NEGOTIATION

Five Things I Know About Resolving Long-Term Conflicts: *Change the Script*

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Once a conflict becomes chronic, the attempts to fix it become part of the problem. Five ways to break the pattern.

1 **Stop thinking about how the conflict started; instead, think about how it continues.**

Once a conflict becomes chronic, attempts to resolve it become part of the conflict system and may elicit a predictable and unproductive response.

2 **Notice what you do each time the conflict flares up.**

The next time, don't do the same thing, even if you believe it's the best approach. Do something unexpected – even the opposite of what you usually do or say. This stops the predictable script and requires something different in the way of a response from the other.

3 **Before you respond to the person with whom you have a conflict, summarize his or her point, issue, or feeling in a neutral way.**

Check to see if the other agrees that you understand correctly before you go on. If the other repeats him or herself or speaks for a long time, interrupt him or her for the purpose of checking your understanding only – then ask a question to guide the conversation in a productive direction – for example, ask what he or she would need from you in order to resolve the issue. This may lead to a negotiated agreement.

4 **At a time when the conflict isn't active, ask the other person to give you some feedback about how you are responding to his or her concerns.**

Listen actively and summarize his or her points, but don't defend or explain. Instead, thank him or her for the feedback and disengage. When you meet again, summarize the other's issues with you before you suggest any solutions. Make sure your proposals meet the underlying needs of the other person as well as your own.

5 Reframe the other's position in a way that makes him or her sound intelligent, trustworthy, and honest (even if you don't believe that to be the case.)

Although it's tempting to try to show someone just how stupid or wrong his or her suggestions or positions are, most people will simply hold more tightly to those opinions when they feel attacked. However, people will often accept a positive interpretation of their words, even if that is slightly different from their original intent.

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Founder of **The Influence Guru**, Kim Barnes is a coach, facilitator, and author with more than forty years of experience in leadership, influence, and organization development. She was a founder and, for many years, CEO of Barnes & Conti Associates, and developed or co-developed programs including *Exercising Influence*, *Inspirational Leadership*, *Intelligent Risk-Taking*, *Consulting on the Inside*, and *Managing Innovation*. She is the author of six books, including *Exercising Influence* (Wiley) and *Building Better Ideas* (Berrett-Koehler). She works with enterprise companies, government agencies, small businesses, and individuals from the San Francisco Bay Area.

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