**Peace and Conflict Negotiations**

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Prior to joining Americorps, I worked as a lawyer and a transformational mediator. Transformational mediation is a relatively new style of mediation in which the mediator is not so much interested in seeking a resolution to the particular conflict, but rather in allowing the parties to gain the skills to solve the conflict on their own so that the settlement is more likely to be successful and future conflicts can be solved without the need for intervention by a third party.

Those who study human conflict have presented three basic theories as to why people engage in conflict, the ***power***theory (Abel, 1982), the ***rights***theory (Fiss, 1984), and the ***needs***theory (Menkel-Meadow, 1984). Of course conflict can be a combination of one or more of these motivations or sub-categories of one or more of the three basic motivators. Typically there are three types of advocators or interveners who attempt to resolve their client’s conflicts: The lawyer who advocates for his/her client’s ***rights***; the community organizer who advocates for an increase of his/her client’s ***power***; and the planner who promotes a client’s ***needs***.

The transformational theory of conflict assumes that regardless of whether a person is in conflict over power, rights, or needs, what people find most significant about the conflict is *how it makes them feel*, or the fear element of the conflict, and that in order for the person to be lifted out of conflict there must be more than just the satisfaction of their power, rights or needs issues; there must also be a transformational change in how the person in conflict is relating to others. Normally this means that there must be a release of the fear. A person who wins his rights in court, or gains power through community organizing, or is presented with a better plan to meet his/her needs is still going to be in conflict internally. A new conflict will soon manifest itself and the struggle will start over again.

International conflicts are no different than personal conflicts. For a peace movement to be successful the basic issues of the international conflict must be dealt with, and those issues tend to be the same as those presented in personal conflicts, whether those are rights issues, power issues, or needs issues.

Deepak Chopra, in his book ***Peace is the Way****,* has suggested that the following nine steps must be included in negotiating a peaceful resolution of an international conflict. These same nine steps are often also necessary in resolving personal conflicts or in building a peace movement:

1) ***“Show respect for your opponent.”*** What is necessary is for each side in the conflict to acknowledge that the other person or nation has *perceived* interests and grievances. It is not necessary to agree with those perceptions, but there must be respect for those feelings or beliefs.

2) ***“Recognize perceived injustice.”***Within most conflicts, whether personal or national, each party perceives that they have been injured.

3) ***“Believe in forgiveness”***For a lasting resolution of the conflict, one that will not flare up again, there must be forgiveness for past grievances. For there to be forgiveness it is helpful if individuals or people in conflict have a perception that the resolution of the conflict is fair and equitable. There have been numerous peace accords or cease fires between Israel and her neighbors, but without the perception of fairness and forgiveness for past wrongs there can be no lasting peace.

4) ***“Bond at an emotional level.”***Some wars have been fought because the leaders just did not like one another. Enduring peace is more likely when leaders have developed a relationship. International travel, exchange students, and social media promote emotional bonds with the other country.

5) ***“Stop all belligerent actions.”***Peace negotiations while continuing belligerent actions are insincere. A ceasefire is essential for effective negotiations.

6) ***“Recognize values that are opposed to yours.”***Unless we can recognize that the other party or nation have values which are opposed to our own values and we can come to the negotiation table respecting those values as mentioned in #1 above, the negotiations will not likely be successful.

7) ***“Don’t pass judgment and make your opponent wrong.”***Within wars as well as personal conflicts most nations and people believe that they are in the right and that the other party is not. As mentioned in #2 above, it is important to recognize the views of the other party to the conflict and acknowledge that their feelings or beliefs support their perception of the conflict.

8) ***“Don’t talk in terms of ideology.”***This is critical to resolving a conflict as ideology makes it near impossible to negotiate a settlement. I use here the definition of ideology from Webster’s Dictionary: “The body of ideas upon which a particular political, economic, or social system is based.” Fundamental ideology was the principle culprit in the Cold War. The Cold War was a contest of ideology, socialism verses capitalism, or in many cases, big business verses indigenous landless people. Contrary to some people’s beliefs, the Cold War was not a contest between democracy and totalitarianism as the United States made clear when again and again it overthrew democratic governments, replacing them with dictators, when the democratic governments were attempting significant economic reforms. Throughout history the contest of ideology can be seen in the many religious wars as well. Eckhart Tolle wrote in *A New Earth* that: “We are coming to an end of...ideologies and belief systems.” The end of fundamental ideology is an essential component of a lasting peace. Of course there is a difference between not talking in terms of ideology when negotiating conflict resolution and ending the concept of ideology. Ideology can provide a unifying set of beliefs in order to deliver a consistent message and unite groups of people.

9) ***“Confront the underlying factor of fear.”***This should really be listed first as confronting fear is necessary before many of the other factors can be implemented. Fear is the factor behind all wars and also all personal conflicts. The only way that fear can be eliminated from personal conflicts is by eliminating it from your personal life. On an international level fear is reduced when people understand that they have the power to effect change. We saw this in Egypt, as more and more people took to the streets, the fear of Mubarak dissipated.

There will be wars and conflicts until a sufficient mass of people become aware, on a conscious level, what each one of us are choosing in our thoughts, words, and actions. When we choose to respond to fear and hate with love and compassion, a transformation will begin, first within our own lives, and then within the lives of those that we perceive are attacking us, the oppressors and war mongers. It is clear that throughout the world there has been a steady movement towards greater awakening. It is my belief that within a few generations our level of individual awareness and our collective consciousness will allow us to implement the systems for maintaining world peace.

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