SIMPLE DETAILS RESOURCE · CONFLICT STYLES

How do you handle conflict?

There's no right style. Each one fits some moments and costs you in others. The goal is to know your default, then choose on purpose.

> *"Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional."*
> Max Lucado

Think about disagreements at work over the last few months. For each statement, mark how often it describes you. Answer for how you act, not how you'd like to.

1 Rarely 2 Occasionally 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Almost always

1	I let a disagreement cool off before I raise it, sometimes long enough that it never comes up.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I go along with what others want to keep things running smoothly.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Once I'm confident I'm right, I push hard for my position.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I look for a middle ground where each side gives a little.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I put all the concerns on the table so we can work through them together.	1	2	3	4	5
6	If an issue feels minor, I'd rather let it go than talk about it.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I give in on a point when it matters more to the other person than to me.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I make my case until the other person sees it my way.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I'll trade a point I care less about to win one I care more about.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I keep the conversation going until we find something that works for both of us.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I steer away from topics I know will create tension.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I put the relationship ahead of getting my way.	1	2	3	4	5
13	When time is short, I make the call and move on.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I'd rather land on a fair answer quickly than hold out for a perfect one.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I ask what the other person needs before I propose a solution.	1	2	3	4	5

Then turn the page to add up your scores.

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Your scores.

Add your three ratings for each style. Scores run from 3 to 15.

Avoiding Turtle	#1 ____ + #6 ____ + #11 ____	=
Accommodating Teddy bear	#2 ____ + #7 ____ + #12 ____	=
Competing Shark	#3 ____ + #8 ____ + #13 ____	=
Compromising Fox	#4 ____ + #9 ____ + #14 ____	=
Collaborating Owl	#5 ____ + #10 ____ + #15 ____	=

12 to 15 a go-to style. 8 to 11 one you use when the moment calls for it. 3 to 7 one you seldom reach for.

Reading the two dials

Every conflict asks two questions: how much does the outcome matter, and how much does the relationship matter? Your answers point to the style that fits.

HOW MUCH THE OUTCOME MATTERS

Competing — SHARK
Assert your position to win the outcome. Fits when the goal is critical and time is short.

Collaborating — OWL
Work it through until both sides' needs are met. Fits when the goal and the relationship both matter.

Compromising — FOX
Find a middle ground where each side gives something. Fits when you need a fair, fast landing.

Avoiding — TURTLE
Step back or delay. Fits when the issue isn't worth the cost, or emotions are too hot.

Accommodating — TEDDY BEAR
Put the other person's needs first. Fits when harmony matters more than the point.

HOW MUCH THE RELATIONSHIP MATTERS

My go-to style, and where it serves me well:

The style I use least, and where it might help:

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The five styles up close.

Each style is a tool. The cost comes from overusing one, or never reaching for another.

	LOOKS LIKE	FITS WHEN	OVERUSED, IT COSTS
Avoiding	Steps away from the issue. Waits, withdraws, or lets it pass.	The issue is minor. You need to cool down or gather facts. Someone else is better placed to resolve it.	Decisions made by default. Issues that resurface. Lost credibility, and energy spent carrying what wasn't said.
Accommodating	Puts the other person's needs ahead of their own. Values being liked and keeping the peace.	You realize you're wrong. It matters more to them. You're building goodwill. A team member needs room to learn.	Less influence and respect over time. Your own needs go unmet. Resentment builds quietly.
Competing	Pushes for their position. Decisive, direct, focused on the outcome.	Speed matters. An unpopular decision has to be made. Something vital is at stake and you're confident.	People stop telling you the truth. Relationships take damage. You end up policing the solution.
Compromising	Splits the difference. Looks for a fair, workable answer.	Both sides have equal power and firm positions. You need a temporary fix. Time is short.	No one is fully satisfied. Solutions don't last. The bigger issue gets lost.
Collaborating	Brings all the concerns forward and works until both sides' needs are met.	Both concerns are too important to trade. You want commitment, not just agreement. Hard feelings need working through.	Too much time on small issues. Fatigue. It only works when trust is there.

Which cost on this page sounds familiar, and where have I seen it in my work?

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Choosing on purpose.

Before a hard conversation, read the two dials. Then pick the style the moment needs, not the one you default to.

WHICH STYLE FITS, AND WHY?	STYLE
A disagreement over deadlines or competing priorities.	
A team member who keeps missing commitments.	
Winning leadership buy-in, and budget, for an initiative.	
Two colleagues clashing over how to run a project.	
Giving a peer tough feedback when you have no authority over them.	

A conflict I'm in right now

How much does the outcome matter? The relationship?

The style I'd usually use, and the one this calls for:

INTEGRATION

Reflect

What does my default style protect me from? What does it cost the people around me?

Take action

One conversation I'll have this week using a different style, and how I'll open it.

> *"Peace is not the absence of conflict. It is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means."*
> Ronald Reagan

The five styles draw on the conflict model of Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann. This is a reflection tool, not the Thomas-Kilmann Instrument. Animal names adapted from David W. Johnson. Related resources: Feedback and Difficult Conversations, Relational Nutrients.

You're welcome to share this resource, unaltered and with credit.