

Ten Myths About Conflict

By Dr. Kimberly Alyn

When you think of the word “conflict,” what comes to mind? For some people, it’s a negative situation that should always be avoided. For others, conflict is not such a bad thing and can result in healthy resolutions. There are many myths about conflict that should be addressed. Review the ten myths below and evaluate your own belief system about conflict. Have you ever found yourself embracing any of these myths?

Myth #1: All Conflict is Bad

Many people believe that conflict is bad because emotions get aroused and issues are often left unsettled. Because they do not like the negative feelings they are dealing with, they tend to avoid conflict. Conflict often arises when the rights of one person or a group are violated. Accepting the violation does not settle the issue. The violation needs to be discussed and resolved if possible. This brings about conflict that may result in positive change.

Myth # 2: Conflict Damages Relationships

It is true that conflict can damage or destroy a relationship. It is also true that conflict can unify relationships when misunderstanding is cleared up. The resolving of conflict can draw individuals or groups together. Positive confrontation and conflict resolution can dissolve built up bitterness and pave the way to cohesiveness. Unresolved conflict is what destroys relationships. Conflict handled in a constructive manner can actually enhance relationships.

Myth # 3: Conflict Should Never be Escalated

Sometimes conflict must be escalated before a resolution can be reached. The escalation of conflict is a major factor in labor union disputes. It helps to force the issue and bring it to a point of resolution. The increase of conflict becomes so uncomfortable that the individuals or group have to face each other. They have to work it out. The conflict itself becomes the catalyst that sets the needed change in motion.

Myth # 4: All Conflict is Just a Character Problem

The implied concept is that if you disagree with me, there is something wrong with you. It must be something inherent in your character. It also suggests that the only people who have conflicts are those with character problems. The fact is, everyone will face conflicts, or will start conflicts with other people.

Myth #5: All Conflict Should be Reduced or Avoided

It would be nice if all conflict could be reduced or avoided. It must be kept in mind that conflict is a universal human experience. Conflict is going to come our way whether we like it or not. We will be unable to run from conflicts caused by unforeseen accidents, illness, or acts of nature. It would be better to reduce our emotional reaction to conflict, rather than avoiding conflict (which is impossible). Let's learn healthy methods for dealing with and resolving conflict.

Myth #6: Conflict Indicates Psychological Problems

There is no question that people with psychological problems have conflicts but so does everyone else. Those who have psychological issues are sometimes hampered to a greater extent in coping with their problems. They often do not possess the skills necessary to constructively deal with conflict. To say that when conflict occurs, the individual has psychological problems is simply a "put-down" technique. It places the person making the comment in a "one-upmanship" position. Conflict is normal between all people, not just those with psychological problems.

Myth #7: Harmony is Normal and Conflict is Abnormal

This concept does not even touch the reality of life—those who cannot, or will not deal with conflict usually suggest that harmony is normal and conflict is abnormal. It is not a pleasant experience to confront anyone. The truth is that harmony is possible and conflict is normal.

Myth #8: If I Ignore the Conflict, it Will Go Away

People often hold on to the misconception that if they ignore conflict long enough, it will disappear all by itself. When you ignore conflict, it merely grows. While people may remain silent on the outside about the conflict, they may be fuming on the inside. The conflict may be growing along with more dissension and resentment. Ignoring conflict will not help the situation. Facing conflict and learning constructive ways to resolve conflict is much healthier than ignoring conflict.

Myth #9: Genuine Conflict is About Facts and Not About Emotions

There are those who endeavor to separate facts from emotions in conflict situations. They suggest that only the facts are important. The implication is that emotions are not to be involved, or at the least, should not carry much weight. While it is true that conflict occurs over issues and facts, a person's behavior and emotions do play an important role. Emotions indicate the degree of importance the individual feels about the issue at hand. Emotions are the thermometer that indicates the intensity of the conflict.

Myth #10: Conflict is a Sign That People Do Not Care

Nothing could be farther from the truth. Conflict is a sign that people *do* genuinely care. Their emotional attachment to the issue(s) is a sign that they have deep concerns about the problem at hand. Their willingness to confront the issues, knowing that it can result in tension, shows they care.

Take a moment and evaluate your paradigm when it comes to conflict. Do you view all conflict as bad and avoid it? Do you think that people who engage in conflict do not care? A close examination of our own belief system often gives us a deeper insight into why we approach conflict the way we do.

Dr. Kimberly Alyn is a best-selling author and an international professional speaker. She is the author of 11 books including *How to Inspire People to Achieve More*, *How to Deal With Annoying People* (with Bob Phillips, Ph.D.), *Discover your Inner Strength* (with contributors Stephen Covey, Ken Blanchard, and Brian Tracy), and *Men are Slobs, Women are Neat... and other Gender Lies that Damage Relationships* (with Bob Phillips, Ph.D.). She has also developed and produced numerous CD/DVD productions on a variety of topics.

Dr. Alyn has been a contributing author to a variety of magazines and has been quoted in prominent books and publications like *Cosmopolitan*. An advocate of life long learning, Dr. Alyn has her bachelor's degree in business management, her master's degree in organizational management, and her doctorate degree in organizational management with a specialty in leadership. Dr. Alyn has over 20 years of experience with speaking, training, educating, and entertaining audiences.

To find out how to have Dr. Kimberly Alyn come speak at your event or to get more information about Kim, log on to KimberlyAlyn.com.