

## Introduction Video

### Slide 1

Cover slide

### Slide 2

Conflict is a universal human problem.

Conflict is also necessary for growth.

Every story has conflict at its core. Can you think of any story where conflict is not at the core? Cain and Abel, Liz Taylor and husbands, Lindsay Lohan and everyone in the world, Hatfield's and McCoy's, and continuing feuds in almost every family.

For example, just this morning in the bathroom, did you have any conflict with your roommate as you got ready?

Did you feel annoyed with a family member?

Did you get upset with another driver in traffic?

### Slide 3

What do we do about conflict? There are two tools that we typically try to provide to people.

### Slide 4

The first tool is knowledge. We try to arm people with knowledge in order to prevent or solve problems. We read books. We talk to experts. We take classes. We get advice. We believe that ignorance creates many problems and can be remedied with knowledge.

### Slide 5

The second tool we try to arm people with is skills. For example, the teaching of communication skills such as the "speaker-listener technique" is very popular. The only problem is that research shows that communication skills disappear in the face of conflict.

*In relationships: "If all we do is stress communication skills to people without softening their hearts, we will simply make people more clever fighters." – Doug Brinley*

*Another example: Basketball – to be a good player we need a **knowledge** of the game and the **skills** of dribbling, passing, and shooting. But what if we don't use the knowledge and skill we have because we are mad at the coach or because we are annoyed with a team mate?*

What we need are not just knowledge and skills, but the motivation or willingness to use the knowledge and skills we have appropriately (and in the best interest of others/the relationship).

We need to be able to see past only our point of view.

So, getting our hearts right really is the key to success in our relationships.

### Slide 6, [p.3]

Personal biases make it difficult to evaluate conflicts fairly.

We think we're objective, but we're all wearing dirty glasses. Our dirty glasses distort and limit our view of the world around us.

We focus on the small issues with others while we don't notice our own. There is hypocrisy in this.

## Slide 7

This problem of seeing imperfectly is especially problematic in relationships. Let's talk about some of the specific biases or distortions that have been discovered by research that keep us from even seeing the situation accurately. As we discuss each one, reflect on how you have seen this bias at work in your own thinking. Please pause the video and jot down your thoughts on page 3.

## Slide 8

Egocentrism: We focus on ourselves and our needs.

We all center our lives on something. When we choose the self as the center of our universe, it changes everything.

The problem is obvious with babies. They are almost completely focused on themselves. But the problem does not disappear as we mature.

Wife: He doesn't even know I'm alive. Men: She doesn't respect ME. We all fail to understand each other.

*Tom Ryan: "I was polishing my trophies the other day and happened to catch my reflection and Gee! it's easy to see why women are crazy about me!"*

*George Bernard Shaw described humans as "a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making [them] happy" (Peter's Quotes, p. 236).*

We all suffer—more or less—from egocentrism—the view that I and my needs are at the center of the universe.

## Slide 9

Fundamental attribution bias: We tend to excuse our mistakes and faults because of our circumstances while blaming others misdeeds on their bad character.

*For example, if I cut in traffic it's because I'm under pressure or in a hurry. If you cut in traffic, it's because you're inconsiderate and unsafe.*

*If I have a messy desk or office it's because I'm busy. If you have a messy desk it's because you are disorganized or a slob.*

*Dr. Laurence J. Peter: "Rare is the person who can weigh the faults of others without putting his thumb on the scales."*

Our inner lawyer always excuses us while condemning others. In the human tradition, we call this judging. It ruins relationships.

## Slide 10

Naïve realism: We tend to see bias and bad logic in other people but fail to see it in ourselves.

*Jonathan Haidt, the great psychologist, discusses "naïve realism": "Each of us thinks we see the world directly, as it really is. We further believe that the facts as we see them are there for all to see, therefore others should agree with us. If they don't agree, it follows either that they have not yet been exposed to the relevant facts or else that they are blinded by their interests and ideologies. . . . It just seems plain as day, to the naïve realist, that everyone is influenced by ideology and self-interest. Except for me. I see things as they are."*

Jonathan Haidt calls naïve realism the "biggest obstacle to world peace and social harmony."

*"We all commit selfish and shortsighted acts, but our inner lawyer ensures that we do not blame ourselves or our allies for them. We are thus convinced of our own virtue, but quick to see bias, greed, and duplicity in others."*

## Slide 11

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## Slide 12

Anger narrows and blinds us. We see others as the enemy.

*Jonathan Haidt:*

*“Once anger comes into play, people find it extremely difficult to empathize with and understand another perspective” (Haidt, p. 78). We see others as the enemy.*

Americans have tended to believe that anger is important to express and vital to use. That has caused us a lot of grief.

*“Of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.”*

*-Frederick Beuchner, Wishful Thinking, Harper & Row*

*Related to couples:*

*Tavris & Aronson: “By the time a couple’s style of argument has escalated into shaming and blaming each other, the very purpose of their quarrels has shifted. It is no longer an effort to solve a problem or even to get the other person to modify his or her behavior; it’s just to wound, to insult, to score” (p. 171).*

Anger increases fivefold the probability of a serious heart event (*Anger Kills* by Redford & Virginia Williams)

Anger is like drinking poison and waiting for your enemy to die.

## Slide 13

Confirmation bias: We tend to accept only information that supports what we already believe.

*“Once we have formed a view, we embrace information that supports that view while ignoring, rejecting or harshly scrutinizing information that cast doubt on it.” (Gardner, 2008, p. 110)*

Whether the issue is religion, politics, family battles, workplace relationships, we all tend to look for information that proves we were right. We ignore evidence that contradicts our view. We would rather be right than wise! We get hardening of the categories.

## Slide 14

Unreliable memories: We regularly reshape our memories to fit our objectives.

*Daniel Gardner: “Most people think memory is like a camera that captures images and stores them for future retrieval. [But the truth is that] memories routinely fade, vanish, or transform—sometimes dramatically. The mind can even fabricate memories.” (pp. 52-3)*

We protest: Not me! I’m objective! (naïve realism)

We systematically shape memories in order to support the narrative we favor.

*Tavris & Aronson: “Between the conscious lie to fool others and unconscious self justification to fool ourselves lies a fascinating gray area, patrolled by that unreliable, self-serving historian—memory. Memories are often pruned and shaped by an ego-enhancing bias that blurs the edges of past events, softens culpability, and distorts what really*

*happened. . . . Over time, as the self-serving distortions of memory kick in and we forget or distort past events, we may come to believe our own lies, little by little.” (p. 6)*

We actively create the image and supporting narrative of a great spouse/child/co-worker or a villainous one. We PhotoShop our memories.

### **Slide 15**

Negativity bias: We tend to be overwhelmed by bad things and forget good things.

If you have a minor auto accident—a fender bender—on the way to a party, how will that affect your evening? What will you remember about that day?

Bad experiences and feelings take up a disproportionate place in our minds and hearts.

For people who are especially sensitive or who have lots of bad experiences early in life, the effect on future feelings of safety is clear.

*For example, have you ever gotten sick after eating a particular food or at a particular restaurant and decided never to eat that food again or go back to that restaurant again?*

Good news: Just as we can be trained to fear or avoid certain things/people, we can be untrained. Phobias can be unprogrammed.

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**[p.4]**

A story of a couple—two good and hard-working people—illustrates the problem of bias. Occasionally the husband got irritated and complained about his wife’s faults. Finally she got tired of being criticized and declared, "You know, you have faults, too!" The husband replied, "Yes. But they don't bother me like yours do!"

### **Slide 17**

We process our perceptions through our own life stories

*Example: It’s a Wonderful Life – George Bailey thought his life was not worth much until he was able to see how the lives of people he cared about turned out without him. It would be nice if we could all have an “It’s a Wonderful Life” type experience. It would help us to see things differently – through the lens of other people’s life stories.*

### **Slide 18**

The solution to bias goes beyond knowledge and skills: Getting our hearts right

*Steven Covey tells the story (1997, p. 205) of his wife, Sandra’s, irrational attachment to Frigidaire appliances. They were discussing purchasing a new appliance and she insisted upon a Frigidaire even though he felt another model would better meet their needs. She seemed unwilling to consider his reasons for wanting to buy another brand. This unwillingness to acknowledge his preferences began to frustrate him. Finally they were able to spend some peaceful time together and his wife opened up about her feelings. As a young girl, Sandra’s father operated an appliance store. During a time when the store experienced great economic difficulties, Frigidaire was the only company willing to finance her father’s inventory which enabled him to stay in business. Since Frigidaire had been loyal to her family and saved their business, she felt a strong desire to be loyal to that brand. Understanding the feelings behind her position allowed her husband to replace his sense of frustration with empathy. He could finally see that her attachment to Frigidaire was not irrational or intended as disrespectful towards his preferences. He could accept her loyalty to that brand. (The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People)*

Tomorrow we will talk about the first of the three keys to getting our hearts right.