



Dear Friend,

## I'm Done with This!

There are times when all of my great plans go right out of the window. (Can you relate?)

Well, such was the case this week. My plan involved an **EA Insights** message and accompanying article that was headed in one direction. However, before I was able to put fingers to computer, something happened to change my plans. Actually, to be more accurate, something happened...*twice*...to prompt the change.

Within the span of 24 hours, I had a meeting and received a call from two people who have absolutely no connection to each other. Each one, a seasoned, well-equipped professional was at wits' end. To paraphrase what I heard from each, *"I'm done with this!"* (Do you get the picture? There was major angst at the root of each of these conversations.)

So, what was going on? In a word...**conflict**.

An interaction in each person's workplace had reached a boiling point. Thankfully, before these pots boiled over and caused a real mess, we had a chance to begin taking pressure-reduction steps together. Yet, the fact that I had two such interactions, within a 24-hour period, got me thinking about the notion of *conflict*.

Like it or not, conflict is inevitable. For that reason, learning skills to help approach conflict situations productively is not just helpful, it's essential. And, that's the topic of this month's **EA Insights**.

So, please don't cry out, *"I'm done with this!"* Well, at least don't do so before you read on.

All the best,

*June*

June Melvin Mickens  
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## 4 Steps to Approaching Conflict Wisely

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Here's a fact of life: *Get two or more people in working together and, at one time or another, there's going to be conflict.*



Notice that I didn't say that there *may* be conflict. The unknown is not *if* conflict will happen; the unknown is *when* conflict will happen.

Because conflict is inevitable, it is crucial to learn how to cope with it effectively. Failing to understand and to work through conflict stops work, progress, and positive environments in their tracks.

So, how can you approach conflict wisely? Consider these four steps:

### Step 1: Describe.

#### **What is the performance or conduct that is causing the conflict?**

Take a step back, and describe what's really going on. What is the person doing (or not doing) or saying (or not saying) in this instance? Be specific about the performance or conduct; provide at least one concrete example, if possible.

#### **What performance or conduct of yours has caused or is contributing to this situation?**

While the other person may be doing or not doing something that is important to you, often there's some conduct or performance of yours that can be highlighted as a cause of the situation or a contributing factor to the action's start or continuation. So, be honest and, again, be specific. What are *you* doing (or not doing) or saying (or not saying) that prompted or that continues to fuel this situation?

#### **What has your outward response been to the situation?**

You may be fuming on the inside, but it's important to consider what's happening on the outside in response to this situation. Think about it. What have you actually done and/or said to the other person in an attempt to make him or her aware of the situation? What have you actually done and/or said to try to correct or resolve the situation? When did you take these steps - date(s), frequency? Be specific.

#### **What has the other person's outward response been to your attempt(s) to correct or resolve the situation?**

Despite popular opinion, mind readers we are not. So, refrain from

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### "Quotes"

*"This is about learning to change your own behavior...so that you can embrace and resolve conflict and enjoy life[.]"*  
~Becky Bailey

*"The path to gaining respect is paved with knowledge and empathy."*  
~Evan Brown

*"The top five critical success factors for [a] team...are clearly defined performance and activity goals, accepted roles, ground rules, trust and good communication and conflict resolution skills."*  
~Paul Esch

*"Between conflict and cooperation, I'm in favor of cooperation. But I would also say that conflict at times can be creative."*  
~Steve John

*"Dialogue is the most effective way of resolving conflict."*  
~Tenzin Lama

*"When you are in deep conflict about something, sometimes the most trivial thing can tip the scales."*  
~Ethel Merman

*"That is the core issue - because of that the conflict erupted."*  
~Vartan Oskanian

*"The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheaply, we esteem too lightly. 'Tis dearness only that gives everything its value."*  
~Thomas Paine

*"Each result has action steps to back them up. The action*

making assumptions about what the other person meant, or thought, or must have known. Instead, take a few moments to look at what he or she actually did or actually said in response to your attempts to raise awareness about the situation or to bring about resolution. Again, be specific.

### **Step 2: Understand.**

#### ***Why do you believe the other person is performing or acting as he/she is in this situation?***

For this question, resist easy answers, like *"She's just selfish!"* To move beyond conflict in a productive manner, it's important to be empathetic. Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes and to understand what may be behind the action. What might he have been feeling that prompted that action? What might she have been experiencing that resulted in today's performance challenge? Seeking to understand is not synonymous with excusing the performance or the conduct; however, seeking to understand is essential to relating effectively with the person attached to the performance or the conduct.

#### ***Why have you performed or acted as you have in this instance?***

Okay, be honest. There has not only been one actor in this scenario; you've played a part too. So, look back at your own responses. What was behind them? Why did you respond as you did? What were you thinking (e.g., business results, staff impact, legal or regulatory concerns, etc.)? What were you feeling (e.g., threatened, deflated, embarrassed, nurturing, tired, etc.)? Be honest.

### **Step 3: Envision.**

#### ***What would the ideal resolution of this situation be?***

It's often easy to see what's wrong. However, how would a "right" situation look? Be specific. What performance or conduct would occur in an ideal setting? What type of interaction would be effective if things were running smoothly? Taking time to think through what you would like to see allows you to begin providing clarity to yourself and the other person about how you get there.

### **Step 4: Plan.**

#### ***What could the other person do in order to bring about the ideal resolution outlined above?***

Now, you won't necessarily get to ideal overnight; so, be realistic. But, also be constructive. What steps would be necessary or recommended for the other person in order to move the situation from where it is now to that ideal you expressed? Besides steps, what tools and/or resources are needed or would be helpful for the other person in reaching that goal?

#### ***What can you do in order to bring about the ideal resolution outlined above?***

Again, ownership of the situation must be shared to some degree. Given that, what is it that you should or could do in order to help the situation reach that ideal? Be specific.

#### ***What should happen next?***

You may have a long list of "to-do" items for the other person and/or yourself, but tackling that list will take time. So, what is the first thing, or the first few things, you both need to do in order to start moving in the right direction? What support or resources do you need in order to complete these initial steps? By when will you complete them?

All of this thinking must be highly personal. However, let me offer one "next step" item. After devoting some personal brain power to the conflict situation, plan a time to sit down with the other person. (If you can, share the four steps with him or her before you sit together so that both of you will have had the opportunity to think about where you are presently and what is necessary for resolution.) If it is helpful, invite a neutral third party to facilitate the discussion, but *have* the discussion. Share how you each view the situation and previous resolution attempts. Clarify, as best you can, what really has prompted your actions and/or responses so that there's greater understanding. Work together to arrive at an appropriate ideal. And, collaborate on next steps so that you can begin moving forward.

Conflicts will come. The real issue is how you deal with them.

*steps are like a map. If you use them like a compass, you will never get lost, and you will reach your destination."*  
~Jacqui Rivait

*"You must take personal responsibility. You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind, but you can change yourself. That is something you have charge of."*  
~Jim Rohn

*"The problem could be anything[.] This helps people learn how to ask the right questions to get beneath the surface conflict."*  
~Sara Ross

*"The great gift of human beings is that we have the power of empathy."*  
~Meryl Streep

*"Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict[.]"*  
~Dorothy Thompson

*"My prayer is that each of us look inside our own hearts. It takes a willingness to pause before we make an assumption. I think all this erupts because we don't wait - we react. And the willingness to have empathy and just imagine what it would be like to be in someone else's skin - that's my prayer."*  
~Carmen Wurgel

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