

How to overcome conflict ... and never be 'taken hostage'

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Do you ever feel trapped, powerless, or helpless? If so, you are almost certainly a 'psychological hostage'.

We can be 'held hostage' by people, by situations and even by our own emotions. We might be unhappy in a job because we are in an ongoing struggle with a boss. We might be afraid to confront a colleague, friend, spouse or neighbour over a difficult problem. In each case, we are acting like a hostage, feeling as though someone is holding a gun to our heads.

The good news is that we can take back our personal power and the ability to act by using the same tactics that real-life hostage negotiators use.

I have been a hostage negotiator for more than 30 years and have been taken hostage four times. More than 95 percent of real hostage incidents are successfully resolved by using the correct techniques. That is why I believe we all have the power to avoid living like 'psychological hostages.' Let's take a look at some of the rules hostage negotiators follow:

Eight steps to resolving a conflict

1. Put the 'fish on the table'

Once the fish - the issue - is put on the table we must go through the sometimes messy process of cleaning it for a great dinner at the end. If we ignore it, it will fester, become toxic, and rot under the table!

2. Bond, even with an 'enemy'

We do not need to like someone to bond with them. We create the bond so both sides can work towards a common goal.

3. Understand the role of loss and pain in generating conflict

Our whole lives are built on a 'cycle of bonding'. We make attachments and form bonds, but the bonds break. When this happens we need to grieve, and if we do not grieve the broken bonds remain. Broken bonds and loss play an important role in generating conflict.

4. *Never think like a hostage*

Focus on what you want to achieve, not on the negatives. We always have a choice, even if only over how we feel.

5. *Use the power of dialogue and negotiation*

Talk. Engage the other party or parties in a dialogue and look for options to solve problems.

6. *Make concessions to build cooperation*

The aim is a win-win outcome for both sides through cooperation around a common goal. Concessions activate the bonding process and build trust and confidence.

7. *Be a 'secure base'*

When we become a secure base for someone we create the foundation for trust and confidence. The other party can lower or even stop defensive behaviour.

8. *Separate the person from the problem*

The moment we make the other person the problem, we become a "hostage" to them. With a strong enough common goal, the conflict can be resolved even with the most difficult persons.

9. *Master your mind's eye and focus on a positive goal*

In a conflict situation, we can change our mental state from negative to positive by focusing on where we want to go rather than on barriers or problems.

These steps are the principles of successful hostage-negotiation. We can use them in any conflict in our daily lives, at work and at home. When we face a conflict, the steps provide a framework that allows us to find a mutually acceptable solution.

The option to live with a hostage-free state of mind is one we can take right now. We never need to feel like hostages again, taking back our personal power to choose how we act and live our lives.

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