

Reducing Conflict 75 Know Your Conflict Level

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Your conflict level is an interesting topic to explore. You may be experiencing conflict at a high degree and not even realize it is going on. Additionally, you may have feelings of being inadequate or fatigued and not recognize the source of those feelings. Conversely, you may whistle a happy tune and walk on clouds outwardly, while you are seething inside.

I think someone should invent a kind of tape we could each put on our forehead. It would turn different colors depending on the level of conflict we are experiencing. In times of low stress and conflict, the tape would appear blue or green. As things began to annoy us, the tape would turn orange or yellow. In times of high conflict, the tape would turn red with rage.

The color of the patch reflects your conflict level

Any time you want to understand your emotions, all you need to do is look in the mirror. Your forehead would contain information on how you are feeling. If you do not have such an invention, how else can you know your level of unrest?

Other ways to know your conflict level

The dilation of your pupils will be greater when you are under high stress, but you cannot track the dilation without a mirror. If your blinking rate goes way up for some reason, the likely culprit is high stress or conflict. Unfortunately, it is difficult to monitor your blinking rate unless you devote a lot of energy to the chore.

You may be squinting and the sun is not in your eyes. It may mean you are trying to decide how much conflict you are willing to tolerate. If your eyes are super-wide-open, it is probably a sign of extreme annoyance. You have to be careful because wide-open eyes can also be a sign of surprise.

When trying to figure out a person's mood using body language, look for clusters. One signal may mean different things when put into context.

Check your jaw

Clenched teeth usually means that something is amiss. The stronger the clench the higher the stress. If you end up with aching teeth, check if you have been clenching all day without realizing it.

Usually, conflict between you and other people is evident by your body language. You also need to be alert to the body language other people send you.

Watch for a change in body language another person has with you

You can gain a lot of insight by noticing a shift in body language another person exhibits toward you. For example, let's say the other person has been using hand gestures with palms up and open. All of a sudden, you notice the hands are closed and in a fist position. Something has just happened that signals conflict with you in the other person's mind.

Another signal might occur with sitting position. Let's say the other person is sitting with legs crossed and leaning backward in a relaxed position. You bring up a delicate topic in the conversation. All of a sudden, the other person drops both feet to the floor and sits up straight. That is a sure sign of a changing condition. You have likely annoyed or created fear in the other person with your comment.

Tone of voice can also signal a change in conflict level

Suppose you are having a general conversation with another employee in the break room. The conversation is natural with no signs of a strain. You mention your support for a new policy and notice the tone of the other person immediately goes up. Be alert that you may have crossed the line into conflict. The other employee may not agree with the new policy.

Conclusion

We do not have tape on our forehead to indicate the conflict level. We do exhibit conflict in numerous ways with our body language and tone of voice. Learn to watch for these signals in daily interactions. You will be able to lower the conflict level in your life.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.