

# 5 Tips for Managing Conflict

Aline Porto



## 1. Don't let it fester

A boat captain who traveled around world with his family once told me that if a conflict happened, he never let people go to bed without talking things through, at least to clear the air.

“In a tempest,” he said, “someone might have to scream at you to be able to save your life. And people rarely listen to others screaming at them if they are holding a grudge. At a boat, grudges cost lives!”

Grudges might also jeopardize the survival of the family business, if we let things fester and never deal with them.

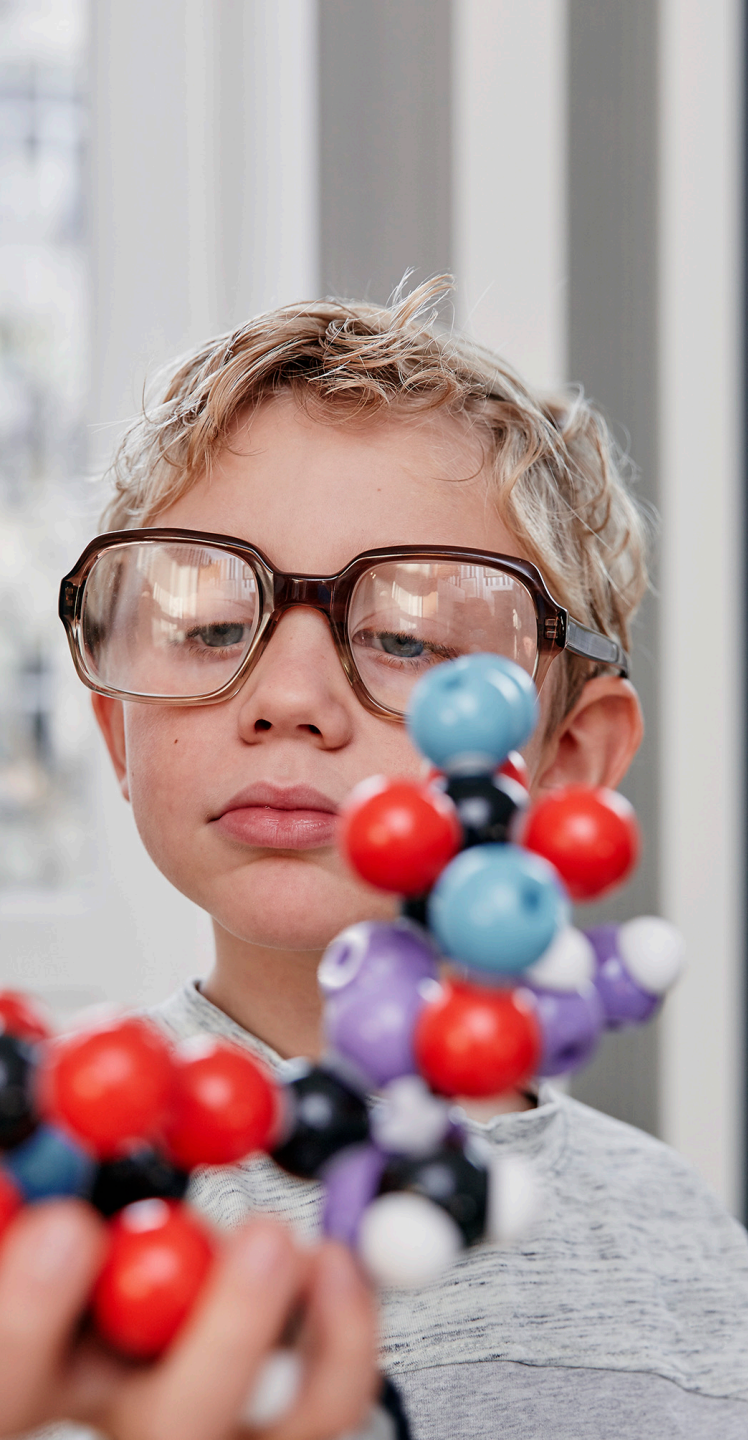


## 2. Remember: it's a Balancing Act

I was once helping a family where a conflict between two brothers happened. Frustrated, Paul, one of the brothers, came to me and said: “It’s impossible to reason with Jeff! I talked for hours, and he wouldn’t listen to me.”

My immediate question to Paul, was if he had listened to Jeff, to which he responded: “Of course, not!” Fortunately, I did not have to say anything after that: it became pretty clear to Paul that, without actively listening to Jeff, they would get nowhere.

Resolving a conflict requires understanding. Understanding requires listening and learning from the other person. Try to balance the amount of time you spend talking vs. listening in a conversation to solve a conflict. Ask open ended questions. Make sure you clarify points you did not get. Be open-minded.



### 3. Genuine Curiosity Matters

Listening to others when we are in conflict might be hard. One good trick for it is to use your curiosity. If we are genuinely curious about someone's point of view, opinions, hopes, fears, etc. we have a much higher chance of actively listen to what they have to say, and therefore to be able to get to an understanding.

An Education professor once explained to me that “humans are prone to learn better and faster whatever is more important to them, or at least whatever makes them emotionally or intellectually curious.”

You might be angry or upset with someone and not genuinely care about them at the moment you are in conflict. But do you care about yourself? Can you think about the situation as a puzzle you might solve? That might be enough to trigger your curiosity and make you able to listen.

# 1%

## 4. The 1% Rule

Another tip that might help you be a better listener is the 1% rule.

If you think you are 100% right and the other person is 100% wrong, of course there will be no reason to listen to them. Changing that does not mean you have to completely let go from your own point of view. You might still think you are right, but... what if there is a 1% chance that you are not? Can you make yourself believe that 1% chance? If so, what might have you being missing?

You will find out once you listen to the other person more actively, on course.



## 5. It's Not About Being Smart

You won't spend the entire time listening, of course. Remember: it's about balance. Knowing what you say is very important too.

When describing a conflict she had with her cousin, Marianne told me: "I am usually considered to be so smart! I can't believe she wouldn't understand me!".

Navigating a conflict is not a contest about who is smarter. It's not about having the best and more robust argument to win. Your goal is to be understood. Helping others learn not only what is your point of view, but how you got there can be key to that. Start by sharing your understanding of the facts. Walk people through your rationale: how you got to a conclusion based on the facts you had at hand. Compare your path from facts to conclusion to theirs: you both will be more likely to find the source of your divergencies in the different turns you took, and might be able to build together a new, common road to understanding

# Putting in Practice

Want to put these 5 tips into practice, or check if you are embracing them? Here are some ideas:

Think of a conversation that did not end well. Either the conflict escalated, or you left it with the sense that issues were not solved.

- Write down how you felt about the situation, and what you think the other person felt, or believed. Share it with them. Have your learning and understanding changed?
- During this situation, was something you found surprising or striking in your position or that of the other person? Share your insight and discuss
- Try to recall what you said and did in the original dialogue. How much of it was talking and how much of it was listening. Why? Can you reach out to the person again and try to have another, more balanced conversation?
- Write down what is the 1% you may be missing in the other side's point of view, and re-engage with them, to test it out
- If you feel you can't move from your current point of view, ask yourself why. What is your core motivation in the festering conflict? To be right? To win? To defend someone? Yourself? Can you change at least some of it and try to work on the situation?

