



# the key

Unlocking  
Solutions  
To Everyday  
Problems



2007

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## EAP COORDINATOR'S CORNER



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*"Thanks to our EAP Advisory Committee, who has recommended a series on conflict communication skills." "Here is the first in a number of newsletters that will cover this topic."*

*Let us know if you find them helpful."*

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

### WHAT IS A PROBLEM ANYWAY?

A problem is basically a dilemma with no apparent way out, an undesirable situation without a solution, or a question that you can't currently answer. It's not just that things are different from the way you'd ideally like them to be-it's that you can't fix them.

The anatomy of a problem boils down to this simple picture:



A problem is an idea, force or goal opposed by a counter idea, force or goal. For example, you want to go shopping, but you also want to save money.

The balanced opposition of situations is what generates stress and confusion. The balance makes the problem persist. If one side gets stronger and wins the struggle, the problem disappears. For example your boss decides how to handle a situation and everyone goes along with the decision.

### PROBLEM- SOLVING METHODOLOGY

The ideal method for resolving problems and making difficult decisions involves two steps, a magic formula that is guaranteed to work. In fact, it's never failed when applied correctly. Here it is:

1. Define the problem.
2. Decide how to solve it.

You already knew that, right? Although it seems obvious, most problem-solvers and decision-makers don't do a very good job of Step 1, Defining the Problem. Instead, your solution may not address what's really wrong underneath. In fact, most students of this system report that finding solutions is relatively easy. The difficulty is knowing exactly what to analyze and resolve.



From the book:  
*Team Problem Solving*  
Sandy Pokras

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## SIX STEPS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

How do you define a problem? And how do you find the best solution? Each step has a specific result. Only when you reach an agreed-upon result should you go on to the next step. For best results, don't skip any step.

### Step 1: *Defining the problem: Exchange "I" messages*

- Verbalize other person's position if he cannot do so himself
- Actively listen as feelings come
- Take time
- It may be necessary to send more accurate "I messages" if motivation lags.
- Be sure the other person understands your commitment to finding a solution acceptable to both.

### Step 2: *Generating possible solutions; like brainstorming:*

- Think divergently
- Ask the other person to suggest solutions first
- Avoid all evaluation for now

### Step 3: *Evaluating the various solutions:*

- Honestly and reality are now important
- Actively listen and genuinely consider the other person's preferences
- One solution to make sure you both understand

### Step 4: *Deciding on a mutually acceptable solution:*

- Be careful not to push your solution
- When close to agreement, state the tentative solution to make sure you both understands.

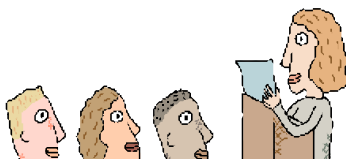
### Step 5: *Implementing the solution:*

- Decide who will do what and when
- Trust the other person to do his part rather than talk about failure contingencies.

### Step 6: *Evaluating the solution:*

- All decisions are open to modification or repeal, but not unilaterally.

Effectiveness Training:  
Dr. Thomas Gordon



## THE DESC MODEL

**D= DESCRIBE** the behavior that you do not like.

**E= EXPRESS** your feelings regarding the behavior, using an "I" statement.

**S= SPECIFY** a more acceptable behavior, either with or without the input of the person(s) with whom you are experiencing the conflict. This can best be done by listing alternative behaviors and coming to an agreement upon one of them.

**C=** Developing **CONSEQUENCES**, both positive and negative, might be helpful, especially if previous efforts at resolving the conflict have led to mistrust. This need not be done if trust is present.

Following is an example in which the DESC model has been used:

"I feel (state a feeling) when you (describe the behavior). I would really like to do something about this situation so that it will not happen again. I'm wondering if you have any ideas about possible solutions. Here are some of my ideas. (State alternative solutions and come to an agreement on one of them.) Now, since this problem has come up before, I want some assurance that the problem will work this time. (Negotiate positive and/or negative consequences.) I feel much better now that we've spoken about this issue. I appreciate your willingness to work this out with me."

## SOME THOUGHTS ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION USING THE DESC MODEL

1. There is no guarantee that this model will necessarily lead to resolution of a conflict. The person with whom you are in conflict has the right to refuse to involve him or herself in this process and behave either aggressively or non-assertively.
2. The DESC model is also useful as an outline for giving positive feedback to another; specifically the first two steps of the process, (e.g., "I feel good when you follow through on your promises to me.").
3. Be aware of your bodily reactions to conflict. If you are feeling tension in your body, take a moment to relax your muscles and breathe more deeply and regularly.