

Conflict Coaching: A Resource for All Special Education Stakeholders

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Goals

1. Define conflict coaching
2. Introduce the Comprehensive Conflict Coaching process
3. Discuss applications of conflict coaching for special education dispute resolution – How it might fit with your systems
4. Peer conflict coaching – one model for consideration

Conflict Coaching Defined

Conflict coaching is a one-on-one process to develop the party's conflict understanding, interaction strategies, and/or interaction skills. Three basic goals. Help them:

1. Understand and analyze their conflict from self and other perspective.
2. Identify preferred direction for relationship and conflict situation.
3. Develop specific skills to enact the preferred direction.

Drivers of Conflict Coaching

- Attractive when one or both parties do not want to engage mediation
- Gateway to other ADR processes
- Option to provide “training for one”
- Helpful for “conflict positive” org. cultures
 - Advance collaborative skills
 - Bolster leadership development

Conflict Coaching Assumptions

- A flexible model is vital
- Party maintains decision-making control
- Should be a component in a larger ADR system
- Follows principle of efficiency – maximum benefit in minimum time
- Needs to be monitored for quality control and effectiveness

Why Conflict Coaching?

- Lowest level of intervention
- Preventative (and de-escalatory)
- Focus on conflict analysis – helping parties understand what is and might happen in conflict
- Emphasis on perspective-taking
- Builds skills and applications
- Low cost



A Conflict Coach Is/Is Not. . .

A conflict coach is:

- -individual support for someone working through conflict
- -Able to help someone prepare for more constructive conflict conversations
- -A neutral but concerned support

A conflict coach IS NOT

- A cheerleader
- An advocate
- An external representative
- A messenger
- An ally

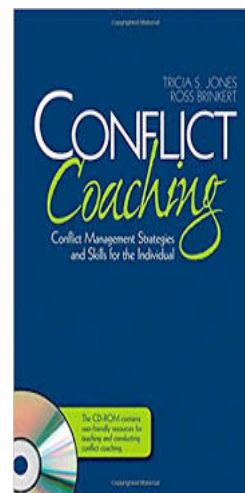
Check Point

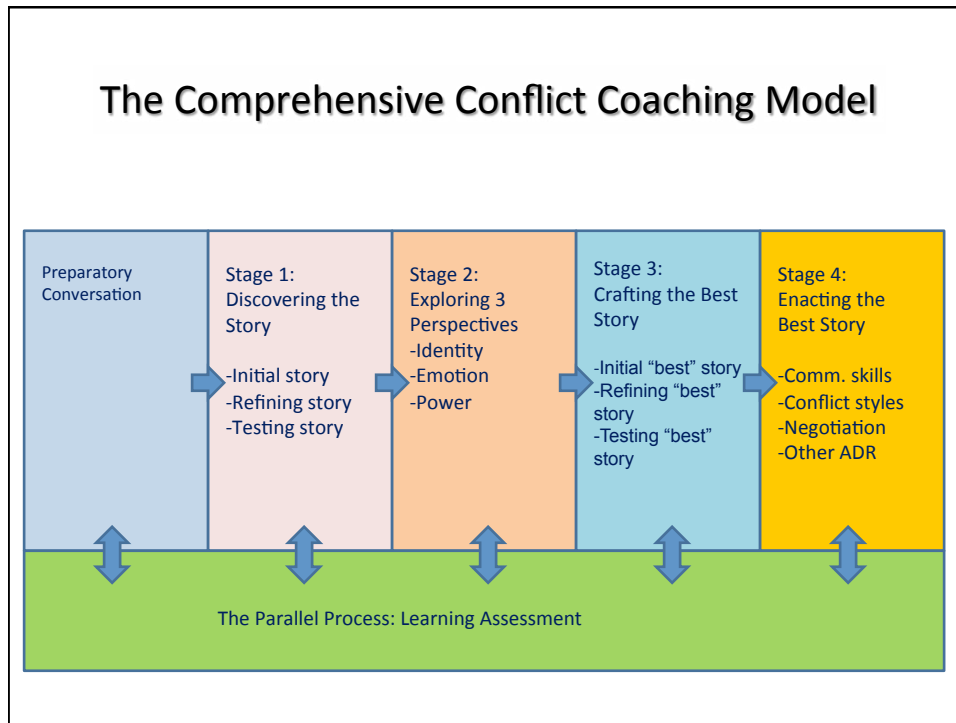
- What is your knowledge about conflict coaching?
- What is your experience with conflict coaching in any context?
- What is your experience with conflict coaching in special education dispute resolution?

Small Group Discussion

- 1. What are your general questions about conflict coaching?
- 2. What are your concerns about conflict coaching as a process?
- 3. What do you see as advantages to conflict coaching as a dispute resolution process?

Conflict Coaching Model and Application





The Preparatory Conversation



Preparatory Conversation

- Conflict coaching may not be appropriate for a specific party in a specific conflict
- A basic conversation is needed to...
 - Explain conflict coaching
 - Make sure the party wants to proceed

Stage 1: Discovering the Story



Stage 1: Discovering the Story

Inviting the
Initial Story
-
What is the
conflict?



Refining the
Initial Story
-
Do I fully
understand
the conflict?



Testing the
Initial Story
--
What
perspectives or
assumptions of
the party may
need to be
challenged?

Narrative is powerful and persuasive.

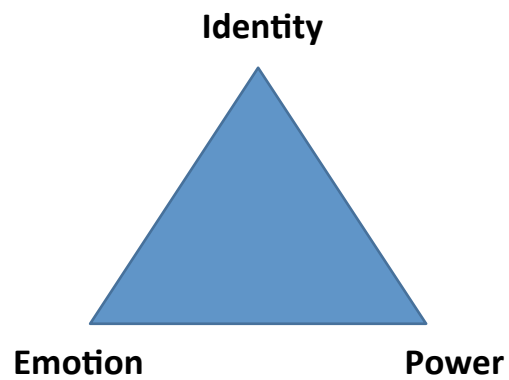
**STAGE 2: THREE LENSES
FOR SEEING CONFLICT CLEARLY:
EMOTION, IDENTITY AND POWER**



Conflict Coaching 's 3 Big Questions for
Self & Other

- Who do I/they want to be (and be respected as)? – **Identity**
- How do I/they want to feel in this relationship/situation? – **Emotion**
- What can I/they make happen in this situation? – **Power**

The Conflict Triangle



Conflict Announces Itself As...



- A threatened identity
- A bad feeling
- A loss of power



Positively Addressing Conflict – Building Better Relationships

- Fosters desired identities
- Develops positive feeling
- Expands a sense of power



Strong Links Among The Three Perspectives

- Identity threats cause negative emotions
- Identity shapes the potential for power
- Identity shapes the kinds of power we use and are comfortable with
- Sense of power affects our sense of identity
- Sense of power affects how we feel about a situation

Stage 3: Crafting the Best Story



Stage 3: Crafting the Best Story

- In this stage the coach helps the party shift from a focus on “what is” to a focus on “what can be”
- Ask party to envision an “ideal” future
 - The Best Visions are detailed, clarified, refined
 - The more detailed the vision the easier it will be to make happen
- Help parties discuss realistic outcomes and coping strategies

Stage 3: Crafting the Best Story

In conflict people often settle for less than they can achieve because:

- They don't think about what they really want
- They see themselves as less powerful than they are
- They are afraid to take risks so they do only enough to stop the pain and not enough to realize the possibilities

Start with the Ideal Story



- The initial emphasis is on getting a party to consider an "ideal" future
- But, if that is not realistic given the system or situation, the coach can help the party identify "real" improvements and/or how to cope with the present situation

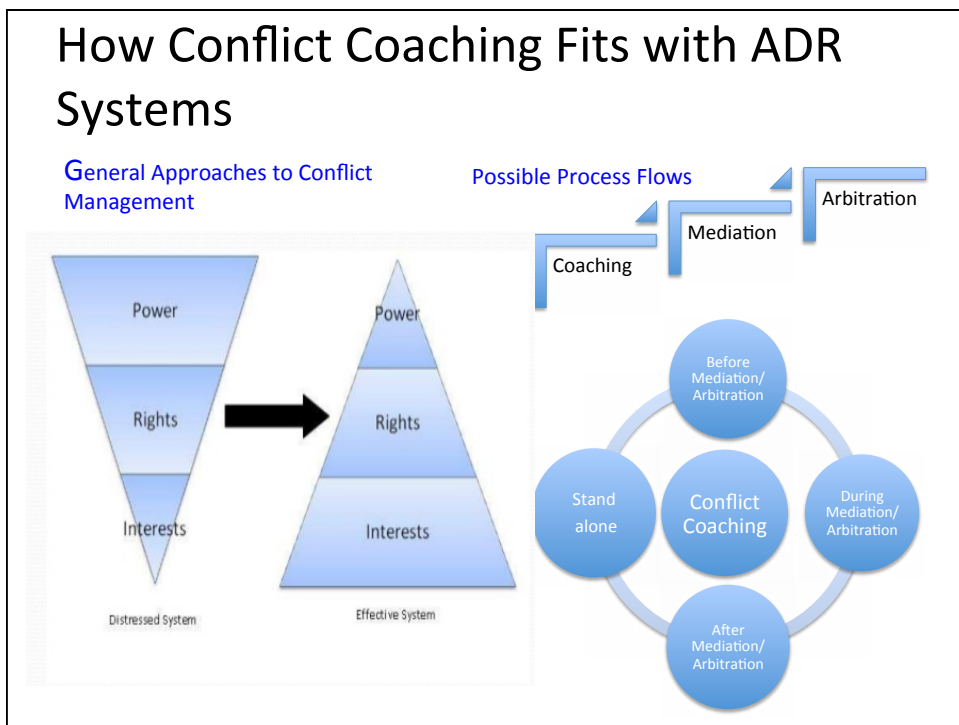
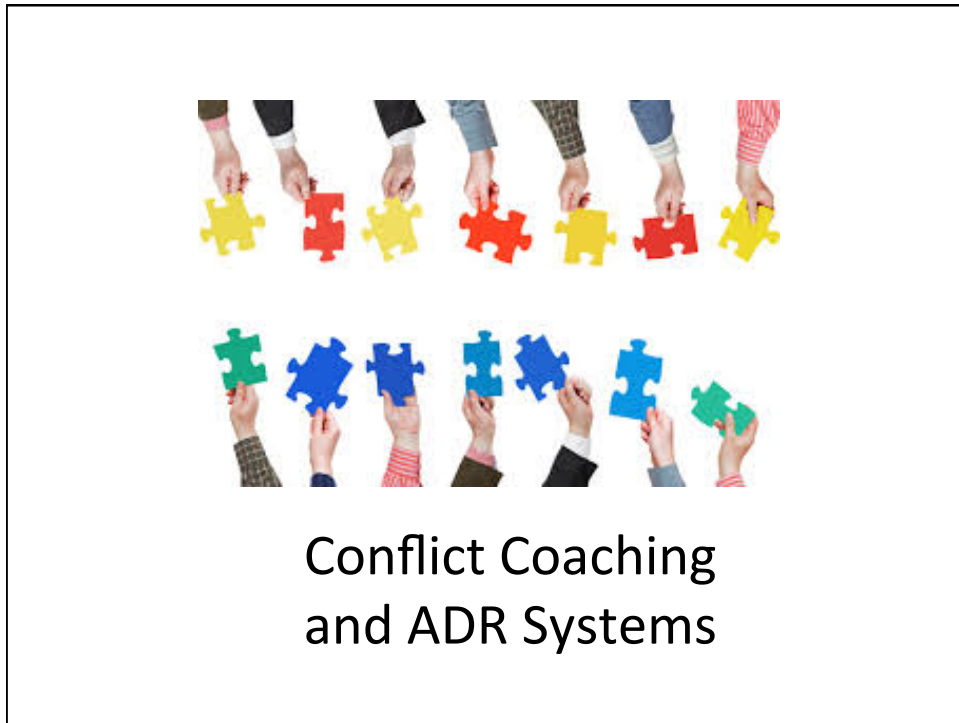
Stage 4: Enacting the Best Story – Skills Development Confrontation



Transition to Stage 4

- Once the coach and party have crafted the “best” story and they have discussed critical skills necessary to enact the “best” story, the coach and party plan skills development agenda
- Stage Four is the process of skills development in the CCC Model





Infusion of Conflict Coaching Skills – Perfectly Poachables

- Use of Identity, Emotion Power Discussions and/
or Visioning
 - -in facilitation
 - -in convening
 - -in mediation
- Dealing with Clarification of Conflict within a
Party
- Skills Development work without the same
degree of Deep Analysis

Who Can Be A Coach?

- In a special education context (as we will
discuss more later) you can train a variety of
participants to be coaches:
- Educators
 - SPED teachers
 - GenED teacher
- Parents
- Parent Support Members
- ADR Professionals



Who Could Be Coached?

- In a special education context (as we will discuss more later) you can provide conflict coaching to help a number of parties in the special education relationship:
- Educators
 - SPED teachers
 - GenED teacher
- Parents



How Could Coaching Fit with These Special Education Dispute Resolution Processes? – Table Talk

- IEP Facilitation
- Mediation
- Resolution Meeting
- Written State Complaint
- Due Process Request/Hearing Complaint
- Expedited Hearing Request and Resolution Meeting



Conflict Coaching and Your ADR System – Table Talk

- How might it fit with your system and structures How are you using it?
 - How could you use it?
 - What would you like it to do?
 - Who needs to hear about this
 - What do they need to hear
 - What else do you need to do
 - What obstacles or concerns do have about pushback if so what?

Peer Conflict Coaching: A Conflict Coaching Process for Special Education



Clarifying Peer Conflict Coaching – A Peer Conflict Coach IS . . .

A peer who:

- helps another person talk through his/her special education conflict to get a better understanding and focus on building a better relationship
- helps the person define what they want in the relationship
- works with the other person to build good communication and collaboration skills

Why Peer Conflict Coaching?

- Peer-based is having the coach be someone with the same general experience as the person being coached.
- What do you see as advantages of a peer based process?
- What do you see as disadvantages?



Coaching for Educators by Educators

- The Need:
 - Increased pressures on SPED teachers to manage collaborative conflict with other educators (GenEd), allied health professionals, and parents – the heavy lift
 - Consequence – losing 13% of SPED teachers every year
 - SPED Educators are not getting enough conflict resolution training in pre-service and professional development
 - We're losing the very people we need to provide the best possible services to children



Coaching for Parents by Parents

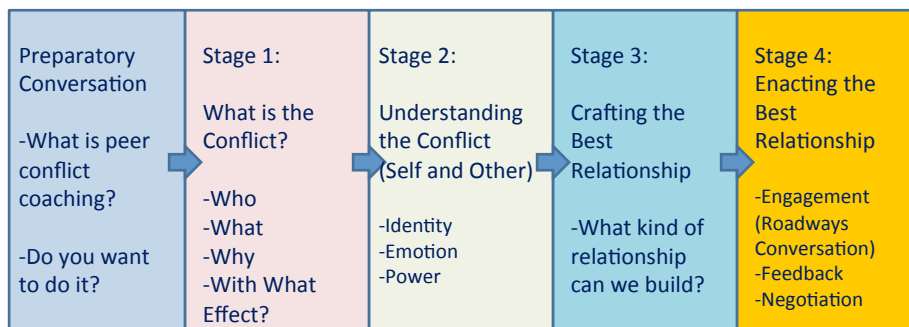
- The Need:
 - Help parents and family members deal with conflict within the family (has significant impacts on escalation and dysfunctional conflict with the system)
 - Help parents prepare to engage as partners in the IEP process, mediation and/or due process hearings
 - Help parents build skill sets that increase their ability to develop positive relationships with schools and educators in the future

Coaching for Administrators by Administrators

- The Need:
 - Help administrators consider how their involvement may be affecting or even escalating conflict
 - Help administrators consider how to partner more effectively with parents
 - Reduce the conflict between SPED and GENED teachers and administrators/the system – cited as a significant issue in contributing to attrition and costs of escalation
 - Help administrators think about building systems of dispute resolution that prevent escalation to due process hearings



The Peer Conflict Coaching Model (slight modification of general model)



Video Example Preparatory Conversation



Stage 1: Learning Goals

- Understand the conflict
- Consider additional information that will increase the understanding of the conflict
- Consider how other people see the conflict – perspective taking

Video Example –Stage One



Stage 2: The Identity Perspective

- Helping the Party Think Through Damaged and Desired Identities for Self and Other
 - Who do I want to be?
 - Who do they want to be?
 - How is this conflict affecting this?
 - How can I establish my desired identity?

CHAT

- Which identity issues are common in your special education conflicts?
- Which of these are hardest for you to handle as a coach/mediator?



Basic Questions– Identity ROLES Conversation

- What is your role in this situation and how is it affecting your actions? Needs?
- What is their role in this situation and how is it affecting their actions? Needs?
- How comfortable are you with this role? Do you feel caught between roles or responsibilities?
- How about them?

Basic Questions– Identity VALUES Conversation

- What is important to you? What do you value in this situation?
- How are your values affecting your actions?
- Are there other ways to stand up for these values that could ease the conflict?
- What is important to them? What do they value in this situation?
- How are their values affecting their actions?
- Are there other ways they might stand up for their values that could ease the conflict?

Basic Questions– Identity RESPECT Conversation

- What are others doing that you feel is disrespectful to you? Why?
- How are you responding to that?
- Is your response making things better or worse?
- What are you doing that might be disrespectful to them?
- How are they responding to that?
- Is their response making things better or worse?
- Have you tried to replay the disrespect?
- Have they?

Basic Questions – Identity FACE-SAVING Conversation

- What are they doing that you think is attacking you?
 - How is that affecting what you're doing? How are you responding?
 - Is your protection making things better or worse?
 - How is it affecting how others see you?
- What might you be doing that they see as attacking them?
 - How is that affecting what they do?
 - Is that helping or hurting the situation?
- Knowing that, if you are doing that, do you want to continue?

Video Example – Stage Two Identity



Stage 2: Emotion Perspective



Opening Discussion

- When you think of emotion and conflict, what things immediately come to mind?
- What are the consequences of emotion for conflicts in special education?

Basic Questions about Emotion in Peer Conflict Coaching

- How are you/they feeling about this situation?
- How are those feelings affecting what you/they are doing or are not doing?
- Are the feelings helping or hurting you/they in your conflict management?
- How would you/they like to feel in order to handle this situation most effectively?

Basic Questions – EMOTION BASIC FEELINGS Conversation

- What are you feeling in the current conflict?
What 2-3 main things?
 - Which of those is most important to you now?
 - How is that feeling affecting your behavior – what you are doing or not doing?
- What do you think they are feeling? What 2-3 main things?
 - How is that affecting their behavior?
 - Do you want to make them feel that way?

Conflict escalation and de-escalation



Emotion Triggers and Escalation



Basic Questions – Emotion EMOTION TRIGGERS Conversation

- What gets you upset in this situation? What behaviors? Language?
- What happens when you get triggered?
- Does it escalate? Quickly?
- Does it shut you down? How?
- What have you done to avoid the triggers?
- Can you avoid the triggers?

Emotional Flooding

Emotional flooding is system overload; it is being swamped by emotion to the extent that you cannot think effectively.

Causes:

- Threats to identity
- Talking yourself into tension
- Playing the blame game; expecting the worst



Emotional Contagion

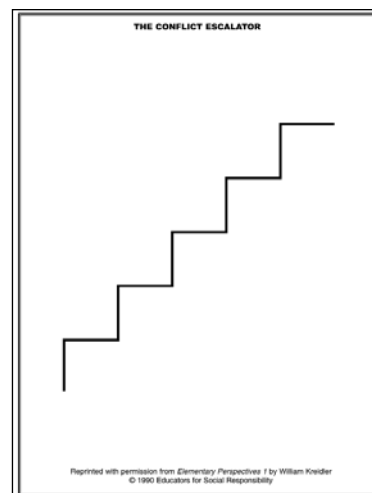
When you “catch” the emotions of others

- Happens outside of awareness.
- Emotionally “reactive”
- Not the same as understanding them or empathy



The Conflict Escalator Conversation

- Understanding how conflict escalates will help parties slow or prevent escalation
- Involves three steps
 - 1. Describe the behaviors
 - 2. Identify the feelings
 - 3. Find places you could do something to de-escalate or come down the ladder



Using the Conflict Escalator as a Peer Conflict Coach

- The conflict escalator helps the client bring the conflict patterns to a behavioral level
- Behavioral description can be used most effectively after you've talked with them about emotion triggers
- Identifying feelings for self AND other for each behavior enhances emotional perspective-taking and appreciation that we have more than one emotion at a time
- Getting them to focus on what they could have done to de-escalate makes them take responsibility for their actions rather than assume the change has to come from the other.

Video Example -- Emotion



Stage 2: Power Perspective

“What Can They Do?”

- Help them understand what they need from each other
- Help them understand power resources
- Explore how they can influence outcomes

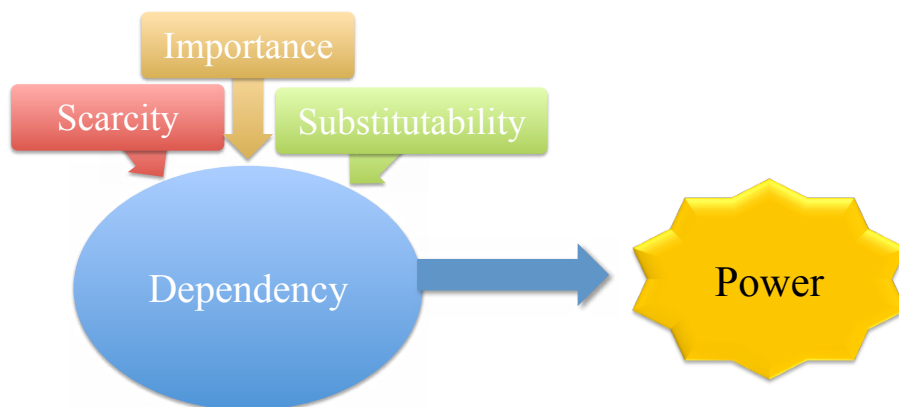
The Coach Helps the Party...

- Understand what kinds of actions are allowed in the organization or system
- Understand what consequences are likely for certain actions in the organization or system
- Identify other relationships, organizations or systems where s/he may be better able to get interests met

Power analysis in a relationship



What Affects "Need"



Basic Questions – Power NEEDS Conversation

- What do you need from the other person?
 - How much do you need that?
 - How easily can you get that from someone else?
 - What could change your need?
- What do they need from you?
 - How much?
 - How easily can they get it elsewhere?
 - What could change their need?

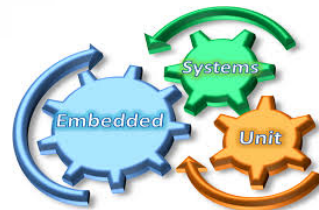
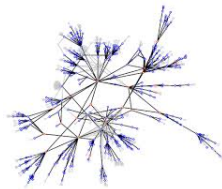
Power analysis in a relationship



Power resources	
Legitimate	• Power that comes from a role or position
Reward Power	• The ability to grant a reward
Coercive Power	• The ability to take something away or punish someone
Information or Expert Power	• Knowledge or specific information
Connection Power	• Influence from who you know or social connections
Referent Power	• Stems from personal characteristics of the person

- ### Basic Questions – Power RESOURCES Conversation
- What resources give you power or influence in this situation?
 - How does the conflict affect that?
 - What other resources would help you in this situation?
 - How easily can you get them?
 - What resources give them power in this situation?
 - How does the conflict affect that?
 - What other resources would help you in this situation?
 - How easily can they get them?

Power analysis in a relationship



Basic Questions – Power SYSTEMS Conversation

- In this larger situation what gets in the way of you being able to do what you want?
- What helps you do what you want?
- How much support do you have for changing these rules/practices?
- What happens if you break the rules?



Stage 3: Visioning a Better Relationship



How a Peer Conflict Coach Can Help

- The peer conflict coach helps the party shift from a focus on “what is” to a focus on “what can be”
- Appreciative inquiry helps people focus on what is good that should be taken forward
 - Reflect on strengths
 - Plan how to retain strengths

Start with the Ideal Story

- The initial emphasis is on getting a party to consider an “ideal” future
 - -more description is better
 - -get it to the “what will it look like” level
- But, if that is not realistic given the system or situation, the peer conflict coach can help the party identify “real” improvements and/or how to cope with the present situation

Initial Story of the Future – Prompt Statements

- “If you were as happy as possible with this relationship, what would that be like?”
- “If the other party(ies) treated you with the respect you want, what would that look like?”
- “If this relationship met your needs, what would it be like?”
- “If you felt you had positive influence what would you be doing in this situation and what would the situation be like?”

The Real(istic) Improvement

- If, after trying the “ideal” future story, the party makes it clear that they see no “ideal” possibility, the coach should encourage them to think about the best “realistic” improvement they can envision
- A critical test before moving to this level is to ask the party to consider how certain they are that a better or more ideal option is not possible

The “Needed” Improvement

- In some cases the party will describe a situation to the coach that suggests there is very little improvement that might be possible
- This process entails having the party think about the factors that contribute the most discomfort and whether the party has any control over exposure to or reaction to those factors

The “Needed” Improvement



- “What causes you the most discomfort in this conflict?”
- “What control do you have over how much you are exposed to this?”
- “What can you do that lessens the discomfort?”
- “What can you do to reduce the power you give to these factors, to this discomfort?”

Video Example – Stage Three



Peer Coaching on Communication and Collaboration

- Choosing the Best Conflict Style
- Constructive Feedback
- Roadways Conversation – Getting Where You Want to Go
- Collaborative Negotiation
- Preparing for a ConsultLine conversation

Video Example – Stage Four



**CONSIDERING COACHING FOR
HIGH CONFLICT BEHAVIOR – WHEN PEER
BASED COACHING MAY NOT BE ENOUGH**



Understanding HCE Behavior

It is important to clarify that unless you are a licensed psychologist or mental health clinician, you are not authorized to “diagnose” anyone’s mental health.

What we can do, however, is:

1. Name the behaviors we see and experience
2. Try to understand the person
3. Empathize (not sympathize)
4. Choose an effective behavioral response

Understanding HCE Behavior

“HC[E]s have a repeated pattern of aggressive behavior that increases conflict rather than reducing or resolving it. It may be part of their personalities – how they automatically and unconsciously think, feel and behave – and they carry this pattern with them....Conflict often feels like a life or death struggle....They tend to have a lot of:

- **All-or-nothing thinking**
- **Unmanaged emotions**
- **Extreme behavior**
- **Preoccupation with blaming others**

(Bill Eddy, "BIFF," 2011, pp. 2-3)

General HCE Behaviors

Adage: "Five percent of the employees take up 90 percent of your time!"

HCEs Lack Self Awareness

- Hard to understand the extent to which HCEs lack an awareness of how they contribute to their own problems
- For some HCEs, their strong sense of entitlement and exaggerated self-esteem resulted from always getting what they wanted
- HCEs have not learned that their own behavior creates or worsens conflict situations

Bill Eddy 2011

HCEs Lack Self-Change

- Because of lack of self-awareness, HCEs make no effort to change their own behavior
- Complex problems are all the other person's fault
- They put most of their energy into defending their own behavior and shifting blame
- HCEs have difficulty learning from their own social mistakes