



Cooling Off: a 15-minute Self-Coaching Process to Help You Face Conflict

Anyone can become angry—that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy.

Aristotle

Jean, a consultant, hired Mike, a database expert (not their real names), to set up a new database system for her office. The scope of the project ended up being much larger than originally expected, due to unforeseen events. Jean paid Mike the last installment of his fee before project completion, to compensate him for the extended time line. Right after he received his cheque, Mike disappeared. He didn't show up for their next meeting, nor did he return emails or phone calls. Jean became worried that something bad had happened. She went to his house and no one was home. After four weeks, he finally emailed Jean to say he had quit because she was too unprofessional.

At this point it would have been easy for Jean to fly off the handle and fire back an angry email. She knew, however, that would further alienate him. Jean needed him to finish the project, since no one else could do the job.

I coached her to do some inner preparation before responding to Mike. After this simple 15-minute process, Jean was able to approach Mike with an open mind and heart. As a result, Mike felt comfortable enough to share his reasons for abandoning the project. He was also able to take responsibility for his part in

the communication breakdown. Within a week, they worked out a win-win agreement that allowed Jean to get the project finished, and Mike to both save face and get fairly reimbursed for his efforts.

Feel free to use this process when you need to respond promptly to a conflict, and want to approach it from a more even-tempered, collaborative perspective.

*This is not the
time to be polite or
reasonable.*

PREPARING FOR CONFLICT

Part One:

Release the negative charge

a) **Voice and movement**

Find a safe way of releasing the negative emotions from your voice and body. For example, one client likes to let out one long, loud yell while tearing up a newspaper. Another client chops wood; another goes running.

b) **Reactions using "I" statements**

Write a whole page of sentences that begin something like this.

- I'm annoyed because . . .
- I'm upset because . . .
- I'm angry that . . .
- I hate it when . . .
- I'm frustrated with . . .
- I'm irritated when . . .
- I'm furious that . . .
- I'm bothered by . . .

No editing

Anything goes. This is not the time to be polite or reasonable. Tell your real feelings. No one else will see this piece of paper. Focus on how you feel. We are often tempted to blame others for the way we feel, but it is our interpretation and our thoughts that cause us to feel the way we do. It is important to take responsibility for that, up front.

Your feelings are always valid. You have a right to feel angry or hurt or irritated or anything. How you express your feelings, however, can be very important. In this first stage, it is essential to validate your own emotional response to help you move through it. If you judge your emotions, you cut them off, and that can be unhealthy for you and those to whom you relate.

c) **Destroy the paper**

After you have filled the page (write more than a page if you need to), tear that paper into as many pieces as you can. Walk over and put it in the garbage can. If possible, burn it.

Part Two:

Reframe toward the positive

a) **Envisioning**

Take a new sheet of paper; write a whole page of why it is worth your while to negotiate. Use these points to get you going.

1. I need this situation to work out because . . .
2. I care about this relationship because . . .

3. If we both felt satisfied with the agreement, I would feel . . .
4. If I had a conversation about this issue, I might gain . . .
5. If we worked it out, the other person would . . .
6. If we don't work it out, I might . . .
7. If we don't work it out, the other person might . . .
8. I feel hopeful we can work it out because . . .

No Editing

Tell your real feelings. Again, no one else will see your page. Focus on how you feel. When you have a strong reaction, it's usually because something you care about is at stake. Focus here on what you want. Reframe your reactions in positive, constructive terms. This will help motivate you to continue, and give you some guideposts.

b) Keep this piece of paper

Have it handy when you are doing the negotiation. Look at it again if you get off track.

c) Ask for help

Take a quiet moment alone in nature, in a place of worship, or in any place that helps you feel peaceful. Ask for the courage to assert your needs and boundaries in a responsible way, and with the creativity to include the other person's needs, as well. Be open to a higher inspiration for creating a win-win solution. ▲

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