

CONFIDENCE AND SELF-RESPECT THROUGH CONFLICT

Question: Would you rather go to the dentist for a root canal or go to a friend and confront her with something that bothers you?

If you picked a root canal, you're not alone. Most people will do anything to avoid conflict and all the accompanying feelings of anger and frustration. On the list of things people love to do, confrontation probably ranks lower than standing in line at the DMV or, yes, even oral surgery.

But conflict doesn't have to be like that. Not only is conflict a normal part of life, it can be managed and even made into a positive jumping-off point for becoming a stronger and calmer person. Confronting someone—be it a business partner or a family member—and feeling that both of you “won” can be as exhilarating as jumping out of a plane. And in the case of conflict, your life-saving parachute is a set of tools that help you survive any encounter or conflict situation.

“In many ways, conflict can be productive,” writes Sam Deep, co-author of *What to Ask When You Don't Know What to Say*. “Like a grain of sand in an oyster, it can produce ‘pearls’ by encouraging creative thinking, risk-taking and entrepreneurial spirit.”

It's not unusual for most people to hate confrontation; in fact, it's difficult for most people to skillfully handle any kind of conflict—at home or in the workplace. And yet, the benefits of doing so include more self-confidence, less anger, greater self-respect and more intimacy, according to Tim Ursiny, author of *The Coward's Guide to Conflict: Empowering Solutions for Those Who Would Rather Run than Fight*. His book outlines practical tips for dealing with conflict with family members, friends and co-workers, including the following:

- Focus on the upside. Conflict avoiders often perceive only the downside. They need to see the positive side of confronting someone.
- Start by finding something that you both agree on (even if it's only 1%).
- Admit your role. If you are even partly at fault, be sure to acknowledge your mistake up front.

- Don't react with anger. This is vital! Realize that you might behave like the other person if you were in their shoes. Look objectively at your behavior as well as the other person's.

Where there's conflict, there's usually anger. Yet it's the angry reactions that often get in the way of a peaceful solution to a problem. Ursiny advises people to look beneath their anger.

"Anger is a secondary emotion," he writes. "Many people—men in particular—react with anger when they're really feeling shame, embarrassment, pain, frustration, fear, confusion or helplessness. When you feel angry or find yourself in a conflict with someone who appears angry, pause and ask yourself why."

