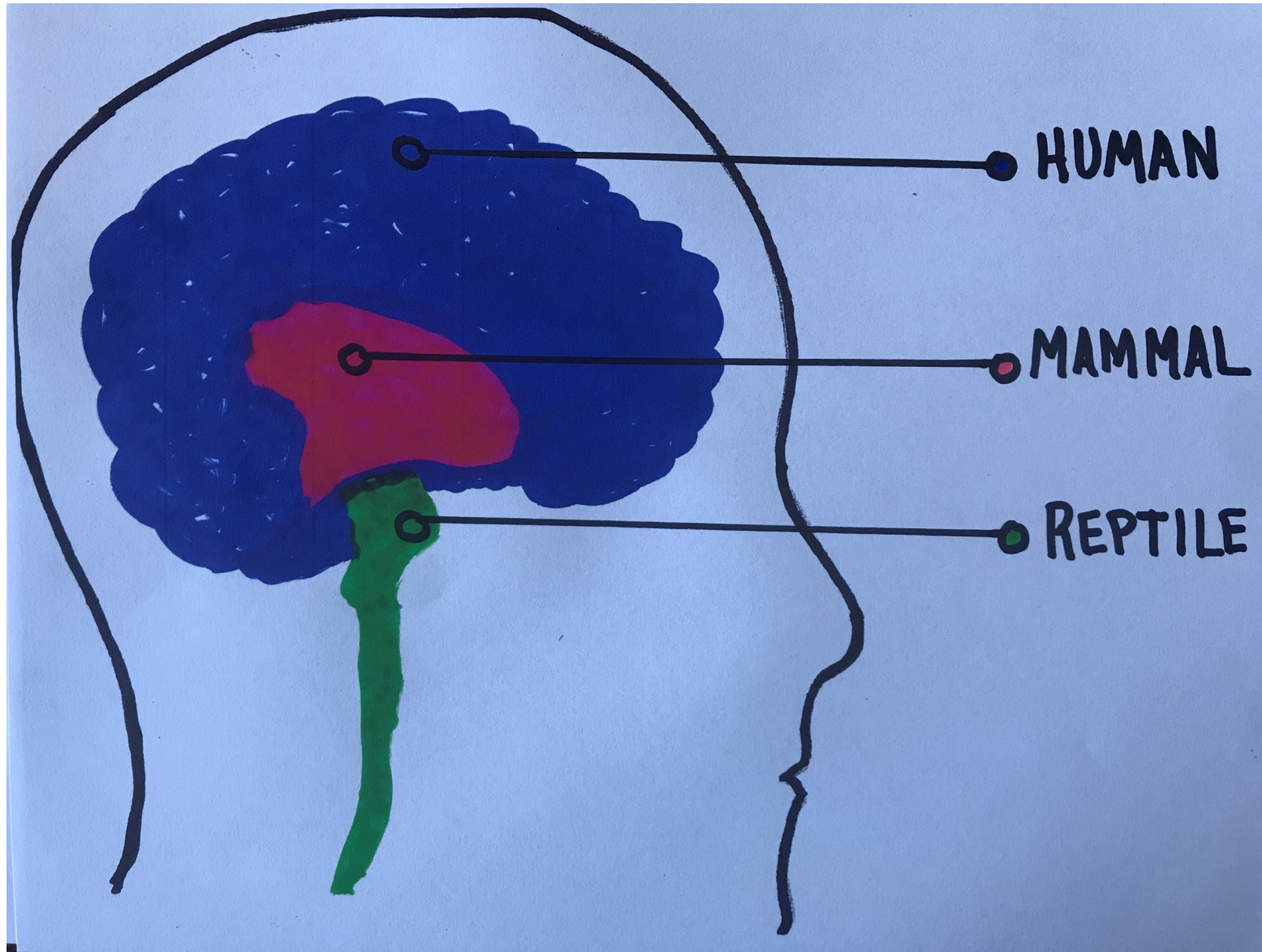
Listening

YOU

Considering



# Brain Science Role in Conflict



# Managing Conflict

## Understanding the Anger

**Anger** – natural human response to pain, or to the threat of pain, real or perceived.

### **Anger occurs when people...**

- ▶ have been hurt (past dealings, exposures),
- ▶ feel threat of risks not of their own making,
- ▶ think beliefs/values are challenged

# Managing Conflict

## Rational & Irrational Anger

**Rational Anger** is seen as normal – child injured

**Irrational Anger** seen as abnormal – chain self to tree

**It doesn't matter that YOU see their anger as irrational. Where they stand their outrage is logical and rational.**

# Managing Conflict

**Naïve realism** – belief that we can interpret reality objectively and that OUR attitudes, beliefs, preferences & priorities are rational, unemotional & unbiased.

**So when others disagree we assume they...**

- ▶ have limited information compared to us,
- ▶ are biased due to mistaken beliefs, ideology or,
- ▶ are too irrational to form conclusion given the evidence

# Managing Conflict

When you discount their behavior you build up self confidence limiting your ability to accept new info/facts.

You may discount plausible arguments/evidence

It can exacerbate the anger if you assert & argue that you are the only one who is rational.

# Managing Conflict

**Angry people believe they....**  
are,  
will be, or  
have been threatened.

# Role of Perspective in Conflicts

**Perspective** is the way you see things & your point of view based on your perceptions:

- ▶ Your understanding of the situation
- ▶ Your background and
- ▶ Your experience

# Instructions



3 seconds



# Poll #3 Perception

1. This was an image of:
  - a. an animal
  - b. a female
2. The person's age range is closest to:
  - a. 20 -30
  - b. 80-99
3. The female's status could best be described as:
  - a. high society
  - b. working class
  - c. poor

3 seconds



3 seconds



## Poll #4: Perception

**Is the image....**

- 1. a goat**
- 2. a bird**

3 seconds



## Signage Posted on Shoreline



**Fine For  
Swimming**

# Managing Conflict

## Dealing with Others Anger – your perception strategy

- 1) Acknowledge their concern & focus on finding the cause or perceived threat – the trigger
- 2) Assume anger is legitimate. This focuses you to emphasize others concerns & not devalue them
- 3) View anger as defensiveness NOT an offensive attack to enable you to be inclined to help & prevent escalation.



# Managing Conflict: Whose problem is it?

THEM

Y  
O  
U

	No problem	Problem
No problem		
Problem		

# Managing Conflict: Whose problem is it?

		THEM	
		No problem	Problem
YOU	No problem	<b>Chit Chat</b>	
	Problem		

# Managing Conflict: Whose problem is it?

		THEM	
		No problem	Problem
YOU	No problem	<b>Chit Chat</b>	<b>Listen</b>
	Problem		

# Managing Conflict: Whose problem is it?

		THEM	
		No problem	Problem
YOU	No problem	<b>Chit Chat</b>	<b>Listen</b>
	Problem	<b>Assert</b>	

# Managing Conflict: Whose problem is it?

		THEM	
		No problem	Problem
YOU	No problem	<b>Chit Chat</b>	<b>Listen</b>
	Problem	<b>Assert</b>	<b>Listen &amp; Assert</b>

# Effective Communication

How your message is communicated and received:

7% is thru words

38% is thru voice and tone

55% is thru body language

How we say it and our body language while saying it are critical to getting the right message across.

# Managing Conflict: Active Listening

Ideally communication is not linear but circular with feedback exchanges in form of:

- ▶ questions for clarification
- ▶ encouragement to tell me more
- ▶ paraphrase or reflect back the message & feeling behind it

All in an effort to seek clarification & confirm the message

Emotions cloud the message or sender not able to clearly express themselves or the feelings in words –so **dig deeper!**

# Phrases to **Avoid** that Escalate Conflict

**“Calm Down!”** – throws fuel on the fire!

- ▶ instead ask what has them so upset – tell me more
- ▶ let them vent so they can get to rational mind

**“I understand”** – usually makes it worse

- ▶ you haven’t walked a mile in their shoes, yet
- ▶ “tell me more so I can understand better

**Humor, smile or smart aleck remark-** risky

- ▶ Instead use active listening

**Any angry rebuttal** – again its fuel on the fire!



# What is Active Listening?

Active Listening IS NOT:	Active Listening IS:
<p><b>Judging</b> <b>Defending</b> <b>Persuading</b> <b>Arguing</b> <b>Parroting</b> <b>Comforting</b> <b>Suggesting solutions</b> <b>Interrupting</b> <b>Giving opinions</b></p>	<p><b>Valuing the speaker</b> <b>Trying to understand</b> <b>Tuning in to feelings</b> <b>Asking open ended questions</b> <b>Paraphrasing</b> <b>Clarifying</b> <b>Reflecting</b> <b>Nodding</b> <b>Respecting</b></p>

# Practicing Active Listening

## The Power of “Hmmm”- Dr. Mark Goulston

**“Hmmm” in a tell-me-more tone of voice** is a de-escalation tool to use when you’re facing a person who is angry, defensive & sure you’re the bad guy

- ▶ It rapidly turns a potential brawl into a cooperative dialogue. They expected an argument back.
- ▶ You are mirroring respect instead, showing interest & encouraging them to talk

# Practicing Active Listening

## Phase I

Phase I Listening (only in 1<sup>st</sup> round)

- ▶ **Nonverbal behavior** – eye contact, nods, leaning in, facial mirroring, taking notes
- ▶ **Subverbals** – Hmmm, Ahuh, moan, groan or chuckle (appropriately)

# Practicing Active Listening

## Phase I Breakouts (6 minutes)

**Roles:** Speaker, Listener, Observer(s) (switch turns)

**Speaker:** discuss your Pet Peeve or a situation causing you conflict (work, home, other) 1.5 minutes

**Listener:** use only nonverbal & subverbals

**Observer(s):** jot notes on what you see, hear & what occurs

**Share Feedback:** 1.5 minutes

**Switch All Roles:** new speaker for 1.5 minutes

**Share Feedback:** 1.5 minutes

**Come Back Full Group**

# Practicing Active Listening

## Phase I Debrief

Using only Nonverbal behavior & Subverbals:

- ▶ How did it feel as a Speaker & what behavior encouraged or discouraged you?
- ▶ How did it feel as a Listener?
  - Did you try to jump in & solve the problem?
  - Did you jump in to share your similar problem?
- ▶ Observers any thing you noted & want to share?

# Practicing Active Listening

## Phase II

Phase II Listening builds on use of nonverbals & subverbals by adding:

- ▶ **“How do you mean?”**
- ▶ **“Tell me more.”**
- ▶ **You repeat the last few words**  
*(with a rising inflection in voice)*

# Practicing Active Listening

## Phase II Breakouts (6 minutes)

**Roles:** Speaker, Listener, Observer(s) (switch turns)

**Speaker:** discuss your Pet Peeve or a situation causing you conflict (work, home, other) 1.5 minutes

**Listener:** use nonverbal & subverbals + How do you mean? Tell me more or repeat the last few words

**Observer(s):** jot notes on what you see, hear & what occurs

**Share Feedback:** 1.5 minutes

**Switch All Roles:** new speaker for 1.5 minutes

**Share Feedback:** 1.5 minutes

**Come Back Full Group**

# Practicing Active Listening

## Phase II Debrief

Using new tools:

***Listeners*** – was it any easier with these tools, how did it feel using them?

***Speakers*** – were you compelled to continue on by the tools the Listener used? Emotion change?

***Observers*** any thing you noted & want to share?



# What's it all about?

## Getting someone to EXHALE

- ▶ People in distress need breathing room
- ▶ Guide them to exhale by releasing that emotion
- ▶ Don't get offended and don't interrupt
- ▶ Active listening and "Tell me more" calms the brain

# Managing Conflict: Active Listening

\*\*\***HOMEWORK For Tonight**\*\*\*

\*\*\*HANDOUTS\*\*\*

# Phase III - Reflective Listening

Acknowledge Ownership	Reflect Emotion	Describe Event/Facts
<i>You get...</i> <i>It sounds like you....</i> <i>You seem....</i>	embarrassed	when your boss shouts at you.

## Phase III - Reflective Listening

“I can’t operate my business under your outrageous demands.”

Acknowledge Ownership	Reflect Emotion	Describe Event/Facts

## Phase III - Reflective Listening

“You District people can’t be trusted – you’re clearly in bed with the developers.”

Acknowledge Ownership	Reflect Emotion	Describe Event/Facts

# Mindful Listening

## “The Zen of Listening” by Rebecca Shafir

- ▶ Goal: find balance between focusing our attention, remaining open-minded & tolerant of different views – perspectives
- ▶ A change of mindset which enables our innate listening abilities to naturally kick-in
- ▶ Is the state beyond the 3 skill phases
- ▶ “Get into their movie” a change in mindset

# Get into their movie

- ▶ Think Star Wars – Chewbacca a Wookiee!
- ▶ You suspend your disbelief & watch movie
- ▶ You know you will return to your belief later
- ▶ Use Suspend Your Disbelief when you find it hard to hear or understand another person's perspective – **get into their movie** to curiously listen to truly understand how they see things

# O'Crap to Okay Technique

Process outlined by Dr. Mark Goulston in his book “Just Listen”

- ▶ learn how to be in control of your thoughts and emotions in stressful situations
- ▶ goal to get self under control
- ▶ move from panic/fear to your rational mind
- ▶ to do so quickly (in minutes not hours)



# O'Crap to Okay 5 Step Process

1. “Oh Crap” (*reaction phase*) *this is a disaster..*

# O'Crap to Okay 5 Step Process

1. “Oh Crap” (*reaction* phase) *this is a disaster..*
2. “Oh, Gawd” (*release* phase) *Sh#%, what a huge mess & I am going to get stuck cleaning it up*

# O'Crap to Okay 5 Step Process

1. “Oh Crap” (*reaction* phase) *this is a disaster..*
2. “Oh, Gawd” (*release* phase) *Sh#%, what a huge mess & I am going to get stuck cleaning it up*
3. “Oh Jeez” (*re-center* phase) *alright I can fix it*

# O'Crap to Okay 5 Step Process

1. “Oh Crap” (*reaction* phase) *this is a disaster..*
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4. “Oh Well” (*refocus* phase) *I’m not letting this ruin me and here is what I need to do right now....*

# O'Crap to Okay 5 Step Process

1. “Oh Crap” (*reaction* phase) *this is a disaster..*
2. “Oh, Gawd” (*release* phase) *Sh#%, what a huge mess & I am going to get stuck cleaning it up*
3. “Oh Jeez” (*re-center* phase) *alright I can fix it*
4. “Oh Well” (*refocus* phase) *I’m not letting this ruin me and here is what I need to do right now....*
5. “Okay” (*re-engage* phase) *I’m ready to fix this or deal with...*

# O'Crap to Okay Process - SECRET

When consciously aware of stages you can:

- ▶ mentally identify each one as it happens
- ▶ manipulate your emotional response to each
- ▶ take yourself out of panic mode
- ▶ move into solution mode
- ▶ say the right things to minimize damage
- ▶ speed shift from start to end in minutes

# O'Crap to Okay Process - Breakout

Groups of 3 or 4 (7 minutes)

Instructions: the 5 steps are in your slide handouts

- ▶ Individually & silently take 1 ½ minutes to:
  - think back to the worst encounter you had in the past year with a colleague, permittee, public or consultant
  - Mentally walk yourself thru the steps from O'Crap to Ok as if you were reliving incident
- ▶ When prompted, discuss as a group if and how the process could be applied to the difficult situations you encounter & merits of using this technique – 5 minutes

# Poll #5: O'Crap to Okay Process

## Poll #5 & Debrief Discussion

- ▶ Were you able to think of an encounter where this technique would be helpful?
  - ▶ YES
  - ▶ NO
- ▶ Will you try this technique in the future?
  - ▶ YES
  - ▶ NO
- ▶ 2-3 Volunteers to share:
  - Merits of using the technique on the job
  - How you hope to use the technique?



# Disarming Crossed Arms

## Fill in the Blank Approach

- ▶ Key is to invite person into conversation rather than asking questions making them defensive
- ▶ You combine your words with an inviting hand gesture – causing them to uncross arms & open their mind
- ▶ You get at their needs or motives
- ▶ End result you come off trustworthy – leads to talk it out & find a solution

# Disarming Crossed Arms

## Fill in the Blank Approach

You don't tell people what they want or even ask them what they want. Instead you get them to tell you

You're using this BMP because it...	(gesture with open inviting hand)
You're thinking of working on this stream segment because....	(gesture with open inviting hand)

# Dealing with an out-of-control Rant

## One Liner Technique

**“Do you really believe that?”**

“An exaggeration is a truth that has lost its temper.”  
.....quote by Kahlil Gibran, Poet

- ▶ You move a person who's over the top from resistance to listening by lowering the person's anger or fear
- ▶ Calmly asked this leads person to recant & restate
- ▶ Temper cools down & you move on

# Lower Defensiveness

## Side-By-Side Technique

*“A preaching point is not a meeting point”*

Quote by Mother Theresa

- ▶ Lecturing → defensive → hiding things
- ▶ Side-by-side → lowers guard → opens up
- ▶ Ask questions & deepen talk with more questions
- ▶ Explore ways to make things go right in future
- ▶ Chance to avoid future problems

# Dealing with a Bully

- ▶ Understand their game – see it for what it is - refuse to follow their script
- ▶ Adjust your expectations so you are not surprised
- ▶ Establish an emotional distance (no longer easy prey) – self control
- ▶ Reframe – this is their problem not yours
- ▶ Let them finish – interrupting just escalates things
- ▶ Stay calm, maintain eye contact, perfectly polite, ever-so-slightly bored
- ▶ Stand up straight, be relaxed do not cross arms, show you're listening
- ▶ Can say “Could you repeat that to me in a calmer tone? I did not understand what you just said.”
- ▶ If exaggeration.. “Do you really believe that?”

## Verbal Judo

**Focus on how people are the same.**

All people want to be:

- ▶ treated with dignity and respect.
- ▶ asked rather than told to do something.
- ▶ told why they are being asked to do something.
- ▶ given options rather than threats.
- ▶ given a second chance.

# Managing Conflict: Assertive Message

## When do you use an Assertive Message?

When you:

1. have a problem, need, issue with someone,
2. when you both have a problem, need or issue or
3. anticipate your message will also cause them a problem

## Managing Conflict: Assertive Messages Should:

- ▶ Focus on you
- ▶ Describe specific behavior/situation that's a problem for you
- ▶ Describe the impact of the behavior on you
- ▶ Communicate your interests or needs
- ▶ Describe your feelings (I feel..., I get..., I am...)
- ▶ Be addressed to person you are in conflict with



# Managing Conflict: Assertive Message

## Formula for Assertive Messages

**I understand** (or appreciate, realize, etc.)....other's feelings, position, needs or wants.

**And, when you** (or “your”)....specific description of behavior

**I feel** (or “need”)....your feeling or needs.

**Because** ....concrete effect on you

**Therefore** ....what you want to happen

# Managing Conflict: Assertive Message

**I understand** you are eager to be heard.

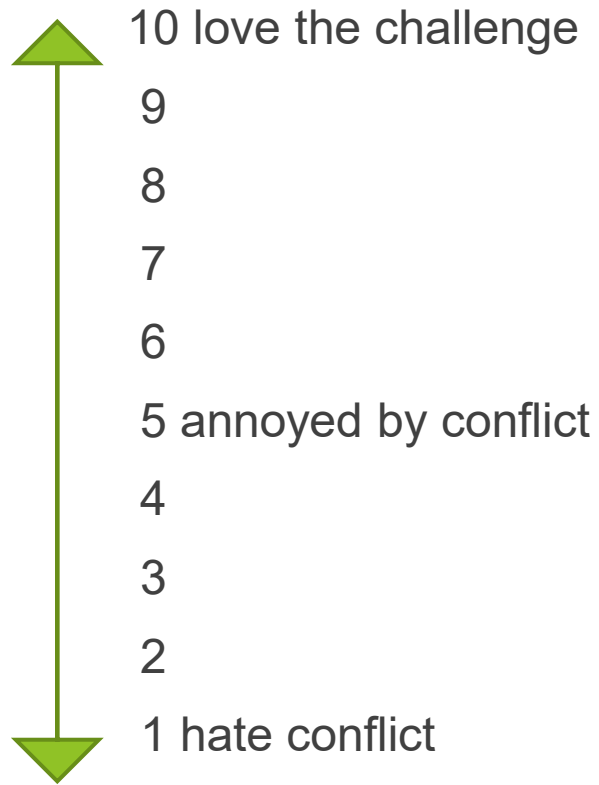
**And, when you** shout while others are speaking, neither I nor the court stenographer can hear the speaker's comments or yours.

**I need** you to speak one at a time and refrain from interrupting.

**Because** the reason we are here tonight is to hear everyone's concerns and to accurately document them so the District can consider them in our review of the application.

**Therefore,** I need you to allow the speaker to continue without interruptions.

# How comfortable are you with conflict?



# Reflection on Workshop

I LEARNED .....

I APPRECIATED .....

I PLAN TO .....

I FEEL .....

I WANT TO .....

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Please email me after you try  
some of these techniques.

Would love to hear your feedback  
and success stories.

