

Personal styles in conflict

Insights for a better understanding of how to just get along

by Larry Dunn, Ph.D.

SIA Conflict Resolution Specialist

This is the third article in our five-part conflict resolution series. It discusses conflict-style differences, how to understand ourselves and others in conflict, and offers some ideas on how to manage our responses to conflict.



Each of us has a unique relationship to conflict. Perhaps predictably some people hate conflict while others love conflict. As hard as either might be to understand, what frightens or even paralyzes some of us excites and energizes others.

A complex set of factors goes into determining our overall orientation to conflict, especially how we experienced it in our families of origin. Usually by the time we're young adults our way of responding to and dealing with conflict has taken shape, landing us somewhere between the two extremes of love and hate.

When it comes to conflict, these preferences take on the form of patterned responses, or clusters of behavior that feel most natural to us. These ways of responding are sometimes talked about as "conflict styles," often identified with behaviors such as avoiding, competing, accommodating, compromising and collaborating. In fact, some use these exact words as names for the styles themselves.

These names for styles are sometimes confused with strategies, which are particular plans of action that anyone

might use for any given (conflict) situation regardless of personal preferences. Conflict styles, however, can be thought of as being more comprehensive than just strategies. An example or two might clarify this difference.

If you were to complete a survey to help identify conflict styles, your results might indicate that you're an avoider or a compromiser. As strategies, these and each of the others mentioned have their uses. If, for instance, another driver on the road is being very aggressive, I might decide to take a different, safer route home at my first opportunity (avoidance). Alternately, if I find myself in an emergency situation where quick decisions need to be made, I don't expect the person in charge to call a group meeting to determine the best response (collaboration).

With its win-win orientation toward problem-solving, collaboration is often held up as the ideal style. If you end up with a different style, you might be expected to change to become more collaborative in your approach.

A survey instrument that I prefer, the Gilmore-Fraleigh Style Profile, takes a different view. You arrive at your results by completing a questionnaire asking you to respond to a variety of situations. These results also place you in a style category that's largely consistent from one setting to the next: Accommodating/Harmonizing, Analyzing/Preserving, Achieving/Directing and Affiliating/Perfecting. I'll briefly describe each one here.

Accommodating/Harmonizers are light-hearted and broad-minded, attentive to the needs of others, want everyone to be happy, can see and adjust to the different perspectives of others, and are quick to forgive and forget. They avoid any kind of negative conflict whenever possible.

Analyzing/Preservers are well-organized, timely, task-oriented, thorough in understanding background information and practical, not likely to get caught up in a flashy new idea. They rarely confront people abruptly or harshly.

(continued on page 2)

- Understanding the dynamics of conflict helps with managing it

Personal styles in conflict

(continued from page 1)

Achieving/Directors are high-energy, initiative-taking, success-oriented individuals who are not afraid to take risks or to be held accountable. They readily accept the difficult challenge of a conflict situation and are often ready to lead others to a solution.

Affiliating/Perfomers are supportive, encouraging and enthusiastic, always looking to learn or do better the next time. Highly principled, they're not afraid to challenge authority if something isn't right (but won't do so simply to gain power over others). Predictably, they're team players in pursuing collaborative solutions.

From these brief descriptions, you may have a good idea of what your style might be and perhaps are thinking about others as well. There's much more about each to unpack that's relevant for conflict, but I'll focus on how the idea of conflict styles can be helpful to us more broadly.

I'll start by returning to my point about how change may be needed to help us deal more effectively with conflict. Rather than identifying an ideal style, the Gilmore-Fraleigh instrument notes the strengths and excesses of each style, characteristics that can help or hinder us when we're in the stress or distress of conflict. Notice I said "excesses" and not "weaknesses." This isn't just a euphemism, as I'll try to illustrate.

If I were to ask you to identify what you loved most about someone you know well, and then asked you to name something about that person that really bugged you, it might very well be the same thing. For example, the thing I love most about my wife is that she's so caring and concerned for others that she'd be willing to do almost anything for them, even to the point of sacrificing her own needs. The thing that drives me crazy at times is that she is so caring and concerned for others that she'd be willing to do almost anything for them, even to the point of sacrificing her own needs! The idea is that the same behavior that's helpful can be harmful when used either too frequently or too intensely, and no person (or style) is exempt.

So, the light-hearted joke of an Accommodating/Harmonizer that breaks the tension at the beginning of a difficult discussion can be distracting or inappropriate later in the

midst of the conversation. It's the same behavior, just done too frequently or intensely. This suggests that a different kind of change is needed to avoid any potential excesses of our conflict style and to become more effective in responding to conflict.

First, rather than change who we are (which can sometimes be used as an excuse for why we can't change – "It's just who I am!"), we can learn to manage our behavior so that it's a strength rather than an excess. Second, once we know

what kinds of situations or behaviors trigger our excess responses, learning specific skills can help us manage ourselves and help others to be at their best. And the key to being at our best is learning how to develop conflict management skills.

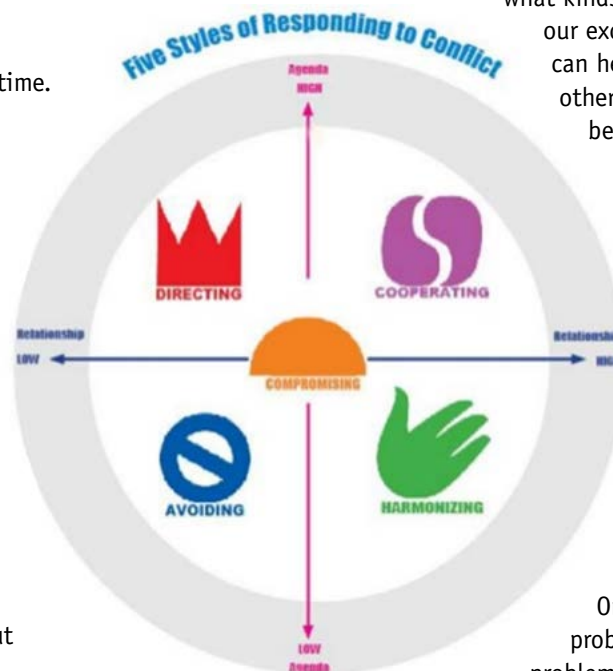
For example, wanting to avoid unnecessary conflicts, Accommodating/Harmonizers might not share what they would like in a situation for fear of leaving others disappointed or unhappy. This is most likely to occur in excess, even to the point of hoping others will "guess what they want" rather than having to uncomfortably assert themselves.

On the other hand, feeling like they probably have the best solutions to problems and not being particularly shy about making them known, Achieving/Directors

under the high stress of conflict might express what they want in a "my way or the highway" manner. Neither of these excess behaviors is helpful for resolving conflicts.

However, a skill like Preference Stating – communicating one's desires rather than asserting them as demands or forcing others to guess – helps both styles avoid excess. Rather than "We're going to do it my way" or "It doesn't matter to me," saying "It would be helpful to me if we did this but I don't want to impose on others" provides a way to define oneself clearly while inviting others to do the same.

Like any labels, style categories are not meant to put us into a tightly closed box. However, conflict styles can provide us with insight and a common language for better understanding ourselves and others in conflict. And in doing that, we can better manage our responses and help others to be at their best. Because, in the end, we don't need our style differences to make our conflicts any more challenging than they already are.



Pedestrians need to be hyper-aware of
forklifts on the move



wellness
& safety



Ways that pedestrians can stay safe around forklifts

Contrary to popular belief, it's not the person on the truck who's most at risk in the event of a forklift accident. Pedestrians in the vicinity have little protection against injury, especially if they don't understand how to recognize potential risks and keep themselves (and others) safe. Pedestrians can include colleagues working on foot, site visitors, delivery drivers, district staff members from other areas of the company, and even the forklift drivers themselves once they've dismounted from their trucks. Anyone near moving materials handling equipment (MHE) is at risk.

Ultimately, it's the responsibility of forklift operators (and their managers/employers) to ensure that forklifts are used safely on site. Operator training, safe work systems and regular monitoring will undoubtedly help create safer operations. But basic awareness training also can significantly reduce risk for this vulnerable group. So what steps can pedestrians take?



- **Use pedestrian walkways/zones.** Inadequate segregation between trucks and pedestrians poses a huge safety risk. Forklifts and people on foot should be separated, wherever possible, ideally by physical segregation using barriers, designated zones and separate traffic routes to keep them apart. Walkways should always be used where available.
- **Adhere to safe systems of work.** Where total separation is not feasible and staff are required to perform tasks in a shared area, there should be other control measures in place to keep them apart. Safe systems of work (SSOW) – based on risk assessments of specific tasks – will ensure that all parties understand how to carry out their duties safely. These should be communicated to all who may be affected and must be followed day in and day out.
- **Keep a safe distance from MHE.** This is a fundamental principle that everyone should follow during their time on site to reduce risk and should be part of a SSOW. Sadly, many injuries occur when pedestrians find themselves too close to forklift trucks when they don't need to be there in the first place. When deciding on a safe distance, consider the specific nature of the operation. For example, when a forklift is unloading something high off the ground, remain far enough away from the machinery to create a safe distance in the event of a tip over. Factor in a larger area that would be covered by a falling mast and load.
- **Wear personal protective equipment (PPE).** Pedestrians must wear any PPE issued to them by their employer for their safety, such as high visibility jackets and safety boots. Not only is this good practice, it's also a legal requirement of the employee.
- **Follow the signage.** Take note of any posters and signs positioned around the site and follow the safety measures, guidance and travel routes.
- **Report bad practice.** Staff must be mindful of both their own safety and that of their peers, and while managers have an obligation to monitor behavior, there may be times when it's necessary for a staff member to flag the actions of others. Unsafe forklift operation or disregard for safe travel routes are examples of bad practices that should be reported to a supervisor for the safety of everyone on site.
- **Training for all.** Forklift awareness training for operators and pedestrians alike allows everyone to understand the importance of following safety measures and the potential consequences if they don't. These types of courses emphasize to all parties the need to remain alert to their surroundings and maintain safe distances between MHE and pedestrians.

Increasing forklift safety awareness across the board can help ensure that everyone is equipped to contribute to a safer site.

Source: Forklift Action October 2023

- New challenges for better health to start the new year off right

Spotlighting more challenges for both physical and social well-being

By Lyn Poll, M.S., Prevention Services

In the last issue of *Wellness & Safety*, I discussed the six dimensions of wellness and encouraged you to focus on your emotional *W.E.L.L.-being** with the *Be Grateful Challenge*. This issue will spotlight the areas of physical and social well-being, with the *Stand-Up Challenge* and the *Heartfelt Challenge*.

The start of a new year for many marks an opportunity to reflect on the past and think about the future. And while New Year resolutions may get a bad rap for encouraging unrealistic goals, they can also be great starting points for prioritizing your health and wellness.

As an example, instead of focusing on a complete overhaul of your current life, as many of us tend to do, start by embracing smaller, more attainable goals that can make you and others feel great. Beginning small can relieve stress, minimize anxiety (not add to it) and improve your overall *W.E.L.L.-being*. Are you ready to commit to living your best life in 2024? Then try these two “small” challenges, one for January and one for February.

The Stand-Up Challenge

If you’re looking for a way to “move” more in 2024, try the second challenge in the Six Dimensions of the Wellness Challenge that focuses on **physical** well-being.

While physical movement can help improve health and fitness, it’s also been shown to have a positive impact on creativity, clarity, mental health and well-being. Even small amounts of activity during the workday have been found to increase productivity and lift spirits. Additionally, it breaks up the workday by providing a change in environment.

Whether working from home or the office, the **Stand-Up challenge** encourages movement roughly every hour—ideally, eight times a day—for 30 days. The key to success with this challenge is to figure out a reliable trigger to remind you to stand up. For example, you may want to stand at the top or bottom of the hour or you may need to set an alarm to remind you.

Take standing up to the next level, add in stretching breaks at the same time ([click this link for stretches that keep you moving](#)). Don’t forget to challenge family, friends, co-workers and others to Stand-Up.

Want to learn more about the mental health benefits of physical movement, [click here](#).



The Heartfelt Challenge

Looking for a way to show people in your life how much you appreciate them but aren’t sure how? Try the **Heartfelt challenge**, the third challenge in the Six Dimensions of the Wellness Challenge that focuses on **social** well-being.

Actions may speak louder than words, but when it comes to feeling appreciated, people need to hear it, too. That’s why it’s important to tell people you appreciate them—even if it doesn’t come naturally. And it turns out that *expressing* appreciation makes us more appreciative in turn. When people feel appreciated, they’re happier and more connected.

The *Heartfelt* challenge inspires you to tell the important people in your life how much they’re appreciated. Over the next 29 days, you’ll tell 20 different people how much you appreciate them. Think about who you appreciate and why, then you tell that person, which may feel awkward at first. This could be a co-worker, friend, family member, mentor or teacher -- the list is endless. Stepping out of our comfort zones and expressing how much we value people or their contributions not only affects the receiver, but also the giver and can have a profound impact on mental and physical health. Let’s work on creating a culture of empathy and connectedness.

Take appreciation to the next level by moving past the 29-day goal and choosing to express appreciation daily. Don’t forget to challenge family, friends, co-workers and others to join you.

To learn more about the health benefits as well as some tips on how to show appreciation, click on the following links:

[Why We Like Being Appreciated](#)

[7 Tips to Show More Appreciation to Others \(With Examples\) \(trackinghappiness.com\)](#)

*Whole Person, Environment, Lifestyle and Learning



Free virtual trainings •
Health and benefit fairs •



wellness
& safety



Free virtual trainings to enhance your life

SIA provides the staff of our member districts with virtual training on a variety of topics that apply to both your personal and professional life. To learn more about any of the training courses listed below, please contact tfranco@sia-jpa.org. You also can join our [email list](#) to learn of future events at [SIA – Schools Insurance Authority \(sia-jpa.org\)](#)

1/10/2024	Compassion Fatigue	5:30-6:30 p.m.
1/11/2024	Eating Healthier On-the-Go	5:30-6:30 pm
1/16/2024	Creating A Healthier Lifestyle	noon-1p.m.
1/18/2024	Coping with Traumatic Events	5:30-6:30 p.m.
1/22/2024	Creating A Healthier Lifestyle	5:30-6:30 p.m.
1/23/2024	Dealing with Grief and Loss	5:30-6:30 p.m.
1/24/2024	Coping with Traumatic Events	noon-1 p.m.
1/25/2024	Get the Best of Stress	5:30-7 p.m.
1/29/2024	Building your Resilience	5:30-7 p.m.
1/30/2024	Embracing Happiness	5:30-6:30 p.m.
2/1/2024	Five Steps to Healthier Eating	5:30-6:30 p.m.
2/5/2024	Autism and ADHD in the Workplace	5:30-6:30 p.m.
2/7/2024	Best Practices for Hybrid Working	5:30-6:30 p.m.
2/8/2024	Boosting Energy Naturally	5:30-6:30 p.m.
2/15/2024	Boosting Energy Naturally	noon-1 p.m.
2/20/2024	Business Etiquette	noon-1 p.m.
2/22/2024	Business Etiquette	5:30-6:30 p.m.
2/26/2024	How to Build Customer Satisfaction	5:30-6:30 p.m.
2/27/2024	Building Your Resilience	5:30-7 p.m.
2/29/2024	How to Overcome Negativity in the Workplace	5:30-6:30 p.m.

District health and benefit fairs help employees commit to protecting their health



Total well-being is the focus of district health fairs.

Health and benefit fairs are great opportunities to engage and educate employees about their benefits. It's a fun way to get employees curious and thinking about their total well-being. Even more importantly, they can demonstrate a commitment to the employees while educating them about ways to protect their health, wealth, property and lifestyles.

Thank you to the following districts for inviting SIA to participate in their health and benefit fairs:

El Dorado COE
Galt Elementary SD
Mother Lode SD
Natomas USD
Robla SD
Sacramento City USD

If you have a health and/or safety event that you would like SIA to attend, email us at PreventionServices@sia-jpa.org.

QUOTE TO NOTE

"If you don't have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?"

- John Wooden



Burn Awareness Week February 4-10

In the United States, one person sustains a burn every sixty seconds. In fact, every year about 400,000 people receive medical treatment for burns. Though most burns occur at home, 10 percent happen in the workplace.

National Burn Awareness Week is an opportunity for organizations and communities to help burn, fire and life safety educators share a common burn awareness and prevention message with employees, families and children. Learn more about burn safety at [American Burn Association](http://AmericanBurnAssociation.org) (ameriburn.org)



Wellness & Safety is published by the Schools Insurance Authority, P.O. Box 276710, Sacramento, CA 95827-6710, (916) 364-1281, 1-877-SIA-KIDS. The SIA is a joint powers authority, composed of 37 members, that collectively provides workers' compensation, liability, property, and health benefit insurance coverage on behalf of its member districts. The SIA school districts are: Arcohe, Atwater, Buckeye, Camino, Center, Central Sierra ROP, El Dorado Co. Off. Ed., El Dorado High, Elk Grove, Elverta, Folsom-Cordova, Galt Elem., Galt High, Gold Oak, Gold Trail, Hayward, Indian Diggings, Latrobe, Merced City, Mother Lode, Natomas, North Bay SIA, Pioneer, Placerville, Pollock Pines, Rescue, River Delta, Robla, Sac. City, Sac. Co. Off. Ed., San Juan, Shasta-Trinity SIG, Silver Fork, Twin Rivers, Visions in Education Charter, and Woodland. SIA Officers: Executive Director — Martin Brady; President — Chris Gilbert, Sacramento COE; Vice President — Wendy Frederickson, El Dorado COE; Secretary — Kristen Coates, Elk Grove USD; Newsletter: Lyn Poll, Prevention Services; CG Communications