

INTRODUCTION

“*The Joy of Conflict Resolution?* You’ve got to be kidding,” I thought when a colleague suggested the title during a brainstorming session. Where is the joy in conflict? Most people avoid it or deal with it reluctantly, as a necessary evil. Yet when Chris Plant at New Society resurrected this title from the brainstorm scrap heap, I reconsidered as I recalled the satisfaction and freedom I experienced when I had resolved a conflict or assisted others to.

At work or at home, conflict is a part of life. How do we respond? Sometimes we suppress it by avoiding people, leaving jobs or ending relationships. When that isn’t an option, we may nurse grudges until we can’t stand it anymore, at which time we may explode and engage in fruitless and even embarrassing confrontations. Unresolved conflict takes its toll on us and on our relationships. We can all learn to resolve it better.

In what follows, you’ll be invited to examine conflict stories. By identifying the ever-changing roles people play in conflict, you will be able to understand and resolve differences. Many people in conflict feel hopelessly stuck. And the harder they push or pull, the deeper they sink, locked into viewing conflicts in terms of right and wrong, good and bad. Without realizing it, they had entered a

“drama triangle” populated by victims, villains and heroes. Trapped in a world of winners and losers they find collaboration impossible.

The Joy of Conflict Resolution uses the drama triangle to illustrate patterns of conflict and to identify the roles people play. You will learn basic skills to help you create more productive roles, move beyond the drama triangle and resolve conflicts collaboratively. You will see how curiosity uncovers the other side of the story, how empathy builds bridges and how assertion separates the person from the problem.

You will learn what fairy tales and Hollywood movies have to teach us about conflict. You’ll also be a fly on the wall at Turm-Oil Inc. and follow the exploits of its employees as they encounter sticky situations everyone will relate to. You might even think the examples have been lifted from your own workplace or family! Each chapter also provides an opportunity to apply the concepts and skills to conflicts in your own lives.

The ideas presented in this book appear simple at face value, yet can lead to profound realizations. As you are challenged to broaden your perspectives, you will discover previously unseen possibilities for resolution. Conflict might be uncomfortable, but it produces energy. We can choose what we do with that energy. Every conflict provides the opportunity for learning, growth, and enhanced relationships. In seizing that opportunity lies *The Joy of Conflict Resolution*.

I hope you’ll join me.