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8 Steps For Conflict Resolution Overview

5. Assert Your Needs Clearly and Specifically

- Use “I-messages” as tools for clarification
- Build from what you have heard - continue to listen well

At this point, it is important to get your own concerns communicated as clearly and specifically as possible. The challenge, of course, is to do so in a manner that is likely to be heard and understood by the other person. Assertive communication is the process of conveying one's needs and concerns clearly and specifically, while respecting the needs of the other party. It may be contrasted to aggressive communication, where one conveys needs globally and without respectful listening, or submissive communication, where one vaguely conveys needs in a manner that is often confusing to the listener.

In delivering assertive messages, it is important to stay focused on those ideas and feelings that are truly meaningful to you: Consider those questions you asked yourself back in Step #2, when you were clarifying your personal needs in the conflict.... What are your true "desired outcomes" from this conversation?

Be prepared for a defensive, even hostile, response to your assertions. Just because you have demonstrated your ability to listen well doesn't mean the other person is able to do so! **HANG IN THERE AND CONTINUE LISTENING!!** Reflect what you now hear from the other person in response to your assertions, and then assert your needs again... calmly, clearly and specifically. You can reasonably expect to go back and forth a few times, just clarifying and understanding the definition of the problem. Do not rush this process: People often hold very different perceptions of the problem and define it differently. For example, you and I may have a conflict regarding a new project I have asked you to complete - I feel that it is important and a top priority, while you are feeling overwhelmed because you have three projects due by the end of the week, and this is the third in line. My initial

inclination may be to think that you don't feel my project is important, and you may feel that I am insensitive to your feelings of being overwhelmed.

As the conversation progresses, build upon what is learned:

- What do I now understand to be our real areas of difference, in comparison to our perceived differences before we spoke?
- Are we both defining the problem in similar terms? Are our needs (substantive, procedural, psychological) similar, or do we have different priorities about the problems that need to be solved?
- Do we need any additional information before we can start to examine possible solutions?

As the dialogue continues, try to remain open to hearing new information that can be meaningful to you, and remain flexible regarding your definition of the "agenda" of issues to be addressed. However, it is also important to stay clear in your own mind about the concerns that matter to you, so the subsequent efforts at problem solving can be focused on meaningful issues.

Article courtesy of [Office of Human Resource Development University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) and Harry Webne-Behrman located at <http://www.ohrd.wisc.edu/onlinetraining/resolution/stepsoverview.htm>

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