

“Judy is a master at helping people to transform conflict into powerful relationships. Her very useful guide will provide the tools to change intractable situations into high-level teamwork and unimaginable possibilities. Let Judy teach you to dance on the ever-shifting carpet of relationships.”

—Thomas Crum, author of *Three Deep Breaths*,
Journey to Center, and *The Magic of Conflict*

“Workplaces are designed for conflict. They bring together competing interests of customers, designers, marketers, engineers, manufacturers, and budgets. This book provides practical and easily implemented ways to allow these conflicts to be productive and relationship-building. I highly recommend the book and hope that its insights leak into the larger arena of our civic and political dialogue. In the end, our way of life may depend on our capacity to trust and cooperate with strangers. The ideas in this book take us in that direction.”

—Peter Block, author of *Flawless Consulting*,
Stewardship, and *Community*

“When two people don’t get along, you can’t just put them into a room and hope for the best, or assign them to a project and insist they work together. All relationships have some conflict, and some relationships are subject to deep conflicts. Addressing destructive behavior related to conflict is important. And addressing conflict when it happens, in a way that builds connection, collegiality, and allows individuals to share vulnerabilities takes time and nurturing. Judy Ringer has a way of working with individuals in conflict so that the relationship (assuming all parties want this) becomes healthy. That said, we need conflict! But we don’t need destructive behavior that sometimes accompanies conflict. Anyone in business can tell you that individuals with healthy relationships, even in the midst of conflict, create a highly productive and psychologically safe environment at work, when they know how to work through the conflict appropriately. Judy’s work provides solid recommendations, practical advice, and methods to address conflict—the book provides great insights to help rid organizations of behavior and approaches that can harm or destroy relationships.”

—Connie Roy-Czyzowski, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, CCP,
vice president of human resources, Northeast Delta Dental

“This brilliant book has a wealth of material: insights, processes, and practices for anyone who is engaged in coaching people who don't get along. Judy offers powerful tools using concepts and principles taken from the martial art of aikido. Drawing from her experience on the aikido mat and as a coach in organizations she has laid out the coaching process in clear, concise, and accessible steps that will help anyone move from conflict toward resolution. I appreciate that her intention is to go beyond organizational coaching, she is also emphasizing, “. . . teaching skills that will support the parties ever after in all areas of life.” A great contribution.

—Wendy Palmer, author of *Leadership Embodiment*

“Judy Ringer's book is for leaders who want to empower themselves to manage workplace conflict. Imagine being fearless when conflict arises, and having the tools and confidence you need to address, manage, and guide your team toward peace and organizational health.”

—Fran Liautaud, organizational development
and training manager

“*Turn Enemies Into Allies* by Judy Ringer is a powerful guide to proactively deal with conflict in the workplace. There is a definite “cost” to avoiding conflict, which will be reduced by following the sage advice offered by Judy Ringer. She skillfully takes the reader through concrete steps and offers exceptional examples from her years of experience. As a management consultant and professor, I found myself reflecting on situations in my life and thought if I had this book, the conflict would have been resolved much quicker and with less drama for all parties involved. *Turn Enemies Into Allies* is truly a gift to new and seasoned managers!”

—Susan Losapio, PhD, professor, Southern New Hampshire
University School of Business

“An essential addition to the conflict resolution toolkit.”

—Marshall Goldsmith, #1 New York Times
bestselling author of Triggers

TURN
Enemies
INTO
Allies

THE ART OF PEACE IN THE
WORKPLACE

Conflict Resolution for Leaders, Managers,
and Anyone Stuck in the Middle

JUDY RINGER



*Dedicated to Lorna Metskas
Mother, teacher, and biggest ally
Thank you*

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*Harmony doesn't mean getting along with people at
any cost just to avoid a confrontation.
Harmony as used in aikido does not involve compromising at all.
Rather aikido's harmony brings different, even opposing,
elements together and intensifies them in a way that drives
everything toward a higher level.*

—Mitsunari Kanai, *Technical Aikido*

INTRODUCTION

Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good; if it doesn't, it is of no use. . . . For me there is only the traveling on paths that have heart . . . and there I travel looking, looking, breathlessly.

—Don Juan, A Yaqui Warrior, as told to Carlos Castaneda

Always practice the Art of Peace in a vibrant and joyful manner.

—Morihei Ueshiba, founder of aikido



There are many, many concepts from the martial art aikido I've incorporated into my life, and one of the most useful is the awareness that I am always giving and receiving *ki*—Japanese for “energy” or “life force.” I am giving and receiving whether I mean to or not. Over time, I've learned to see not an attack and not even people, but energy. And with time, I've learned to be more intentional about the energy I give, express, and extend to others as well as how I manage what comes my way.

On the aikido mat, it's inevitable that some partners are easy to work with and others are not. In life, too, sometimes the dance is easy. We enjoy our partners as we flow together through life, work, and relationships. Other times, the dance is fraught with missteps, interference, collisions, and falls. The flow is interrupted by our inability to see ourselves as contributors. We know we can't move, but we don't know why. We're caught in patterns we are often unaware of.

Aikido helps us see our part in creating the dance. We learn to be intentional on the mat. We learn to relax when we wish our partner

would relax. We understand that if we're forcing the technique, it's time to stop and try something different. Off the mat as well, I begin to see what I can and cannot control. Instead of avoiding or resisting the energy coming my way, I learn to dance with it, harness it, and guide it. Erstwhile enemies become dance partners and potential allies.

This book is a guide for managing and resolving conflict in the workplace. It is also a guide for managing conflict in all areas of life. And our complex world needs it. We need guides in the form of human beings—like you—who understand that in conflict, there is always a choice point. When two roads diverge, do I give in to the triggers that lead to high drama, reactions, and regret? Or do I choose the centered path of awareness, connection, and purpose?

We get better at what we practice—another lesson from aikido. Psychologist Chris Argyris, who gave us the Ladder of Inference, called it “skilled incompetence”—the notion that we are, in fact, practicing all the time even when the results are not what we want. Our daily thoughts and actions are well-traveled neural pathways that can be reinforced or restructured with intention.

Personally, I want to practice intentionally. So if my path is not leading me where I want to go, I can stop, reflect, and choose a new one.

You will change, too, as you practice what you teach. Conflict, like life, is a learning path. Be curious and easy with yourself as you find your way as a teacher of conflict resolution skills. Enjoy watching the interactions of the participants as well as your own. Always keep a sense of humor. And find the path with heart.

I hope you're ready to take on a workplace challenge. I hope the principles and framework offered here give you a path to follow. And I hope you always practice in a vibrant and joyful manner.

Why Should You Read This Book?

“What should I do when coworkers don't get along?” In a quarter-century of training and coaching, I've seen dozens of managers and leaders struggle with this question. As a conflict and communication skills professional, I work closely with managers of small businesses and corporate teams. Usually, the manager asks me to solve the problem—

to intervene between two people who are equally important to the company and who are not getting along. In many cases, their conflict is distracting to those around them and hurting the organization.

When I ask the manager to describe the problem, common responses include:

- ☞ “There’s a personality conflict between two key players that needs resolving.”
- ☞ “I don’t know what to do with coworkers who can’t get along.”
- ☞ “When do I let people work it out themselves and when do I get involved?”
- ☞ “Their conflict is disrupting our workflow/customer service/productivity/team.”

I understand the manager’s challenge. Although intervening in conflict is not for the faint of heart, it comes with the job if you’re a manager, supervisor, or leader. Even so, you may not have received the necessary training or previously encountered such a challenge.

The first time I was asked to mediate and resolve a workplace conflict between two employees, I was hesitant. At the time, my work centered on training individuals and groups in addressing conflict, engaging in difficult conversations, and overcoming performance anxiety. I was experienced in mediation techniques, but I sensed this request called for something different. The client wanted these employees to be able to work well together beyond the resolution of the current conflict. Most of the problems I see emanate from a lack of awareness and skill. If the parties had the skills, they could resolve any conflict—the current one and those that might arise in the future.

In addition, the word *mediation* has a formal quality to it, with accompanying rules, definitions, and conditions, and often evokes a legal or courtroom mindset, causing people to tighten, distance themselves from the process, and revert to a contest mentality. Also, as a mediator, you generally follow prescribed formats, and although the parties gain skill through participating in the mediation, the primary goal of the mediator is not necessarily to teach but to act as an intermediary and interpreter, and to facilitate agreements.

When I work one-on-one with individuals, I call it “conflict coaching,” and I heard this request as exactly that: Coach two individuals, one at a time, in the same conflict management skills and aikido concepts central to my group trainings, until they’re able to sit together and talk to each other about rebuilding their working relationship. In many ways, this approach offers a middle ground between mediation and conflict coaching. As in mediation, agreement and resolution are the desired outcome. Here, equally important is the emphasis on teaching skills that will support the parties ever after in all areas of life.

As I fielded more of these requests to work with individuals in conflict, I confirmed my sense that the work was about instructing people on the needed skills to sort things out. If the individuals were interested, motivated, and willing to acquire the skills, there was every reason to believe the individuals themselves would resolve the conflict. What’s more, the parties could walk away with expertise and leadership qualities to apply in other settings—a win for the employees, their manager, and the organization.

This Book Is a Process and a Guide

This book is a precise and practical guide for catching employee conflict before it escalates and coaching the parties to resolution. It is a process I developed to help two individuals resolve conflict, communicate more effectively, and rebuild a working relationship. As I refined and developed the process over time, I became convinced that managers and leaders could do what I did and achieve similar results.

This guide offers a deliberate and methodical way of working with employees in conflict—an approach that draws on my expertise in conflict and communication skill-building as well as my training in mind-body principles from the aikido. In my experience, managers, supervisors, and human resources (HR) professionals receive limited preparation for dealing with employee conflict—even though this is a fact of life in their work. Research published in the October 1, 2016 issue of *Forbes* reveals that 98 percent of managers believe they need more training to deal effectively with “important issues such as professional development, conflict resolution, employee turnover, time management and project management.”

Dealing with conflict is an essential element of management, and yet one that many managers avoid. Conflict can be hard, complex, and fraught with emotional roadblocks. If you find yourself stuck in this mindset, it's harder to see the benefits of conflicting views, such as the advantage that multiple perspectives bring to the solution of a problem.

However, with a shift in perspective, an investment of time and practice, and the clearly defined four-phase model in this book, you'll be able to manage the majority of workplace conflicts and help members of your team build key skills. At the same time, you'll reap personal and professional benefits from exploring new ideas, experimenting, and being open to learning.

In addition, while this method is highly valuable as a managerial intervention with conflicting employees, it also offers skills and tools just as useful in the executive suite as they are in the family kitchen. As a result, this approach is effective across organizational strata—at the executive level, with middle management, or on employee teams. Anyone with influence can initiate the process. You can invite the conflicting parties into the conversation yourself or find a neutral party to help you.

The Costs of Unaddressed Conflict

As tempting as it may be to ignore interpersonal conflict, addressing it is important for organizations for a host of reasons.

At the top of the list, unaddressed conflict is costly. A 2008 study commissioned by CPP, Inc.—authors of personality and conflict style assessments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and Thomas-Kilmann (TKI) conflict mode instrument—found that 85 percent of employees at all levels of the surveyed organizations experienced conflict to varying degrees. The study also found that in the United States, an average employee spends nearly three hours a week dealing with workplace conflict. At the time of the study, those hours amounted to approximately \$359 billion in hourly wages.

Secondly, conflict among coworkers saps energy and limits creativity. I see otherwise skilled and technically savvy managers and executives stymied when faced with team members who aren't working

together productively. In a 2012 survey of HR professionals, by UK author and mediator Marc Reid, the most negative aspects of conflict in the workplace were found to be the distress it causes employees (45 percent) and the fact that it distracts from business objectives (34 percent). Two-thirds responded that it “impacts operational performance of the company.”

These clear consequences mean the situation can't be avoided. If you intervene unskillfully, you will make the problem worse. If you ignore the issue, it usually remains unresolved and negatively impacts the work environment. Good people leave. Work is done inefficiently because coworkers won't talk to each other. Relationships and output suffer, and entire organizations become polarized. According to the CPP study, 43 percent of employees think their bosses don't deal with conflict well.

The good news is, while not always intuitive, the skills and competencies to resolve organizational conflict can be learned. Learning to intervene intelligently in workplace conflict saves you and your team money and time, and reduces stress levels. You'll also give the conflicting parties the opportunity to build emotional intelligence and confidence, and watch as they pass these competencies on to others. Managers and leaders who demonstrate the confidence and ability to address conflict foster happier, more productive, and more inclusive workplaces. We spend too much of our lives at work for the environment to be otherwise.

A New Approach

My approach to conflict stems from the martial arts, specifically the Japanese martial art aikido. In 1994, I started practicing aikido because I resonated with the metaphor it offers for dealing with difficulty, challenge, and the unexpected. Usually, people think I discovered the martial art first, and that led to my training and coaching career, when actually it was the other way around. A conflict—and my desire to improve my own communication style—led me to aikido and to this work.

For fourteen years, I sold residential real estate. Real estate transactions can be contentious. I often found myself in the middle of a

heated contest between buyer and seller, or with the need to advocate for a transaction with a banker, building inspector, or concerned family member. My default conflict style is to accommodate other people's wishes, and that isn't always useful in those kinds of transactions.

The clash that ultimately drove me to become a student of conflict was with the manager of an agency I worked for. She had a strong need to control, and I was used to a lot of freedom. I almost left the company because I couldn't express to the new manager that her style felt smothering to me. Luckily, a leader higher up the ladder saw my unhappiness and my foot moving toward the door. He sent me to a weeklong program he'd previously attended.

During that training, I was introduced to aikido and its countless applications, including its use in addressing conflict, solving problems, and determining one's purpose. I met author, aikidoist, and presenter Thomas Crum, who became a mentor and lifelong friend. Tom had been teaching aikido since the early 1970s. Along with other aikidoists—such as Terry Dobson and George Leonard—Tom combined aikido with his life as a trainer and educator, and was among the first to apply the essential principles of aikido to work and family conflict. His books inspired me to continue along that path, and his trainings changed the direction of my life.

In 1993, I formed Power & Presence Training, and within a year had founded my own aikido school with help from instructors at nearby aikido centers. Happily, Portsmouth Aikido is alive and well today, currently owned by one of my original students. I'm a third-degree black belt and member of the board of directors.

Aikido: The Art of Peace

Aikido is first and foremost a martial art. It has roots in judo and jujutsu, and yet is quite different in that the goal is not to block a strike, win a contest, or otherwise prevail over an opponent.

Aikido is a fairly recent evolution of the martial arts, developed in the early twentieth century by Morihei Ueshiba, a highly skilled and renowned Japanese swordsman and martial artist. The word *aikido* is often translated as “the way of blending or harmonizing with energy” or more simply “The Art of Peace.” Aikido principles, such as entering—moving

off the line of the attack and into a partnering relationship with the attacker—create alignment with the incoming energy, or *ki*.

Another principle is blending. When you enter and align with the incoming energy, you can blend with it—add your energy to it. Next is redirecting the energy such that both attacker and receiver remain unharmed. These three principles—entering, blending, and redirecting—are fundamental to aikido as well as to our four-phase process, and we will return to them often.

Aikido principles are taught and used throughout the world to de-escalate conflict as well as build stability, flexibility, and presence. Because aikido involves more flowing than fighting, most students begin with the goal of learning a martial art that teaches self-defense without injuring others. Students soon understand the physical components of the art apply in the outside world as well.

In aikido, an attack is reframed as power that can be developed and guided. Consequently, the aikidoist does not block or hinder the opponent. Our first move is to enter. We want to find our partner's energy, and join or blend with it. What would normally be understood as an act of aggression is instead seen as energy to be utilized—entered into, blended with, and redirected—changing the dynamic from resistance to connection.

Similarly, the parties in the four-phase intervention described in this book learn to enter a difficult conversation by listening first. Through active listening, they gain valuable information, and begin to understand their opponent/partner's feelings, needs, and objectives. Then, the parties *blend* by acknowledging and appreciating their partner's view. They *redirect* their partner's energy by offering their own view and focusing the conflict energy on solutions that are mutually beneficial.

When I'm with workshop participants, or coaching clients to resolve a conflict, I introduce them to the martial art and the metaphor, and then invite them to partner in aikido movements that simulate the stated problem. Through visual and kinesthetic experiences, both parties gain insight into their behavioral patterns and, more importantly, how they might respond more effectively.

By practicing hands-on exercises as well as developing an understanding of the underlying aikido intention of disarming without harm

through entering, blending, and redirection, individuals and organizations regain composure and move from adversarial to partnering relationships. When conflict is reframed as a normal part of life that can be skillfully managed and transformed, relationships mend, and team members learn to discuss and resolve issues rather than avoid them.

An Aikido Lexicon

In my twenty-five-plus years of practicing aikido, I've come to see the world so thoroughly through the aikido lens that I sometimes forget that others don't speak this language. Here are a few key words and phrases from my aikido practice, and how I use them in this book:



- ☞ **On the mat:** Aikidoists practice on a firm but springy mat so we can learn how to take the beautiful falls aikido is known for. We fall down and get up again approximately 150 times a night. Falling and bouncing back is one way we blend with and receive our partner's energy. When we're "on the mat," we're learning techniques, so I use this phrase when I'm speaking about actual physical aikido or the metaphorical "mat" of the coaching session.
- ☞ **Off the mat:** I use this phrase when talking about the opportunities life offers to practice aikido verbally and relationally every day. When I find myself in a difficult life situation, I practice "off the mat" aikido. I ask myself, "Am I trying to win an argument at any cost, or am I interested in hearing my conflict partner out so that we can try and reach an agreement?" "Am I perceiving feedback as criticism or as potentially useful information?" "How do I blend with and redirect a verbal insult?"
- ☞ **Ki:** Translations of this word include "energy," "power," and "life force." It is the Japanese equivalent of *ch'i*, as in *tai chi* or *qi*, as in *qi gong*. In my work, I use it to mean the life

force that connects us and influences everything we do. My ki (pronounced “key”) can expand or contract, depending on the circumstances and my conscious intention. When I walk into a room, my ki influences that room, just as my ki is influenced by the people in it. We’re always giving and receiving ki. Practicing aikido off the mat means I’m aware and purposeful in my giving and receiving.

- ☞ **Dojo:** The dojo is where we practice aikido; it is the space where we get on the mat and learn aikido techniques. This can be a literal dojo (a school or studio such as our Portsmouth Aikido dojo) or a metaphorical dojo (such as a coaching session).
- ☞ **Attack:** Because aikido is a martial art, I use what one colleague describes as “fighting language.” Because of some of the images we see, hear, experience, and turn away from in our often adversarial culture, words such as attack, opponent, adversary, and power are laden with connotations and weight. For me, however, the word *attack* is fairly neutral—it simply describes energy coming toward me. On the mat, this can be a physical attack in the form of a grab or strike. Off the mat, when I use the word, it may include harsh feedback, demeaning language, or a difficult person or attitude, but not a physical attack.
- ☞ **Centered presence:** When I’m centered and present, I am confident, flexible, focused, calm, and prepared for any eventuality. My conflict buttons can’t be pushed; they are removed when I’m centered. Instead, I’m connected to something bigger: my personal power and life purpose. *Mindfulness* is another way to describe this mind-body state, and aikido is just one way of finding it.
- ☞ **Purpose:** I use the word *purpose* intentionally and in similar ways throughout the book. In my life and work, I find that clarity of purpose is instrumental to the effective resolution of any conflict and an essential element for accomplishing anything of importance, such as holding a difficult conversation, cultivating a relationship, or creating a life. Purpose

is the first strategy on the 6-Step Checklist in Chapter 5. Each component of our four-phase process begins with a Primary Purpose. And, as you will see, an individual's ability to clarify their purpose for entering this process is a contributing factor in its successful completion.

I'll explain other words and phrases as we go along.

As with any other metaphor, aikido words and phrases help us understand our stories about conflict in ways that are different and unfamiliar, allowing us to step out of our story and see our patterns and habitual reactions anew. Stepping back lets us see more clearly.

Aikido is also:

- ☞ A visual and kinesthetic expression of moving off a point of view in order to see another—a best-practice concept found throughout conflict resolution theory and practice.
- ☞ A demonstration of how to remain simultaneously powerful and flexible when faced with difficulty—a foundational life skill.
- ☞ A different way to view conflict—as something to be embraced and utilized for the benefit of all involved.

Aikido Is a Practical Tool

Over the years, the practice of aikido became for me a practical tool for both physical self-defense and managing everyday conflict—the clashes of personalities, ideas, goals, roles, and worldviews we experience at work and at home. Along the way, the daily repetition of physical technique embedded aikido principles into my very cells. While it's true that conflict still exists in my life (just ask my family and friends), the aikido metaphor makes it easier to address. Adversaries become partners in problem-solving. Contests of will appear as opportunities to find common ground. And the energy of attack is just a gift in disguise.

Although the idea of aikido may seem exotic or unduly daunting, you are practicing aikido whenever you listen with curiosity to an opposing view, or search for mutual understanding, respect,

and purpose. Aikido happens any time you stop, take a breath, and choose a centered state of being. No matter how you approach it, whether physically or conceptually, aikido offers a unique blend of power and grace. In life, the aikido metaphor is realized when you sense the learning opportunity in conflict and adapt to new circumstances with ease, moving with life's flow instead of struggling against it.

Whether I'm presenting workshops, coaching, or writing, this martial art permeates my thinking and teaching. I offer "Aikido Off the Mat" lessons throughout the book to broaden your understanding of the martial art as well as the work you and your employees are doing, and to have some fun. As we go along, you'll learn how the aikido lens can be useful in every corner of life without ever physically getting on the mat.

The Four Phases

This book is organized in phases, similar to how aikido is practiced as a martial art. On the mat, I:

1. **Bow in.** I bow in to the space with respect and gratitude for what I'll learn there, bringing myself fully into my surroundings and knowing that my intention will affect my practice.
2. **Enter and blend.** I acquire techniques to enter and blend with each opponent's energy, for the purpose of aligning, joining, and harnessing that energy rather than resisting it.
3. **Redirect.** I learn to redirect my opponent's energy toward a peaceful and sustainable resolution to the conflict. I turn an enemy into an ally.
4. **Bow out.** I bow out at the end, offering thanks to my partners and teachers, knowing there is more to learn.

The four phases comprise a practical handbook for addressing the questions leaders may have when employees vital to the organization don't get along:

- ☞ "Should I intervene?"
- ☞ "Do I bring them together or work with them individually?"

- ☞ “What do I say?”
- ☞ “How do I ensure cooperation and positive results?”
- ☞ “What tools, skills, and practices will help me?”

The phases and chapters help you organize your intervention. You can follow them in the order I offer here or start where you feel most comfortable. The phases merge and overlap, and that’s okay. That’s the way conflict resolution happens: You move with the energy in the room.

When I write about measuring the parties’ abilities in Chapter 3, for example, I’m also inviting you to think about skill development, which is the focus of later chapters. To teach communication effectiveness, you need skills in emotion management and centered presence. To make these skills easy to absorb, I outline them in separate chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) when in reality, they aren’t separate at all. The first phase, Work on Yourself Alone, is an ongoing directive that permeates every phase and chapter.

We look at ways you can implement each step in your workplace. And, there’s a handy quick-reference guide at the end of the book. Each phase has a specific focus.

Phase 1: Bowing In

In Chapter 1, you build your personal competency and mindset for reframing conflict as opportunity—the understanding that conflict is real and inevitable, and that its energy can be an opening to learn, grow, and change if we see the possibilities it offers.

You’ll learn how, as an individual and facilitator of the process, your attitude toward what’s happening in a conflict makes all the difference. You’ll also identify the conflict management skills and centered presence to help you be effective and purposeful in working with the conflicting parties. This chapter is the key to increasing your leadership presence, resilience, and ability to manage the unexpected—assets that make everything about your job easier and more satisfying.

Because the concept of a learning mindset is integral to conflict resolution and an extension of centered presence, it is developed further

in Chapter 4, where you'll find activities to reinforce this learning mindset with the people you're coaching.

Phase 2: Entering and Blending (Individual Sessions)

Phase 2 is your entry into the conflict. My experience is that it's important not to bring the parties together at first, but to meet with them individually for a few sessions to understand the conflict from both viewpoints and to see what each person wants and needs in order to move forward. Chapter 2 offers overarching themes and helpful behaviors for these individual sessions. The goal is for the parties to have time and space to tell their version of the conflict story as well as how it is affecting them and their work.

During the individual sessions, the parties also begin to gain appreciation for their conflict partner's side of things and prepare to enter the next phase of setting their differences aside.

In Chapter 3, you determine if the parties are committed to the process, help them find their motivation, and develop an alternate plan if they're unwilling or unable to move forward.

Once you know you have willing participants, Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the core of the model: building awareness and skills in centered presence, emotion management, purposeful communication, and problem-solving.

Phase 3: Redirecting (Joint Sessions)

When you're ready to bring the parties together, Phase 3 shows you how to start and follow the process to a successful resolution.

Chapter 6 offers ways to make sure the first joint session is a success. In Chapter 7, you find topics and questions that build rapport, keep conversations flowing, and smoothly broach areas of the conflict that are ready to be resolved. In addition, you see how to stimulate further conversation about people's values, new wisdom gained, and what a sustainable resolution looks like.

If you decide to document and catalog the sessions' accomplishments in a final letter of agreement, Chapter 8 offers tips for doing so.

Phase 4: Bowing Out

In the aikido metaphor, the coaching sessions represent the mat, and our conflict parties are “on the mat” in the sense that they’re learning and practicing techniques to manage conflict as individuals and in relationships. The parties are learning to “dance” together in a new, more cooperative way.

Life and work being what they are, when the process ends, people are often tempted to fall into old patterns. It’s important that the parties leave with agreements, written or otherwise, about how to follow up and continue working with each other. This last phase of our process takes the practice off the mat and into the workplace.

When the coaching process is finished and the pressure returns, the parties need ways to manage the emotions that inevitably recur. Chapter 8 is about fostering accountability and continuing to build the relationship by exploring future challenges and planning follow-up reinforcement.

Getting on the Mat

I include many examples to illustrate the book’s focus. Each scenario comes from an actual facilitation in my work with clients. Names and aspects of the narratives have been changed, but the process is representative of what occurred, demonstrating how each part of the intervention played out.

Each chapter describes a component of the intervention (Primary Purpose, Preparation, and Agenda) and detailed coaching instructions.

With this in mind, I hope you’re ready to jump in. You can use the book in various ways, depending on your goals and needs. For example, you can:

- ☞ Start with Phase 1 and read the entire book.
- ☞ Review the Purpose, Preparation, and Agenda at the beginning of each chapter.
- ☞ Skim the end-of-chapter summaries, or go directly to the quick-reference guide at the end of the book, where I offer a “lite” version of the four-phase process.

- ☞ Jump to specific chapters that will help you address an urgent situation.
- ☞ Use the book to refresh, reinforce, and expand your already existing skill set by looking at it through the aikido lens.

Whatever approach you choose, you'll soon be on the path to resolving workplace conflict as well as creating more peace and productivity. This approach is founded on the premise that you can help resolve employee conflict with conscious intention and some key skills, which are translatable and transferable. This represents an investment of time and energy, and it is worthwhile work. Your willingness to begin, this book, and the resources it provides combine to offer a path to positive improvement in your people and your workplace.

Are you ready for things to change?

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PHASE 1
BOWING IN



Your goal is to use yourself intentionally as an instrument of influence in the process.

1 WORK ON YOURSELF ALONE

With life comes conflict. We must learn to joyfully dance on a shifting carpet.

—Thomas Crum, *The Magic of Conflict*

Primary Purpose

Working on yourself is ongoing, foundational, and critical to maintaining the presence, power, and purpose required of you as you help your employees regain balance and centered presence with each other. In this phase, you determine your motivation for learning how to facilitate conflicts on your team, knowing that your intention and clarity are important to the success of the intervention. You also develop and maintain a positive mindset and learning orientation toward what is to follow.

Preparation

Consider your purpose for beginning the intervention. Refer to Appendix A, “Before Action Review,” on pages XX–XX for help with this step.

- ☞ Clarify your desired outcomes for each individual, yourself, and the organization.
- ☞ Be aware of your assumptions, judgments, and concerns.
- ☞ Be open to surprises.
- ☞ Enter with optimism for a positive outcome.

Agenda

- ↻ A Positive Mindset
- ↻ Centered Presence
- ↻ Personal Power
- ↻ Clarity of Purpose
- ↻ Practices and Attitudes to Maximize Presence, Power, and Purpose
- ↻ Practices and Attitudes Detrimental to the Process
- ↻ Before You Engage
- ↻ Understand the Process

I was hired by a multi-disciplinary healthcare practice to help three physicians resolve an organizational conflict. Because of his reputation as a dominating, perfectionistic figure, I entered my first meeting with Douglas, the lead physician, with some trepidation. The purpose of this session was to show Douglas the results of the 360-Degree Conflict Dynamics Profile he had recently completed.

To make sure I was prepared, I studied the results of his profile carefully and thought through how I would present the data, some of which I was fairly sure he would not agree with or want to hear. Working on myself alone, I also took a moment to envision a productive session, reminding myself to center periodically, keep a positive mindset, and be prepared for anything. Sure enough, I arrived at our scheduled time and ended up waiting forty minutes before Douglas called me in.

I said hello. Douglas did not reply. In his office, there was a desk and one chair—his. A couch stood perpendicular to and across the room from the desk. As he sat down, he directed his body toward the desk and away from me. I asked if we could sit so he could see the materials. He waved his hand, indicating that things were fine as they were.

This fascinating beginning seemed filled with breeches of professional courtesy. Here I was, asked to make a presentation to

someone who seemed only remotely interested in the content. By his conscious or unconscious design, his behavior communicated that he held the power, that my report and I were meaningless intrusions on a busy day, and that the sooner this was over, the sooner he could get back to important items on his agenda.

I realized that to do the job for which I was hired, I had to take charge of the environment in a more purposeful way. I took a conscious breath and thought about aikido and how I might align with Douglas's energy.

I stated what I thought I was there to do and asked if he saw things in a similar way. (Yes, he did. Excellent.) I explained that it was important for him to be able to see the data in the report and follow along. I opened the door to his office, found a chair in the hall, carried it over to his desk, and positioned it so we were now side by side.

Next, I invited his energy with open-ended questions. What did he think was the purpose for our session? What would be his ideal outcome? Which parts of the instrument interested him most?

Gradually, by remaining centered, curious, non-judgmental, and true to purpose, I began to redirect Douglas toward being my ally in attempting to solve a problem. Little by little, Douglas joined me in that endeavor. He saw I was not there to expose or criticize, but to support him.

It was a valuable learning experience in the ways we can shape relationships by the way we show up.

A Positive Mindset

No one learns as much about a subject as one who is forced to teach it.

— Peter Drucker

Research shows that a manager's attitude toward a conflict is crucial to how the impasse is resolved. In 2016, the *International Journal of Conflict Management* cited an Australian study of 401 employees in sixty-nine work groups. The study was designed to investigate what

happens when a third-party supervisor intervenes to help manage a conflict. In cases where employees had a supervisor with a positive conflict-management style (CMS) the result was reduced anxiety, depression, and bullying. In addition, researchers discovered a strong connection between a positive CMS and a decrease in the number of times employees thought about filing a workers' compensation claim.

Especially in situations with a lot of history and high emotion, before you can successfully guide others through a conflict, you must first examine your own attitude, emotions, and beliefs around what is possible and understand what your role is in bringing out those possibilities.

I call this way of self-reflecting “working on yourself alone,” a concept from the writings of Arnold and Amy Mindell, founders of the Process Work approach to resolving conflict.

“Working on myself alone” means observing the mindset with which I come into the process of resolving a conflict. For example, what judgments might I have made about Douglas when I first entered the room with him? I could have seen him as trying to diminish me and devalue my attempts at support. Instead, I changed my mindset to appreciate his unfamiliarity with this process, which increased my ability to redirect his behavior by helping him understand the process.

As you begin to work with your employees, are you looking forward to supporting them? What judgments are you making? What is your attitude toward each one?

The skill- and rapport-building sessions that you conduct with the parties involved in the conflict offer continuous opportunities to notice your beliefs, assumptions, and emotions. Who you are and how you choose to be present with the parties help determine the success of the endeavor. Your goal is to use yourself intentionally as an instrument of influence in the process. If you become uncentered at any point—for example, by losing your composure or becoming emotionally triggered—it's important that you find your way back. By training yourself to notice your own anger, judgment, blame, and premature conclusions, you can learn to let them go and return to supporting the parties and the process.

Knowing about the ways in which my presence can affect the process, I continually cultivate an awareness of my own physical and

mental behavior as I lead an intervention. By lead, I don't mean control. I ask honest, open-ended questions, listen non-judgmentally, stay centered and curious, and always keep purpose in mind. I smile a lot. I work to minimize nervousness, fear, and judgment in the room, and I find things I like and appreciate in each of the parties.

My posture, demeanor, eye contact, and even the way I walk into the room speak volumes. As I learned with Douglas, my belief in whether this is a learning experience with a positive outcome or a situation fraught with challenge is communicated before I say a word. Consequently, I look for positive benefits and believe in the learning that will take place. I can't pretend. I have to truly believe the intervention benefits the parties involved and that I am a supportive factor in facilitating the resolution of the conflict. My mindset is a principal ally throughout this process, as it is in life.

Mirror Neurons

In the last part of the twentieth century, scientists discovered neurons in the human brain that mimic the actions and emotions of those around us. For example, when one person's face reflects frustration, the neurons identified with those facial movements also fire in an observer's brain, eliciting similar emotions. For this reason, these neurons were named "mirror neurons." In the Harvard Business Review's "Social Intelligence and the Biology of Leadership," Daniel Goleman and Richard Boyatzis write: "When we consciously or unconsciously detect someone else's emotions through their actions, our mirror neurons reproduce those emotions. Collectively, these neurons create an instant sense of shared experience."

In one of the more amazing studies referenced by Goleman and Boyatzis, a group of employees received positive feedback from a leader who exhibited negative emotions (narrowed eyes, frowning) during the feedback session. Even though the feedback was positive, these employees reported feeling worse about their performance than employees who received negative feedback given with a positive affect (head nodding, smiles).

Clearly, the way in which the message is delivered has more impact than the message itself.

Presence, Power, and Purpose

As you work on yourself alone, there are three nonverbal qualities you bring with you at every phase of the process:

1. Your centered presence
2. Your personal power
3. Your clarity of purpose

As we go forward, these three qualities help you manage your mindset and behavior. They are your guides when questions arise and decisions are made. When you feel you've lost your way, let these qualities bring you back to where you need to be. The steps in this process are not as important as how you enact the steps, and my practice in aikido informs how I understand and embody these qualities.

Centered Presence

Underlying and connecting all aspects of the aikido-conflict metaphor is the ability to direct our life energy consciously and intentionally. Call it what you will—self-control, composure, mindfulness—your ability to manage *you* is where it all begins. On the aikido mat, when the attack comes, we learn to “center and extend ki.” (Remember: *Ki* is the Japanese word for “energy” or “universal life force.”) To be centered in this sense means to be balanced, calm, and connected to an inner source of power. In life as in aikido, when you're centered, you are more effective, capable, and in control.

When you center and extend ki, you increase your ability to influence your environment and your relationships. An awareness of how you are managing your energy is vital in helping others manage conflict.

Personal Power

In your role as manager, parent, partner, or workmate, have you noticed how you influence a conversation by your presence in it? We are always influencing, because we're always giving and receiving energy. When you enter the room, the energy in that room changes. The more intentional you can be with your energy—by purposefully extending your ki—the more influence you have in the outcome of

events. In other words, by observing and drawing on your personal power—your *ki*—you enhance your ability to bring about your stated purpose.

Aikido Off the Mat: Personal Power and Intentionality

As you coach your conflicted employees, apply your growing awareness of centered presence and personal power as follows.

Before each session, whether individual or joint, do a mental assessment: Are you worried things will go badly, or are you planning for them to go well?

Your primary job is to believe with confidence that the outcome is not predetermined, and that the conflict is actually potential energy you and your employees can harness toward a positive result. This is where your power lies.

More than likely, the employee is nervous and worried. If you enter the session with fear, judgment, or tension, you're setting the stage for an unhappy outcome. If, on the other hand, you approach the conversation with an optimistic, hopeful mindset, you foster more of the same. When you offer assurances that the individual can benefit from the process and be able to make the necessary changes, you encourage trust.

If you don't have this positive mindset, you must re-examine your purpose and work on yourself to find the mindset you need. Or, alternatively, you can call on another party to manage the intervention.

Clarity of Purpose

As you move toward intervention, consider your purpose for doing so. Some purposes are more useful than others. From the following list, choose the ones you think are useful and the ones you think might not be.

- ☞ Help the parties learn that conflict can lead to greater understanding of each other as well as a more productive and positive workplace.

- ☞ Make sure these people get over their difficulty and stop acting out.
- ☞ Change the relationship in any way I can.
- ☞ Help the parties see and maximize what they have in common as well as leverage their differences.
- ☞ Get through this situation as quickly as possible.

You may laugh at some of these examples, but purposes can be hidden. For example, I may think my purpose is to communicate a difference of opinion, but hidden in the background is an intention to make sure you know how angry I am. Or I may say I want to help the parties use the conflict to learn about each other and create a more positive workplace, but my actions say I just want to get through this and move on to more important things.

What do you really want for yourself, the parties involved, and the organization? What is your highest and best purpose? Continually clarify your purpose, and keep it at the forefront of each session you conduct.

Practices and Attitudes to Maximize Presence, Power, and Purpose

Bringing the three qualities of centered presence, personal power, and clarity of purpose to a conflict situation is easier said than done. Conflict usually robs us of all three, as we struggle to do the right thing, find the perfect answer, and maintain psychological safety and equilibrium.

Fortunately, conflict can also provide the perfect crucible to practice bringing these vital qualities to any situation. On the following pages, I discuss ways of acting and being that I've discovered add to my power and presence as well as help me return to purpose when things get difficult.

1. Reframing

In aikido, it's often said that the opponent's attack is a gift of energy. At first glance, it is difficult to imagine conflict or aggression as a

gift. In many cases, I would rather not have to deal with a problem. Nevertheless, it is present and taking up mental space. The question becomes: Should I waste valuable life energy (ki) wishing it away, or should I turn it into a positive force?

After many years of practicing and teaching aikido, and applying its principles in the workplace, I've found that things change dramatically when I reframe an attack as incoming energy that can be guided toward a mutually supportive outcome. In aikido, my goal is to keep myself safe while supporting my opponent-partner. Regardless of my partner's intention, mine is clear: I intend to disarm without harming and guide the energy toward a mutual purpose (the key word here is "mutual"). Enter, blend, and redirect. The spirit in which the coaching is entered into makes a huge difference.

When dealing with your employee conflict, you can use the conflict energy to reframe the problem in the following way.

This conflict is an opportunity for both parties:

- ☞ To change their relationship for the better
- ☞ To learn valuable work and life skills
- ☞ To see each other's positive aspects
- ☞ To step into leadership roles and model conflict competency in the organization
- ☞ To solve problems together using their differences as assets
- ☞ All of these statements could also be useful purposes for your intervention.

2. Possibility

When coaching people in conflict, I ask what possibilities exist for each of the participants as well as how the resolution affects the larger team and organization. Although you may be working with just two people, a positive change in their relationship can create constructive waves throughout the system. For example, dialogue may flow more freely between all team members when the logjam of this particular relationship is cleared. Time and energy previously claimed by the conflict is released and freed up for the people and processes that need them.

It's the coach's role to help everyone see how a positive outcome liberates untapped potential—for the parties in the conflict and for others. Wherever possible, I recommend documenting drained resources, reduced momentum, and other hidden or indirect costs that are likely to improve when the conflict is resolved.

When John joined Taylor's department in their company's regional production center, they somehow got off on the wrong foot. Their work stalled, productivity suffered, and their teammates first avoided the conflict then polarized around it.

I worked with John and Taylor individually for three months, helping them to build skills and see each other differently. Then, the three of us held several joint sessions. We discussed behaviors that had caused difficulty, and worked through how John and Taylor would manage their interactions going forward. Last, we brought the rest of the team into the conversation by being transparent about the process and inviting them to support John and Taylor in their new relationship.

When I later followed up with the manager, she reported that teamwork became more relaxed, easy, and open as the men freed themselves from the conflict that had immobilized everyone.

3. Non-Judgment

When you coach, if at any point you start to draw conclusions about which party is right and which is wrong, it becomes difficult to do your job effectively. If you judge one of the parties as the problem, it will be hard for you to see their positive intent. And you may miss constructive actions or recast neutral behaviors in unhelpful ways.

As human beings, we are practiced at forming judgments about everything, and we're usually unaware we're doing it. For example, if I have a workshop to give and there's a blizzard raging, I automatically judge this as a bad thing. When I make this assessment, my body tenses, my mood deteriorates, and I become angry. This doesn't change the weather—it is what it is. I still have to decide what action

to take. Do I cancel the workshop or continue as planned? Seeing the weather as a neutral event reduces my stress level, saves time, and improves my ability to make a wise decision.

Aikido Off the Mat: The Practice of Non-Judgment



As you work on yourself alone, you can apply the aikido principles of entering, blending, and redirecting to the practice of non-judgment with increasing inner awareness.

The first step is to enter—to notice that you're judging and witness your judging mind at work. Then blend or align with the judgment—determine if it's accurate, helpful, or useful. Regardless of its accuracy, judgment hampers your ability to facilitate the process. Instead, redirect your mind toward curiosity and openness. Think about what skills each party needs and how they can attain them.

The power of non-judgment becomes clear when you see others changed by it. As they learn non-judgment from you, the individuals in a coaching process become more open to each other and more willing to entertain each other's positive intent. People begin to see themselves and others as more generous, kind, and forgiving.

I have a colleague who models non-judgment extremely well. She's a great listener who seldom offers advice, instead preferring to ask questions that promote reflection. In one case, she was coaching two women who had been workplace adversaries for a long time. With my colleague's help, they eventually found a new way

to interact. A few weeks after the coaching process ended, one of the women reported back to my colleague: “I don’t know what you did to us, but I’ve hated her for ten years, and I actually like her now.”

What my colleague did was to listen without judgment until two women felt fully heard. The power of non-judgment is tangible and communicable.

4. Curiosity and Inquiry

More than anything else, a mindset of curiosity and inquiry empowers you and keeps your conversations safe and on track. When the atmosphere in an intervention becomes charged with emotion, I practice using the aikido principles of entering, blending, and redirecting by asking open-ended questions, such as:

- ☞ “How did you feel when that happened?”
- ☞ “What were you hoping for?”
- ☞ “What do you think your coworker’s intention was?”
- ☞ “What was your intention?”

A previous client of mine—while technically savvy and an outstanding leader in a Fortune 100 company—found it difficult to practice curiosity and was easily triggered by behavior she considered irritating. In one session, we talked about a colleague’s email etiquette. The colleague’s penchant for copying a long list of people on every email angered my client, particularly when the email reflected poorly on the department. During one practice session, I asked the client to devise questions she could ask her colleague to understand the intent behind copying so many people. One question she came up with was, “Why did you copy everyone on that email?”

The content of the question was fine, but as we role-played asking it, my client sounded confrontational. I asked if she noticed the tone of her delivery (she did) and what would have to change for her to ask the question in an open, curious way. She answered, smiling, “I’d actually have to be curious.” We both laughed as she absorbed the “aha moment.” It’s not what we say, but whether we’re curious or judging when we say it.

When you feel judgmental, shift your mindset. Get curious. Ponder. Wonder. The more you practice this important skill, the more you'll learn about each person's perspective. And the more you model it for others, the more you encourage their curiosity.

5. Appreciation

Appreciative Inquiry is another example of aikido in the workplace, one that maximizes the power of noticing what is already working rather than focusing on what is broken. Since David Cooperrider introduced the concept in 1987, organizations and individuals have been using Appreciative Inquiry to solve problems and imagine what could be. Practitioners have learned that as soon as you align with the positive, you gain energy and move toward a compelling future.

A concrete example of Appreciative Inquiry happens every time a beginner learns a new technique on the aikido mat. Invariably, the new technique is easier to do on one side of the body than the other. Instead of trying to fix the “bad” side, the instructor tells the student to focus on the “good” side (the side that can do the technique effortlessly). Since that side knows how to do it, aikido instructors say to “let the good side teach the other side.”

In my coaching interventions, I encourage people to appreciate what's positive and learn from it. For example, when coaching Douglas and his colleagues at their healthcare practice, I learned there were often times when the team collaborated without conflict. I inquired what it was about these situations that allowed the team to work together harmoniously. At first they weren't sure, but with some reflection, it came to light that when things flowed more easily, the teammates were clear on their roles and the purpose for the endeavor. Ah! Clarity of roles and goals! We began to investigate how the team could be clearer about roles and goals in other situations.

When you help your employees focus on the good, you reinforce their strengths, knowledge, and positive attributes. When they find the areas in which they work well together, coworkers can apply that awareness to areas in which they have difficulty. Setbacks, too, are part of the process and teach us what needs to happen next. Throughout the coaching, whether you're reinforcing strengths or acknowledging a

challenging setback, you can appreciate the employees' commitment as they build a new relationship and foundation for solving future problems.

Practices and Attitudes That are Detrimental to the Process

Harried, overworked, and overwhelmed as we are, we often experience our students, patients, clients, colleagues, and children as difficult, irresponsible, rude, dull, or simply too numerous to keep track of. But if we mean to choose the world, we must see God in the people who come under our care. That is, we must see them as at bottom no different from ourselves.

—Philip Simmons, *Learning to Fall*

Just as certain practices and mindsets promote success in managing conflict, others can derail the process. Have you ever found yourself uttering the following phrases—or thinking them? I know I have. Consider the phrases and their antidotes.

This is not my job.

This is exactly your job. As a supervisor, manager, owner, or CEO, you are a leader—and leaders lead. You show the way. You model. You put forth a vision and invite others to join in.

This is why it's vital to manage your attitude for maximum power and presence, and to keep your purpose in mind. If you don't feel ready to lead in this way, consider calling in someone else you believe is right for the job.

I don't have the skills to do this.

This may be true. If so, this is a great opportunity for you to learn the skills to become a more effective, respected, and responsible manager. Through your learning, you will increase trust and build influence with your team.

This will take too much time.

Even when you know the importance of actively addressing workplace conflict, you may wonder where to find the time. Ask yourself:

- ☞ How much is the conflict costing in wasted hours, lost or unhappy staff and/or customers, and stifled creativity?

- ☞ Are you waking up at night wondering what to do?
- ☞ Do you avoid certain meetings because of the conflict?
- ☞ Is the tension affecting others?
- ☞ Does the conflict limit the team's ability to accomplish goals?
- ☞ In my experience, it takes more time not to resolve conflict than to address it.

Whatever time the process takes will be less than the time you, your customers, and your company lose in reduced productivity and goodwill. In my experience, it takes more time *not* to resolve conflict than to address it.

They should just rise above it.

I've heard this phrase too many times to count; your staff would if they could.

I recently conducted a series of coaching sessions with two employees of a food manufacturing company. As I met with the employees individually, they each told me that when they asked their manager for help, he suggested they "just rise above it." They said they tried, but they didn't know how. Just being in each other's presence was enough to shut down conversation and workflow.

If your employees could make wiser choices, they would. It helps the process immeasurably when you believe your employees are doing the best they can with the skills they have and help them acquire the skills they currently lack.

What's wrong with these people?!

Ask instead: "What do they need to help them through this?" "What are they blind to?" "How can I help them see what they're missing?"

They're mean, disrespectful, and hurtful.

They're unskilled.

When you reframe negative intent as a need for skill-building, you shift from judge to coach. You also see what the people in conflict really want (recognition, support, autonomy, and inclusion) and how their (sometimes misguided) attempts to achieve these goals have an

unexpected, negative impact. Being able to reframe the situation also means you can help your team get where they want to go more effectively.

In the aikido school I founded, Sam practiced with us for a number of years. In the beginning, no one liked seeing him in class. He usually came in late, during pre-class meditation time, when the rest of us were sitting quietly on the mat. Sam would enter, drop his large key ring noisily on a chair, sigh or make some other attention-grabbing sound, and after much ado, finally bow onto the mat and join us. Another of Sam's regrettable habits was to insinuate his way into private conversations. He was not well liked, and yet he came to every class and seemed committed to learning aikido.

I let things go for a while, not knowing what to do ("This is not my job!") and harboring my own judgments about Sam ("What's wrong with this person?! He's so disrespectful!").

In time, I realized it was my job. I was the chief instructor and owner of the school. If I didn't address this difficult situation, the class environment would deteriorate. I also changed my story about Sam. Instead of seeing only a disruptive influence, I imagined a more positive intention. Maybe he was seeking attention and just wanted to fit in. So I gave Sam some attention in the form of a brief conversation after class one day. I explained the impact of his behavior on the other students, while also appreciating his commitment to learning aikido. He took it well, and told me he had no idea he was so noisy and didn't mean to be disrespectful. He only wanted to make new friends. Unfortunately, he was going about it in all the wrong ways, leaving a wide gap between intent and impact. After our conversation, he made an effort to fit in differently and his relationships improved.

Before You Engage

To give yourself the best chance at success as you begin to engage with the parties in conflict, answer the following questions. Continually

hold them in your awareness for each session, but especially for the initial meeting.

What is the purpose of the intervention? What do I really want—for each individual, for the relationship, and for the organization?

Imagine the ideal outcome for the intervention, and the ease and flow of each day once this difficulty has been resolved. How will the individuals interact, and how will the team and organization reflect the shift? The clearer and more detailed the vision, the more likely it will come to be.

Am I contributing to the problem?

Your actions may have unknowingly helped the situation develop. For example, have you avoided talking with the parties? Have you fallen victim to one or more of the detrimental attitudes listed earlier in this section? It's only human nature to hope people will "rise above it," to think you "don't have the skills," or to worry this course of action will take "too much time."

Once you determine your contribution to the conflict, you can more clearly see how you can help resolve it.

What actions have I already taken that have helped or hindered?

Review the conversations you've had with each party prior to the session. What went well? Looking forward, what will you do differently?

What is the best alternative to a successful resolution of the conflict?

If the parties are unable to reach an amicable way to work together and take their relationship to the next level, what is Plan B? How will you implement it? Is this alternative something you will share with the participants or hold in reserve?

Understand the Process

What you're about to undertake is a process of coaching, facilitation, and conflict resolution. It requires time, energy, and commitment.

Your greatest asset is the quality of your being: centered presence, personal power, and clarity of purpose. Everything else is secondary. Your influence originates in your attitude, thoughts, posture, and breath. When you pause for reflection, so does everyone else. When you shift from certainty to curiosity—and from judgment to appreciation—others also relax and become more centered. The change in energy is palpable and profound.

If you believe in the process and your people, you will lead them to a satisfying conclusion.

Key Points

- ↻ Working on yourself is ongoing and foundational for you to help your employees come to center.
- ↻ Centered presence, personal power, and clarity of purpose are integral to every phase of the conflict resolution process.
- ↻ Underlying and connecting all aspects of the aikido-conflict metaphor is the ability to direct your life energy in a conscious and purposeful way.
- ↻ It is necessary to clarify your purpose for the intervention and to keep this purpose at the forefront of each session.
- ↻ Certain attitudes maximize presence, power, and purpose. Conversely, there are attitudes that are detrimental to the process.

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As a coach, it's important to curb your well-intentioned impulse to solve the problem.

One of the simplest ways to practice the alignment of aikido is to listen with interest to people's stories.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Judy Ringer is the author of *Unlikely Teachers: Finding the Hidden Gifts in Daily Conflict*—a book of stories, practices, and inspiration on turning life’s challenges into life teachers—and author and narrator of “Managing Conflict in the Workplace: An Aiki Approach” CD, in which she answers frequently asked questions and offers practical advice about transforming conflict in the workplace.

A skilled vocalist and National Anthem singer, Judy has performed in many venues, including singing The Star Spangled Banner for the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park. She is the producer of the CDs “Simple Gifts: Making the Most of Life’s Ki Moments” and “This Little Light: The Gift of Christmas,” in which she narrates stories from her blog and sings familiar standards from the Great American Songbook.

The owner of Power & Presence Training and founder of Portsmouth Aikido, Judy provides conflict, communication, and presentation skills training internationally using principles from the martial art aikido, in which she holds a third-degree black belt.

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Born and raised in the Chicago area, Judy's adopted home is Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where she lives with her husband Jim.