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# Messenger

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## Resolve Conflict Without the Fireworks

Chances are you have already had to deal with at least two conflicts before you've even had time to read this Messenger. For some of us, two could be an understatement. Between putting out fires at home and at work, some of us feel that we have our own volunteer fire department.

Everywhere we go, people have different opinions. What's the old saying about how you should never bring up politics or religion? Our world is made up of uniquely individual people complete with uniquely individual thoughts. Those individual differences, opinions, life experiences, and goals are what generates situations where delicate measures must be taken.

Before we can look at how to resolve a conflict, we need to understand how it escalates. There are three levels in the anatomy of an argument.

**Level #3:** The lowest level of an argument is that a conflict has arisen and a quick agreement hasn't been reached. Both parties will normally shut down and anchor positions. If at all possible, a resolution needs to be made at this level. If the disagreement moves on to Levels 2 or 1, you'll not only be dealing with the situation, but also with more hurt feelings, anger, and possibly people taking sides on the issue.

**Level #2:** If the conflict continues, one side will claim the other party thinks or feels certain things. Normally, it's inaccurate. It's impossible to be inside the other person's head and **know** for sure

what is being thought. This will just get us in more trouble. I grudgingly admit that I do this too often with my husband. There are times that after a disagreement, we'll go in different rooms to calm down a bit, however, I "continue" the conversation in my head. Before long, I'm even more mad at him over things he never even said. I know I'm not the only one guilty of doing this. Anyone else want to admit to it? If you let this behavior continue, there are so many unnecessary walls that will need to be brought down before a resolution is reached.

**Level #1:** This is the most destructive level. At this point, things get out of hand. Oftentimes, things have moved so far beyond the original disagreement, that neither party remembers what started it all. Complaints are matched with counterattacks and both parties refuse to acknowledge the truth.

If not handled correctly, conflict can hurt the morale and productivity of an organization. This does not mean, however, that all conflict is negative. There is a positive side of conflict:

- It will allow frustrating situations to be discussed.
- It keeps bad events from escalating
- It allows misunderstandings to be resolved.

***What is noble can be said in any language,  
and what is mean should be said in none.***

***Moses Ben Maimon (1135-1204)  
Philosopher & Physician***

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So, how do we disagree agreeably? Below, I've listed five suggestions to keep in mind while you're dealing with a conflict.

1. Respect others' ideas. Just because the other person has a different idea, that doesn't mean that the suggestion isn't valid.
2. Listen and support first. Completely hear the other party out. Don't dismiss him or her based upon what you **think** is going to be said. You may be way off base.
3. Ask questions. Again, before you make a judgment on what has been said, make sure you understand everything correctly. It's hard not to bring your own biases into a discussion, but until you've listened to everything the other person has to say, you can't know how to respond.
4. Disagree nonjudgmentally. Once you've heard the other person out, you may still not agree with him or her. That's okay! Hopefully, both of you will give the other the respect deserved to listen.
5. Offer another solution. When you don't agree, work together to come up with another

solution. Is there a way that both of your ideas can be combined? You may have to get a third party involved to help brainstorm ideas.

While we can't control how others respond during a conflict, we can control our attitude and response. Always remember to completely hear what the other person has to say before you decide what to do.

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