



EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NEEDS

Well, maybe not everything. But a lot. And the one thing that can help you transform conflict into collaboration.

Conflict is part of life

Many nonprofit leaders struggle with conflict. Their CEO yells at them. Or their supervisor keeps piling things on top of their already too-long to-do list. Maybe their colleague does something that seems to undermine their authority. Or their team members complain about each other on a daily basis.

As a result, they go home overwhelmed. They don't have the energy to play with their kids. They get annoyed with their partner. They toss and turn at night rehashing the events of the day. Or they throw in the towel and look for another job. And some just grind their teeth and work 16 hours a day.

You might recognize this, even though the details might look different. Like many other people, you probably like conflict as much as rotten spinach. It stinks, is bad for your health, and leaves a bad taste in your mouth.

And even if you think conflict is a normal part of life, you probably weren't taught effective ways to deal with it. So you either avoid conflict and pretend everything is okay, or you get at it with full force and are perceived as aggressive.

When our go-to strategy is more on the sub-assertive side, we focus on the relationship but cover up the issue. When our strategy leans more to the aggressive side, we address the issue, often at the cost of the relationship. Oftentimes, we end up with less of a relationship and less of a resolved issue.

It doesn't have to be this way. Conflict is the normal clash between different assumptions, strategies, norms, and values. The problem is that we don't always know how to resolve those differences.

If you know how to uncover the underlying needs, you can use conflict to increase understanding between each other. As a result, you can improve your collaboration, harmonize your relationships, and have more energy to contribute to your mission, your organization, and your clients.

You can use the insights of this paper to help with that and develop your conflict resolution skills. And skills are like muscles: you need to train them to get stronger.

Everything you want to know about human, universal needs

Well, maybe not everything. But a lot.

The big thing is understanding that everything we think, say, and do is an attempt to meet a precious, universal, human need. Needs that we share throughout space and time.

People in China want respect, autonomy, and closeness just like people in Nigeria. 2000 Years ago the Romans wanted acceptance, understanding, and support, as do we. The Aztecs and the medieval Europeans all wanted emotional safety, meaning, and beauty.

[Marshall Rosenberg](#), the founder of Nonviolent Communication, listed 40 of them plus 7 headers. They are listed at the bottom of this paper. You can also use this [link to download and print them](#).

Stick it on your fridge, your bathroom mirror, put it under your pillow, or in your wallet, and memorize those 47 words to familiarize yourself with the words that describe what makes life more wonderful.

These universal, human, precious needs are the basis of our shared humanity.

We know what it is like to want love, closeness, and play, we can have empathy for others. We can put ourselves in someone else's shoes without thinking they are ours and running away with them.

We also know what it's like when our needs are not met. This inspires compassion, the longing to relieve suffering by trying to contribute to those needs.

Marshall believed, as do I, that we can meet all needs at the same time if we have enough creativity and support.

This is the good part. Read your next email to see why that doesn't always help with transforming conflict.

[Marshall's list with universal, human needs.](#)

Conflict arises at the level of strategies, not needs

So insight number one is that we share the same human, universal needs throughout space and time. Insight two is that we can meet all needs at the same time.

Insight three is that that is not necessarily true for strategies. Strategies are specific ways to meet needs. Needs are universal throughout space and time, strategies are idiosyncratic and dependent on who we are, where and when we live, and other personal circumstances.

We all want love, but not everyone wants to be married to my husband to meet that need. We all need food, but you might like steak and I prefer my vegan diet. Even though we all have a need for acceptance, being accepted by our peers is a strategy.

Conflict arises when we get só attached to our strategies that we are unwilling to think of other strategies to meet those needs. We get stuck in either/or. We either eat steak or tofu.

You might want to meet your need for safety by expanding the police force and privatizing jails. I might think that raising the minimum wage and providing mental health resources is a better strategy.

If we get stuck at the level of strategies we have a conflict. But if we see the universal, human need for safety underneath our preferred strategies, we can brainstorm other options.

We could provide mental health services in jail, teach the police mindfulness and empathy, or invest in neighborhoods. We can organize events that empower communities to self-organize. We can practice the insight of interbeing or take martial arts classes.

Make sure that you surface all the needs underneath the strategies: both at the content level and at the relational level. This is the first step in resolving conflict and transforming the either/or in and/and.

Tragic expression of unmet needs

Some strategies are a “tragic expression of unmet needs”: they meet the needs of one person, but not the needs of others.

Yelling, criticizing, blaming, demanding, judging, killing are all tragic expressions of unmet needs.

Your CEO might yell because they want more respect or understanding, but this probably doesn't meet your needs for emotional safety and consideration.

So what to do about that?

Our instinctual reaction might be withdrawal or counter-aggression, neither of which contributes to the relationship.

An alternative is to empathize, silently or out loud, and try to understand the precious, human, universal needs underneath this tragic expression of unmet needs.

If this is too big a challenge, you seek empathy for yourself first. Your CEO would not be your best choice, but you might have a friend who can listen to your frustration. Journaling, meditation, and the [Judge-Your-Neighbor](#) sheet from Byron Katie can also help.

With enough empathy, you can imagine strategies that would meet your needs. Maybe you want to tell your CEO how the yelling landed for you. Or you try to empathize again and understand the needs they were trying to meet with the behavior that didn't work for you. Or you hire a mediator.

You might even nurture a sense of compassion for their current inability to ask for their needs in a more wholesome way. They didn't have enough creativity and support to ask for support for their needs in an inclusive way.

This doesn't justify their current behavior, but it can diminish our judgment of them.

That's easier when we distinguish the behavior from the person. We can judge the behavior as inconsiderate and disrespectful, while we see, accept, and celebrate the precious, human, universal needs underneath the behavior that's bothering us.

In our final email tomorrow, you will read about what to do when nothing helps with transforming conflict into collaboration.

Protective Use of force

When we see strategies that harm others, we need an additional element to compassion and empathy: the protective use of force. This is the minimal amount of force we use to protect the needs of as many people as possible. This is especially relevant when we perceive urgency and ignorance.

A simple example is scooping up a child who is running into the street. We step over their need for play to meet our need for safety. We imagine the child doesn't understand they're at risk and cars might hit them before they see it. We can always take them to the backyard to play once we grabbed them but we can't if they were run over.

Protective use of force is different from punitive use of force: it is not to punish the person for being a bad person, it is to serve as many needs as possible.

We call it protective when we move people out of harm and explain the harm we feared. It becomes punitive when we tell them there is something wrong with them and we ascribe our fears to them as a person.

Protective use of force honors the distinction between the person and their behavior: what someone does is not who they are. This allows for the restoration of the relationship later on.

Speaking of relationships: a big shout out to [David Nayer, my husband](#), for contributing most of the ideas to this paragraph.

Next steps

Of course, this booklet is not gonna solve all your conflicts. Even if you know what to do, you might not know how to do it. If that's the case, you can [book a free, discovery call](#) with me to see how I can help.

HUMAN, UNIVERSAL NEEDS

Autonomy

- To choose one's dreams, goals, values
- To choose one's plan for fulfilling one's dreams, goals, values

Celebration

- To celebrate the creation of life and dreams fulfilled
- To celebrate losses: loved ones, dreams, etc. (mourning)

Integrity

- Authenticity
- Creativity
- Meaning
- Self-worth

Interdependence

- Acceptance
- Appreciation
- Closeness
- Community
- Contribution to the enrichment of life (to exercise one's power by giving that which contributes to life)
- Emotional safety
- Empathy
- Honesty (the empowering honesty that enables us to learn from our limitations)
- Love
- Reassurance
- Respect
- Support
- Trust
- Understanding
- Warmth

Play

- Fun
- Laughter

Spiritual Communion

- Beauty
- Harmony
- Inspiration
- Order
- Peace

Physical Nurturance

- Air
- Food
- Movement/Exercise
- Protection from life-threatening forms of life: viruses, bacteria, insects, predatory animals
- Rest
- Sexual expression
- Shelter
- Touch
- Water