

Please Try This at Home

Monthly Tips for Increasing the Joy in Your Life

Paying for Peace

It's easy to be peaceful when no one is inconveniencing us. But most of us don't get to live in slogan land where we get things "my way right away." There's a lot of conflict in life, and most of it is cooked up by people. In general, the more people we relate to, the greater our potential for conflict.

Since most of us would say that we want more peaceful, rewarding lives, but we're also surrounded by a host of conflict-breeding people, we can bet that whatever peace we find will have a price tag. Depending on when and how we pay this price, though, we can have more or less interpersonal peace.

Conflict Style Quiz

So when and how do you pay your price for peace?

1. The last 3 times you've gotten together with your friend, he's been 20-30 minutes late. You:
 - a. Keep showing up on time, greet him with a smile, and tell yourself that friendship requires sacrifice.
 - b. Say nothing, but start showing up 45 minutes late to make sure he has to wait.
 - c. Tell him he's a failure as a friend and a person and that you will cut off if he's as much as 5 minutes late ever again.
 - d. Tell him that it's hard for you to enjoy your time together when his lateness makes you feel unimportant to him. To look forward to being with him, you need that to change.

2. Your spouse asks you to clean out the garage, but you notice that, despite being asked several times, she has not cleaned the dog poop out of the back yard for a whole month. You:
 - a. Clean out the garage and go ahead and do the back yard as well.
 - b. Silently vow to steer clear of the garage until she cleans the yard.
 - c. Tell her she can forget that vacation you were planning because you wouldn't want to go anywhere with someone so sloppy.
 - d. Tell her that if you clean out the garage while she has not cleaned up the back yard, you will feel like she's taking advantage of you, which will mess up other parts of your relationship. Invite her to set up a time where the two of you will both complete your chores.

3. Your boss has not given you a raise in two years, despite the fact that she told you she would when she hired you. You:
 - a. Keep showing up and doing your best, not mentioning it.
 - b. Begin taking office supplies home.
 - c. Tell your boss exactly what you think of her and resign right before a big presentation, making her do it at the last minute.

- d. Tell her that you cannot do your best work when she is not valuing you as she promised. To remain at the company, you need evidence of follow through soon.

Four Conflict Styles

Those who answer with A's—the **Passive** conflict style—pay up front for their half and the other person's half of the interpersonal peace "bill." The idea of requiring others to follow through with their reasonable relational responsibilities is painful enough that Passive people would rather just give up their interpersonal rights instead. Others may see them as likable, dependable, and "safe," but Passive people earn this reputation at a high price. They can be quick to burnout, struggle with over or under eating, have poor health and self care, and miss exciting opportunities that would require others to be a little inconvenienced. The feeling that life is giving them the short end of the stick may fester into resentment that leaks out or explodes at strangers or loved ones. Passive people buy short-term interpersonal peace at the price of long-term self destruction.

Those who answer with B's—the **Passive-Aggressive** conflict style—pay both people's share of the interpersonal peace bill up front, but then find ways to collect the whole sum back from the other person indirectly. They want others to see them as likable and dependable, but they are not going to be taken advantage of for long. Over time, the other person will pay, they just might not know it for awhile. Eventually, though, other people feel uncomfortable around Passive-Aggressive people and begin to avoid them. What they say about their feelings or preferences can't be trusted because they'll tell people what they want to hear and then make them pay for it later. By then, they might not even know what they're paying for. Passive-Aggressive people buy short-term interpersonal peace at the cost of long-term conflict and abandonment.

Those who answer with C's—the **Aggressive** conflict style—demand that the other person pay the whole bill for interpersonal peace up front with interest. If they feel taken advantage of, they see it as an opportunity to collect on any previous relational "debts" as well. They will stay in relationship only if the offending party agrees to bow down and pay amends on this conflict with extra added in to cover past wrongs as well—even if that person wasn't responsible for those past wrongs. The nice thing about this conflict style is that people know exactly who they are dealing with right away. There's no pretense here. But Aggressive people are scary and unsafe. Others tend to avoid them sooner rather than later. Aggressive people refuse to pay the short-term costs for interpersonal peace, paying long-term costs of ongoing conflict and abandonment instead.

Those who answer with D's—the **Assertive** conflict style—pay only their half of the interpersonal peace bill up front and ask the other person to do the same. They are aware of and okay with their own needs and limitations: that they only have so much energy to give, that they can't function long-term in relationships where others won't perform their responsibilities, and that they can't be much good to others unless they care for themselves as well. They tend to take a long-term view of relationships, knowing that the benefits of successful working and personal relationships are worth the short-term hassle of figuring out where to draw the line between their needs and responsibilities and those of others, and the inconvenience of asking for what they need. They pay the price of discernment and inconveniencing others in the short-term to gain long-term interpersonal peace and self care.

What Does Assertiveness Require?

If we're looking for a conflict style that maximizes our long-term interpersonal and personal peace, obviously Assertiveness is the clear choice. But it would be a mistake to think that it's simple just because it makes the most sense. I mean, what's more difficult for self-starters and rugged individualists than admitting that we have limitations and we need others to come through for us or eventually, we can't be in relationship with them or do business with them? And what's more difficult for kind, other-centered people to admit than that their own needs must be met in a mutual fashion on an ongoing basis, or they won't be any good to anyone else?

What an incredible personal balance is required for the Assertiveness battle cry of, "I can do some for you, but not all; I need you to do some for me, but not all." The line between some and all on both sides is constantly changing. It takes ongoing work and attention.

This is tough stuff. A long journey. But since it is worth it to move toward more sustainable peace in your relationships, here are some things you might try:

- Thinking through past and current conflicts, see if you can identify which conflict style you tend to prefer.
- For each past and current conflict example, think through what an Assertive response would look like.
- Once per day, practice responding Assertively in a small, relatively easily conflict like asking for a receipt when one wasn't given, informing someone who has cut in front of you that you were already in line, etc.
- Gradually practice responding Assertively in situations that are more and more difficult for you, seeing if you can work up to one per week.
- Don't give up! Your relationships and self care are worth it!

If you or someone you know would like some help understanding or practicing assertiveness, *call me at 303-931-4284 for a free 20-minute consultation or email info@jenniferdiebel.com.*

Thanks for reading!

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