Toolbox for Building a Culture of Forgiveness in Virtual Teams

Martin Luther King, Jr. said 'Let no man pull you low enough to hate him'. When we are in a situation where someone wrongs us, it is so easy to get caught in a negative space. We ruminate, we stress, we may even get sick. And in most cases, there is a good chance the other person does not even know what they have done to us. The art of forgiveness can be a very powerful tool in these situations. When you forgive someone else, it has nothing to do with them – and everything to do with you. It is a gift of love to yourself.

One thing that can help with moving into a forgiving mindset is to think in terms of growth. If you believe abilities can be cultivated through practice and everyone on your team can make excellent progress, then a culture of forgiveness is possible to achieve – one step at a time. In this toolbox, you will find two assessments helpful in learning your communication and conflict styles, templates for a team charter and team communication plan, recommendations for building a culture of forgiveness – including tips on communicating in the virtual environment and managing emotions, and a list of teambuilding activities geared toward virtual teams. You will also find a PowerPoint with notes from a recent presentation on the antecedents of building a culture of forgiveness in the workplace, with a focus on virtual teams.

Thank you for taking the time to view these materials. If you are interested in learning more about forgiveness in virtual teams and connecting with others on the same journey toward building a culture of forgiveness in their teams, please visit the Virtual Team Climate group on LinkedIn and join the discussion!

Stephanie Menefee, PhD

A certified conflict resolution practitioner, Stephanie Menefee's relevant research centers on dispute resolution, collaboration, and creativity in on-ground, virtual, and hybrid teams. Her most recent projects include conflict prevention in virtual teams, mediation in collaborations, and the diagnosis and management of negative organizational culture and climate. Stephanie is Associate Dean of Students and Full Professor in the School of Business at Northcentral University. She holds a Ph.D. in Public Administration & Policy with a concentration in psychology and conflict from Old Dominion University.

Melody Rawlings, EdD

With over 10 years of virtual team experience, Melody Rawlings' relevant experience includes firsthand knowledge of conflict resolution and mediation in the virtual environment. She has taught in the U.S. and Europe in the areas of conflict resolution, teamwork, organizational leadership, ethics, and eService learning. Melody is Director of the Center for the Advancement of Virtual Organizations, Lead Faculty for the PhD in Organizational Leadership at Northcentral University. She holds an EdD in Educational Leadership with a concentration in educational administration from Northern KY University.

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Creating a Culture of Forgiveness in Virtual Teams

We are so glad to have you join us in this interactive session to learn more about antecedents to conflict in geographically dispersed virtual teams - and how to leverage them to create a team culture of forgiveness and growth. Identifying the main causes of conflict and the resultant coping practices of team members can be the first step toward a culture of forgiveness, and at the root of it all is communication. To prepare for this session, we would like to provide you with the following communication style assessment. Based on Bienvenu's original Interpersonal Communication Inventory, this version put forward by Learning Dynamics will help you gain insight into areas where you may excel in communicating and areas where you may benefit from improvement. Completing the assessment prior to the session is optional, but entering the session equipped with this self-knowledge will help maximize our time together.

Forgiveness is one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves. We are looking forward to our interactive time together and to helping you build a toolbox for creating a culture of forgiveness in virtual teams.

Interpersonal Communication Skills Inventory

Purpose
This Interpersonal Communication Skills Inventory is designed to provide individuals with some insights into their communication strengths and potential areas for development. By answering each question candidly, an individual will receive a profile that displays their level of competence in four key communication areas. This inventory is intended to be viewed only by the individual who completes it.

How to Complete the Inventory
To complete this inventory, read each statement carefully and honestly assess how often the statement applies to you. For instance, in Section I - question number 1, if you sometimes find it difficult to talk to other people, place a check mark in the "Sometimes" column for question number 1. And for question 2, if others often tend to finish sentences for you when you are trying to explain something; check the "Usually" column and so on until you have completed all questions in all four sections of the inventory.

Interpersonal Communication Skills Inventory

SECTION I

	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	SELDOM
1. Is it difficult for you to talk to other people?			
2. When you are trying to explain something, do others tend to put words in your mouth, or finish your sentences for you?			
3. In conversation, do your words usually come out the way you would like?			
4. Do you find it difficult to express your ideas when they differ from the ideas of people around you?			
5. Do you assume that the other person knows what you are trying to say, and leave it to him/her to ask you questions?			
6. Do others seem interested and attentive when you are talking to them?			
7. When speaking, is it easy for you to recognize how others are reacting to what you are saying?			
8. Do you ask the other person to tell you how she/he feels about the point you are trying to make?			
9. Are you aware of how your tone of voice may affect others?			
10. In conversation, do you look to talk about things of interest to both you and the other person?			

SCORE: SECTION I TOTAL _____

Learning Dynamics, 2002

Interpersonal Communication Skills Inventory

SECTION II

	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	SELDOM
11. In conversation, do you tend to do more talking than the other person does?			
12. In conversation, do you ask the other person questions when you don't understand what they've said?			
13. In conversation, do you often try to figure out what the other person is going to say before they've finished talking?			
14. Do you find yourself not paying attention while in conversation with others?			
15. In conversation, can you easily tell the difference between what the person is saying and how he/she may be feeling?			
16. After the other person is done speaking, do you clarify what you heard them say before you offer a response?			
17. In conversation, do you tend to finish sentences or supply words for the other person?			
18. In conversation, do you find yourself paying most attention to facts and details, and frequently missing the emotional tone of the speakers' voice?			
19. In conversation, do you let the other person finish talking before reacting to what she/he says?			
20. Is it difficult for you to see things from the other person's point of view?			

SCORE: SECTION II TOTAL _____

Learning Dynamics, 2002

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Interpersonal Communication Skills Inventory

SECTION III

	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	SELDOM
21. Is it difficult to hear or accept constructive criticism from the other person?			
22. Do you refrain from saying something that you think will upset someone or make matters worse?			
23. When someone hurts your feelings, do you discuss this with him/her?			
24. In conversation, do you try to put yourself in the other person's shoes?			
25. Do you become uneasy when someone pays you a compliment?			
26. Do you find it difficult to disagree with others because you are afraid they will get angry?			
27. Do you find it difficult to compliment or praise others?			
28. Do others remark that you always seem to think you are right?			
29. Do you find that others seem to get defensive when you disagree with their point of view?			
30. Do you help others to understand you by saying how you feel?			

SCORE: SECTION III TOTAL _____

Interpersonal Communication Skills Inventory

SECTION IV

	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	SELDOM
31. Do you have a tendency to change the subject when the other person's feelings enter into the discussion?			
32. Does it upset you a great deal when someone disagrees with you?			
33. Do you find it difficult to think clearly when you are angry with someone?			
34. When a problem arises between you and another person, can you discuss it without getting angry?			
35. Are you satisfied with the way you handle differences with others?			
36. Do you sulk for a long time when someone upsets you?			
37. Do you apologize to someone whose feelings you may have hurt?			
38. Do you admit that you're wrong when you know that you are/were wrong about something?			
39. Do you avoid or change the topic if someone is expressing his or her feelings in a conversation?			
40. When someone becomes upset, do you find it difficult to continue the conversation?			

SCORE: SECTION IV TOTAL _____

Learning Dynamics, 2002

Interpersonal Communication Inventory Scoring Key

Instructions: Go back and look over your responses to each question. In front of each question, write the appropriate score using the table below.

For example, if you answered "Seldom" to Question 1, you would get 3 points. Write the number 3 in front of Question 1 on the inventory. Proceed to score all other questions.

Each section contains 10 questions. After scoring all questions, go back to Section 1. Total the score of Section 1 and put that number on the line "Score Section 1 Total." Proceed to total all scores for all other sections.

Enter your score here: _____

SCORING KEY

Question	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Question	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom
1	0	1	3	21	0	1	3
2	0	1	3	22	3	1	0
3	3	1	0	23	3	1	0
4	0	1	3	24	3	1	0
5	0	1	3	25	0	1	3
6	3	1	0	26	0	1	3
7	3	1	0	27	0	1	3
8	3	1	0	28	0	1	3
9	3	1	0	29	0	1	3
10	3	1	0	30	3	1	0
11	0	1	3	31	0	1	3
12	3	1	0	32	0	1	3
13	0	1	3	33	0	1	3
14	0	1	3	34	3	1	0
15	3	1	0	35	3	1	0
16	3	1	0	36	0	1	3
17	0	1	3	37	3	1	0
18	0	1	3	38	3	1	0
19	3	1	0	39	0	1	3
20	0	1	3	40	0	1	3

Learning Dynamics, 2002

Assessment:

(Choose one from each section please)

1. Occasionally I hold back and let others figure out how to resolve the conflict. I aim to focus on similarities rather than differences in views.

2. I like to resolve problems through negotiating.
   I try to make sure everyone's concerns are addressed.

3. I know what I want and I go for it.
   I sometimes aim to make the other person feel better in order to end a conflict.

4. I like to resolve problems through negotiating.
   I'm willing to give up my own views if it will help the other person feel better.

5. I always try to work together to solve problems.
   I aim to avert uncomfortable situations when possible.

6. I do what I can to avoid tension.
   I aim to convince others that I am right.

7. I stall in order to take some time to think about problems before approaching them. I am willing to compromise when others do.

8. I know what I want and I go for it.
   I aim to discuss problems openly so that they can be worked out right away.

9. Sometimes conflicts are better left not discussed. I try to get what I want.

Note: This quiz is based on the TKI instrument, published by CPP, Inc.—further information and TKI materials can be found on www.cpp.com.

10. I know what I want and I go for it.
    I like to resolve problems through negotiating.

11. I aim to discuss problems openly so that they can be worked out right away.
    I sometimes aim to make the other person feel better in order to end a conflict.

12. At times I keep my views to myself in order to avoid conflict.
    I prefer a "give and take" solution to problems where both sides make adjustments.

13. If the other person can agree to disagree, I can do the
    same. I make sure others know my views.

14. I share my thoughts and ask others to share
    theirs. I aim to convince others that I am right.

15. I sometimes aim to make the other person feel better in order to end a
    conflict. I aim to avert uncomfortable situations when possible.

16. I try make sure the other person does not get upset.
    I try to make sure others understand my reasoning and why I am right.

17. I know what I want and I go for it.
    I aim to avert uncomfortable situations when possible.

18. I allow others to voice their opinions without objecting if it makes them feel
    better. I prefer a "give and take" solution to problems where both sides make
    adjustments.

19. I try to work out problems with others right away.
    I sometimes stall in order to take some time to think about problems before approaching them.

20. I try to work out problems with others right away.
    I prefer to figure out what the fairest outcome would be from everyone's perspective.

Note: This quiz is based on the TKI instrument, published by CPP, Inc.—further information and TKI materials can be found on www.cpp.com.

21. **I try to pay attention to the other person's opinions when we are working out problems. I prefer to talk about problems directly.**

22. **I take a problem-solving approach where all sides figure out what we can agree on and what we are willing to give up.**
    I tell others what I want.

23. **I tend to worry about making everyone happy.**
    Occasionally I hold back and let others figure out how to resolve the conflict.

24. **I try to please others if it seems important to them.**
    I aim to work together to settle our differences through a bargaining approach.

25. **I try to convince people to agree with me.**
    I try to pay attention to the other person's opinions when we are working out problems.

26. **I try to find a way for different sides to meet half way in a conflict.**
    I tend to worry about making everyone happy.

27. **At times I keep my views to myself in order to avoid conflict.**
    I allow others to voice their opinions without objecting if it makes them feel better.

28. **I know what I want and I go for it.**
    I always try to work together to solve problems.

29. **I try to find a way for different sides to meet half way in a conflict.**
    Sometimes conflicts are better left not discussed.

30. **I try make sure the other person does not get upset.**
    I tell others when something is wrong so that we can work together to make it right.

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Assessment answer key:

1. **Occasionally I hold back and let others figure out how to resolve the conflict.** *AVOIDER*
   I aim to focus on similarities rather than differences in views. *ACCOMMODATOR*

2. **I like to resolve problems through negotiating.** *COMPROMISER*
   I try to make sure everyone's concerns are addressed. *PROBLEM SOLVER*

3. **I know what I want and I go for it.** *COMPETER*
   I sometimes aim to make the other person feel better in order to end a conflict. *ACCOMMODATOR*

4. **I like to resolve problems through negotiating.** *COMPROMISER*
   I'm willing to give up my own views if it will help the other person feel better. *ACCOMMODATOR*

5. **I always try to work together to solve problems.** *PROBLEM SOLVER*
   I aim to avert uncomfortable situations when possible. *AVOIDER*

6. **I do what I can to avoid tension.** *AVOIDER*
   I aim to convince others that I am right. *COMPETER*

7. **I stall in order to take some time to think about problems before approaching them.** *AVOIDER*
   I am willing to compromise when others do. *COMPROMISER*

8. **I know what I want and I go for it.** *COMPETER*
   I aim to discuss problems openly so that they can be worked out right away. *PROBLEM SOLVER*

9. **Sometimes conflicts are better left not discussed.** *AVOIDER*
   I try to get what I want. *COMPETER*

10. **I know what I want and I go for it.** *COMPETER*
    I like to resolve problems through negotiating. *COMPROMISER*

11. **I aim to discuss problems openly so that they can be worked out right away.** *PROBLEM SOLVER*
    I sometimes aim to make the other person feel better in order to end a conflict. *ACCOMMODATOR*

12. **At times I keep my views to myself in order to avoid conflict.** *AVOIDER*
    I prefer a "give and take" solution to problems where both sides make adjustments. *COMPROMISER*

Note: This quiz is based on the TKI instrument, published by CPP, Inc.—further information and TKI materials can be found on www.cpp.com.

13. **If the other person can agree to disagree, I can do the same.** *COMPROMISER*
    I make sure others know my views. *COMPETER*

14. **I share my thoughts and ask others to share theirs.** *PROBLEM SOLVER*
    I aim to convince others that I am right. *COMPETER*

15. **I sometimes aim to make the other person feel better in order to end a conflict.** *ACCOMMODATOR*
    I aim to avert uncomfortable situations when possible. *AVOIDER*

16. **I try make sure the other person does not get upset.** *ACCOMMODATOR*
    I try to make sure others understand my reasoning and why I am right. *COMPETER*

17. **I know what I want and I go for it.** *COMPETER*
    I aim to avert uncomfortable situations when possible. *AVOIDER*

18. **I allow others to voice their opinions without objecting if it makes them feel better.** *ACCOMMODATOR*
    I prefer a "give and take" solution to problems where both sides make adjustments. *COMPROMISER*

19. **I try to work out problems with others right away.** *PROBLEM SOLVER*
    I sometimes stall in order to take some time to think about problems before approaching them. *AVOIDER*

20. **I try to work out problems with others right away.** *PROBLEM SOLVER*
    I prefer to figure out what the fairest outcome would be from everyone's perspective. *COMPROMISER*

21. **I try to pay attention to the other person's opinions when we are working out problems.** *ACCOMMODATOR*
    I prefer to talk about problems directly. *PROBLEM SOLVER*

22. **I take a problem-solving approach where all sides figure out what we can agree on and what we are willing to give up.** *PROBLEM SOLVER*
    I tell others what I want. *COMPETER*

23. **I tend to worry about making everyone happy.** *ACCOMMODATOR*
    Occasionally I hold back and let others figure out how to resolve the conflict. *AVOIDER*

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24. **I try to please others if it seems important to them.** *ACCOMMODATOR*
    I aim to work together to settle our differences through a bargaining approach. *COMPROMISER*

25. **I try to convince people to agree with me.** *COMPETER*
    I try to pay attention to the other person's opinions when we are working out problems. *ACCOMMODATOR*

26. **I try to find a way for different sides to meet half way in a conflict.** *COMPROMISER*
    I tend to worry about making everyone happy. *ACCOMMODATOR*

27. **At times I keep my views to myself in order to avoid conflict.** *AVOIDER*
    I allow others to voice their opinions without objecting if it makes them feel better. *ACCOMMODATOR*

28. **I know what I want and I go for it.** *COMPETER*
    I always try to work together to solve problems. *PROBLEM SOLVER*

29. **I try to find a way for different sides to meet half way in a conflict.** *COMPROMISER*
    Sometimes conflicts are better left not discussed. *AVOIDER*

30. **I try make sure the other person does not get upset.** *ACCOMMODATOR*
    I tell others when something is wrong so that we can work together to make it right. *PROBLEM SOLVER*

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Interpreting your scores:

You may look at your scores and wonder how "right" they are. There are no right and wrong answers in this assessment, as it examines how you handle conflict situations which can vary greatly. Different contexts call for different approaches, and there is a time and a place to use each of the conflict styles. Your scores for each style will range from 0 to 12. If you have a score that falls between 9 and 12, you tend to use that style frequently; a score between 5 and 8 means you sometimes use that style; and a score between 0 and 4 means you don't use that style very often.

Competer:

Competers are known for being persuasive and direct. They know the result they want in a conflict situation, and they go for it. Their strengths are that they are often passionate about their views and dedicated to pursuing their convictions. Competers are good at making quick decisions, and tend not to waste time, which is especially helpful in the time of crisis.

Weakness: Sometimes Competers wind up with unequal relationships with others, and feelings of others can be hurt or overlooked with their decision-making style.

Problem Solver:

Problem Solvers tend to want to discuss all the details of a problem and work through it together so that everyone gets what he or she wants and is happy in the end. Their strengths are that they tend to welcome differences, build high-levels of trust and mutual understanding in relationships. There is also the potential to learn from creative problem solving.

Weaknesses: When time is a factor, it is difficult to spend the energy and time needed to process the way
Problem Solvers tend do. There is also the potential for burnout from over-processing.

Compromiser:

Compromisers approach conflict with the goal of compromise. They tend to think about what they are willing to give up and what they are willing to hold on to, and try to gear communication to focus on this give and take for all parties. It is a good way to promote cooperation. It can be done fairly quickly when both parties are engaged.

Weaknesses: Sometimes neither party really winds up with what he/she wants. It can also be viewed as a Band- Aid approach that doesn't really get to the root of a conflict.

Avoider:

Avoiders tend to step away from conflict. They often keep their opinions to themselves in conflict situations so as not to continue or escalate the conflict. They are often admired for having a calming, quiet presence in the face of crisis.

Weaknesses: Avoiders sometimes keep their feelings bottled up and then aren't able to meet their own needs. This can result in a frustrating buildup of emotions.

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Accommodator:

Accommodators have a harmonizing approach to conflict. They often focus on supporting others in a conflict situation and are adept at placating people in uncomfortable situations. Accommodators often gain strong appreciation from others involved in a conflict.

Weaknesses: Accommodators may build up resentment from denying their own needs. It also may be difficult for those who want to get to the root of the problem to work with Accommodators who tend to focus on making others happy.

Recommendations for Creating a Culture of Forgiveness in Virtual Teams

- Be an authentic leader with deep awareness of your values and strive to reflect those values in the way you speak, act, and lead. Staying true to your values expresses a sense of authenticity and genuineness which in turn increases your credibility and makes you trustworthy in the eyes of the team.
- Use emotional intelligence to build trust by showing respect, forgiveness, and empathy. Practice self-control and mind your own emotions; maintain professionalism in your attitude and behavior. Treat others with kindness and impartiality and they will respect and feel trust toward you.
- Promote creativity and innovation by encouraging team members to take risks in finding solutions to achieve team goals. Model forgiveness and create a safe place where team members do not feel threatened for risk taking and mistakes. Unforgiveness harms others, the team, and the organization.
- Provide appropriate collaborative tools that allow the team to share files, instant message, and access to other necessary resources.
- Begin meetings with five minutes devoted to allowing team members to discuss what is going on in their life. This often results in discoveries of shared interests leading to connections and stronger bonds among team members.
- Practice clear and consistent communication with expected dependability. Send regular project updates to team members and respond to questions in a timely manner. People are creatures of habit and these communication practices help team members feel supported and confident you are present.
- Promote relationship-building by providing scheduled times for socializing. Get to know each member of the team by actively listening learning about their interests, career goals, families, and hobbies. Socialization also provides opportunities for interpersonal relationships to form between team members.
- Monitor team and individual progress toward goals. Coach those who are not performing as they should to help them get back on track. Ensure that all team members are carrying an equal amount of the workload.
- Show you trust your team by showing confidence in their abilities, experience, and character. Celebrate, reward, and praise achievements of members individually and the team as a whole.
- Act with transparency and share information with the team. While there are times when certain information must be confidential, some information should always be communicated such as work schedules, project progress, and available resources for project completion.
- Use team building activities to develop and maintain trust and cohesiveness.

TEAM CHARTER TEMPLATE
The team charter should be developed collaboratively by the team

Roles and Responsibilities - Determine the necessary team roles and responsibilities needed. Have each team member identify two or three strengths and two or three weaknesses about themselves to help team members gain an understanding about each other and best fit for each person's role and responsibilities on the team.

Name and Title of Role:	Responsibilities:	Specific Duties:
Ex. Gina Jones, Team leader	Lead and manage team project.	• Monitor team progress • Provide regular updates to management • Oversee conflict management process • Manage timeline and budget

Core Values - Discuss and identify shared goals and determine the values of the team.

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•
•
•

Team Norms - Determine what actions and behaviors to which the team members are expected to adhere. Be specific, it may help avoid conflict and miscommunications. Below are some examples.

• Team members will respond to emails and other communication within _____ hours.
• All team members are responsible for submitting work free of writing errors.
• Attendance and participation at all team meetings is required.
• Add others as determined by team

Determine a Team Conflict Management Process –determine clear steps to follow should a conflict arise.

1. Identify the problem, who is involved, and report the issue to the team leader
2. The team leader should schedule a meeting with those involved in the conflict to further discuss the issue.
3. If the issue cannot be resolved between the members, bring in a mediator.
4. Once the issue is resolved, the terms should be recorded and sent to all members of the team for future reference.

Timeline – Create a timeline with milestones for deliverables.

Rawlings, M. (2015). *Learning to lead across borders through eService in virtual teamwork*, International Leadership Association, 17th Annual Global Conference, Barcelona, Spain

Team Communication Plan
(A team communication plan is unique to each project)

Communication Needs for Project [name]: Identify the communication needs for the project.

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-
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Team Members: List all team members, their roles, contact information, and preferred method of communication

Name & Title	Role	Communication Responsibility/Frequency	Phone	Email	Format/Channel
Ex. Katy Jones, Analyst	Team lead	Weekly and as needed			Email updates on project progress

Communication Schedule: Provide a detailed outline of what, when, how, why, and whom

Information/Report	Method	Frequency	Purpose	Person responsible	Recipient(s)
Ex. Project Status	Email	Weekly	Evaluate project progress and identify issues/challenges	Team leader	Team and department manager

Escalation Process: Define a communication process for resolving issues.

Urgency Level	Impact	Decision Authority	Timeframe for Resolution
1	Major: Resolve quickly to avoid adverse effect on profit or schedule	VP or above	4-6 hours
2	Mid-level: May result in adverse effect on profit or schedule	Project Sponsor	1 business day
3	Minor: My result in minor scheduling snags; no adverse effect on schedule or profit	Project lead	2 business days

(Rawlings & Menefee, 2020)

How to write an email

- Be specific in the subject line
- Be formal (unless you've already developed a more casual relationship)
  - Begin with an appropriate title such as "Dear Dr. X" or "Dear Mrs./Mr. X". If that sounds too proper for you, open with "Greetings Dr. X" or "Hello Mrs./Mr. X"
    - If you've already established a casual relationship, you can say "Hi" or "Hello" instead – for example, "Hi John"
    - *Tip: spell out the entire name and make sure it's the correct spelling*
  - Close professionally (i.e. Best, Thank you, Sincerely, Regards). Thank you is always a good idea when in doubt.
    - If you are writing an informal communication, you can also include a personal message to the recipient. For example, if it's a Friday, you can say something like "I hope you have a wonderful weekend!" or "Happy Friday!". The relaxed language at the end makes it a less formal communication.
- Be concise in the body of the email
  - *Tip: begin with a "nice" opener like "I hope this note finds you enjoying the day"*
  - Get straight to the point – why are you emailing? Say it as clearly as possible
    - Example: "I am writing in hopes of scheduling a meeting to discuss X"
    - *Tip: make sure you aren't asking a question you could answer on your own by searching a bit*
  - Ask a question if you need a response
    - If you don't get a response in a reasonable amount of time (give it 48 hours) send a follow up email. "I am reaching out today to follow up on my previous email about…" is always a safe introduction to a second email
    - *Tip: avoid use of the word 'just' in your communications. Informal or not, the word diminishes the importance of your message*

How to manage emotions:

- Stall: ask for clarification or ask for something to be repeated to give yourself a minute to think.
- Pause: silence isn't terrible. It just means you're taking a moment to stay in control and collect your thoughts.
    - You can also use a pause to check in with your body. Are your hands clenched? Jaws? Is your breath shallow? These are all signs that you're stressed and need to breathe.
    - Use the pause to calm down.
        - How?
            - Sensory input: take a sip of water, eat a mint, squeeze a stress ball, put a pen to paper, touch the table, notice your posture and sit up straight, feel your feet on the ground, etc.
            - Once you've had a minute to breathe and are in the present moment try and see the matter from the other person's perspective. *Empathy does not equal agreement.*
                - Let the other person talk… and finish. If you feel the need to interrupt, don't. Write yourself a note so you can remember to come back to the point when the other person is finished speaking.
- Address one point at a time. If you list three things in response to each piece of feedback, you'll seem scattered. Make one point and then pause for a reaction. The reaction will indicate whether it's safe to proceed with your next point.
- Be clear: how you say it is equally as important as what you're saying.
- Be assertive: Your values and opinions are just as important
- *Tip: If you already boiled over and said things you wish you hadn't, it's not too late. You can still go back, take responsibility for your words and/or actions.*

Virtual Teambuilding Activities

Leaders of virtual teams must be intentional about team building in order to create trust and develop a cohesive team. A cohesive team fosters and enables forgiveness. There are hundreds of ideas for virtual team building activities on the web and some popular ones are described below.

Simple and Easy Activities

- **Virtual happy hour**: Host regular virtual happy hours in Zoom or other conferencing software to promote social interaction and relationship-building. Give it a theme and consider using games such as Name that Tune, workplace trivia, show and tell, etc.
- **Virtual open-house**: Allow team members to take a look inside each other's home to showcase a favorite room or activity. This could be part of a weekly or monthly virtual happy hour. During the holidays, encourage team members to share about their favorite holiday foods, recipes, and stories.
- **Conversation Starters**: Start a chat room in your organization's messaging platform and have an informal topic and a set of questions for everyone to get to know each other.
- **Secret Kudos**: Have everyone submit anonymous compliments for team members throughout the month, then on the first day of the following month send them out in an email to the entire team.

More Complex Activities

- **Miniature campfire smores**: Schedule a teambuilding activity and a week in advance, mail a smores making kit to team members. The kit should include: mini marshmallows, a chocolate bar, matches, toothpicks, and a tealight candle for the "campfire." During the scheduled teambuilding event, each member will roast their mini marshmallows and build their smores around their candle "campfire."
- **Mock gameshow**. Host a mock gameshow complete with a prize such as gift card: Schedule a video conference and create a PowerPoint with one closed-ended question on each slide. The number of questions will depend on how long you want the game to last. Add fun graphics and music. These can be theme related about the work environment or not. If a small team, members can play individually or if a large team, members can be divided into small teams with as few as two. Share you screen to show the PowerPoint one question at a time and have members "raise their hand" in the software to answer the question. The first person to raise their hand gets the first chance to answer. If playing in smaller teams, each team should pick a person to raise their hand for the team. The individual or team with the most points at the end wins.
- **Virtual scavenger hunt**: Different images are hidden on the pages of the organization's intranet This activity could be centered around a holiday theme such as Easter where images of eggs are hidden. Be sure and have a prize for first person who finds all the hidden images.
- **Guess who**: This works best for smaller teams. The leader asks team members to share their own baby picture which is complied into one document with each picture on a

separate page. In a virtual happy hour or other outside of work socialization time share the screen to show each picture and have the team guess who it is.

- **Virtual book club**: Encourage team members to read by starting a virtual book club. Having a virtual book club offers not only opportunities for socializing for members to become better acquainted, but also builds critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Have a few suggested books at the first meeting, but allow the club members to make the final selection. Also, in the first meeting establish a few ground rules such as meeting attendance, reading assignments, etc.

Creating a Culture of Forgiveness in Virtual Teams

Stephanie Menefee, PhD
Melody Rawlings, EdD

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Session Roadmap

- The Virtual Team
  - Conflict
  - Communication
  - Trust
  - Forgiveness
- Bringing it all together

Many people see forgiveness as a religious concept... or one that encourages weakness... not true! Many studies show how forgiveness can improve health and well-being – and productivity. Forgiveness is an effective coping tool – and in the workplace it can be a powerful one. Especially in the virtual environment where people are geospatially located. What we're going to talk about today and start learning how to practice is *not* forgive and forget... instead it is creating the mindset that everyone brings value, and communication is paramount.

Think about something or someone who makes you angry... recognize the feeling – really think about it – is your jaw clenching? Fists tight? Anything else? Body tensing up? What happens if you held all that inside? (think about blowing up a balloon – or even do it!). If you let "it" out when you feel this way, it's not so bad. But when you add to it – it gets bad... (blow it up again)... Now, what if the negative keeps coming in, but never going out? (blow up the balloon some more). If you let the balloon go after you fill it to the max with hot air... it'll fly everywhere! It's out of control. What if this balloon were you? Remember, *not* forgiving is a detriment to your health.

In this presentation, we go over all the precursors to building a culture of forgiveness (conflict, communication, trust) and then we bring it all together in the end and talk through it in terms of *your* organizational experiences and goals.

3

Characteristics of Virtual Teams

- Operate across space, time, and organizational boundaries
- Linked through communication technologies
- Function best with structured tasks and moderate levels of interdependence
- Require high level of trust among members and leaders

(Manning & Curtis, 2019; The annual IWG, 2019)

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A virtual team is a group of individuals who collaborate on work from different geographical locations or time zones and have been around way before COVID-19 hit. Also called remote teams, geographically dispersed teams or distributed teams rely on various communication tools to work together. But being geographically dispersed doesn't necessarily mean that team members should be in different countries or continents. Members can be in the same city and still be part of a virtual team.

Virtual teams are more cost effective than traditional teams

Team members are typically responsible for their own office space and equipment (and utilities like internet and electricity)

Talent acquisition can come from anywhere around the world, helping build global virtual teams. The diversity of virtual teams also holds many benefits such as better ideas, more creativity, different perspectives, more solutions.

Research shows virtual teams operate best when tasks are structured and interdependence of team members is moderate.

Perhaps the most important component of effective virtual teamwork is trust. Trust in teams helps people understand that everybody in the team is impacted by the actions, judgments and expectations of the other team members. While it is hard

work to build trust in teams, one may assume it is even harder to trust each other when teams go virtual. A strong and positive relationship between trust and virtual team effectiveness, particularly on team attitudes and on the degree to which individuals are willing to share information and knowledge. So, when virtual teams recognize that they are struggling, investigating how much they trust each other is probably a good first action to take.
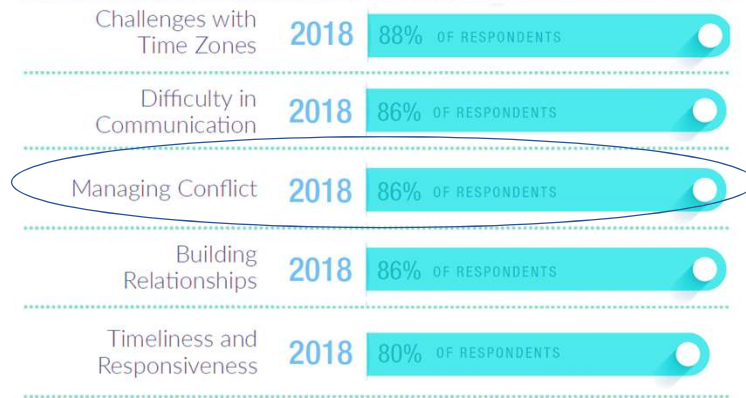
According to the 2018 Virtual Teams Survey, 86% reported managing conflict as a top challenge

Antecedents of Virtual Team **Conflict**

- Geographic distance
  - No hallway or office interactions
  - Lack of nonverbal communication
- Feelings of isolation
- Power imbalance – real or perceived
- Miscommunications
  - Poor netiquette
  - Misinterpretation of communication

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Team conflict be broadly categorized in two types

➢ Relationship conflict which involves personal issues such as personality clash, shared dislike, and anger between members – some believe relationship conflict is harmful to team effectiveness

➢ Task conflict which concerns differing opinions about task completion, responsibility of tasks, and delegation – some task conflict can be constructive to team effectiveness

- (Kankanhalli & Wei, 2006)

Antecedents of Virtual Team Conflict

- People feel less inhibited resulting in a greater likelihood of aggression
- Virtual team members may be more likely to take disagreements or criticism of their ideas more personally
- Conflict is more emotionally charged in virtual teams and can escalate quickly
  - Possibly due to lack of history with other members of team

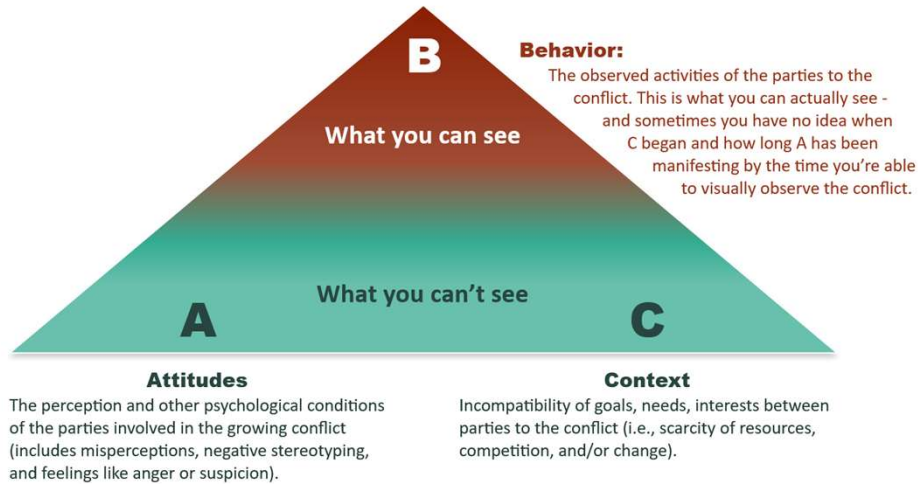CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF **VIRTUAL ORGANIZATIONS**

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There are many predictors of conflict in virtual teams stemming from the nature of virtuality itself. The distance from team members and lack of in-person interaction can lead people to feel more empowered to say things or behave in ways they would likely not say or do in a face-to-face setting. Unfortunately, this can lead to aggression.

Members of virtual teams may internalize criticism more in the virtual environment than they would if the criticism was delivered in the physical workplace leading to more likelihood of disagreements.

As a result, emotions can be high in the virtual workplace resulting in quicker escalation of conflict. This may be in part due of a lack of history with team members.

Conflict Triangle

B
What you can see

Behavior:
The observed activities of the parties to the conflict. This is what you can actually see - and sometimes you have no idea when C began and how long A has been manifesting by the time you're able to visually observe the conflict.

What you can't see

A

C

Attitudes
The perception and other psychological conditions of the parties involved in the growing conflict (includes misperceptions, negative stereotyping, and feelings like anger or suspicion).

Context
Incompatibility of goals, needs, interests between parties to the conflict (i.e., scarcity of resources, competition, and/or change).

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When you're operating in a culture of forgiveness, potential conflicts are more easily caught and resolved before they bubble up and become behavior.

Recognizing signs of conflict:

- Use your Spidey senses to notice a tense atmosphere in team meetings

- Listen to what team members say about each other

- Tune-in to signs of resentment

- Pay attention to indications someone may feel treated unfairly

- Watch for body language in video conferencing, i.e. no longer turning on camera, paying attention, nor contributing

- Be aware of silence of team members

Communication in Virtual Teams

- Dependent on electronic communication
- Greater risk of miscommunication
- Involves unique challenges
- Requires a different leadership and management approach
- Lacks body language and subtle visual cues

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How to mitigate some of the conflict? Communication!

- Involves unique challenges including time zones, cultural, and language barriers

- Dependent on the use of electronic communication media

- Greater risk of miscommunication

- Requires a different leadership and management approach

- Lacks body language and subtle visual cues

For a deeper dive into effective communication, take the Communication Style Assessment in the Toolbox we've provided. In the virtual environment especially, our best and sometimes only way to communicate is via written communication (i.e. email) and group meetings. Think about how your assessment results relate to your work in the virtual environment and how you could capitalize on your strengths in everyday communication with your colleagues.

Formal vs Informal Communication in Virtual Teams

- Formal = Work Based
  - Group meetings
  - Written communications

- Informal = Relationship Based
  - Linked to trust

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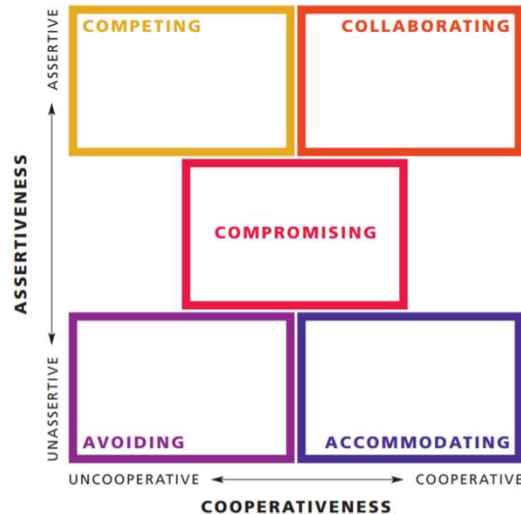
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FORMAL

- Holding frequent remote meetings are a necessity
  - ➢ Hold video meetings with the team and individual team – seeing each other is very important

- Ensure written communication is clear, concise, and respectful
  - ➢ Encourage team members to proofread their emails for not only writing mechanics, but also for tone and content

- Create a sense of community through intentional relationship-building and transparency
  - ➢ Infuse fun into video meetings and begin with time for casual conversations
  - ➢ Permit team members to share their successes
  - ➢ Ensure the team has what they need
  - ➢ Provide opportunities for growth through virtual conferences and trainings

INFORMAL

- Virtual teams lack opportunities for social interaction with team members to build essential relationships for sharing information and building communication networks

- Connections among team members in the network lead to both formal and informal knowledge sharing to enhance team effectiveness

- Three key factors affect information sharing in virtual teams: leadership, technology, and trust

- Team leaders should encourage collaboration over competitiveness, establish a team charter, and ensure technology tools and training are available

- Quality communication in virtual teams is linked to trust

Conflict Management Styles

(Thomas, 1976)

Important to know conflict style in a virtual environment… When it comes to conflict, there is no one solution that will work in all situations. Each situation will be different, from the trigger of the conflict to the parties involved.

A manager skilled in conflict resolution should be able to take a birds-eye view of the conflict and apply the conflict management style that is called for in that specific situation. It's also helpful to observe and identify the conflict style of each team member. This will help you better understand why a conflict happens and possibly even help it be prevented.

Avoiding: uncooperative and unassertive

- Downplaying disagreement, retreating from the situation, above all staying neutral

Pros: Giving people time to calm down can solve a surprising amount of issues. Time and space can give a much-needed perspective to those in conflict, and some issues will resolve themselves. Managers show that they trust employees to act like adults and solve issues.

Cons: If used in the wrong situations, this technique will make conflicts worse. Managers can seem incompetent if they overuse avoidance because employees will

think that they are incapable of handling disagreements.

Accommodation: cooperative and unassertive
- Allow the desires of others to rule and overlooking differences to maintain the status quo

Pros: Small disagreements can be handled quickly and easily, with a minimum of effort. Managers can build a reputation as an easygoing person, and employees will know that they can speak their mind about problems without reprisal.

Cons: Managers might be viewed as weak if they accommodate too often. Using this technique with larger or more important issues will not solve any issues in a meaningful way and should absolutely be avoided

Compromising: moderately cooperative and moderately assertive
- Bargain for acceptable solutions where members win some and lose some

Pros: Issues can be resolved quickly, and the parties in conflict will leave understanding more about the other person's perspective. Compromise can set the stage for collaboration down the road, and allows both parties to feel heard. Managers using this tactic are seen as facilitating agreement, being hands-on and finding solutions.

Cons: No one leaves completely happy. In some cases, one side might feel as though they sacrificed too much and be unwilling to compromise again in the future. Managers who rely on this technique will burn up employee goodwill and be seen as unable to execute collaboration.

Collaborating: Cooperative and assertive
- Strive to satisfy all members' concerns as much as possible by resolving differences

Pros: Everyone leaves happy. A solution that actually solves the problems of the conflict is found, and the manager who implements this tactic will be seen as skilled.

Cons: This style of conflict management is time-consuming. Deadlines or production may have to be delayed while solutions are found, which might take a long time, depending on the parties involved and can lead to losses.

Competing: This style rejects compromise and involves not giving in to others' viewpoints or wants.

Pros: Managers using this style show that they are strong and will not back down on their principles. Disputes are solved quickly, as there is no space for any disagreement or discussion.

Cons: Managers using this style will be seen as unreasonable and authoritarian.

Handling conflicts by crushing any dissent will not lead to happy, productive employees, nor will it lead to finding the best solutions in most cases.

Side note: From the TKI assessment: Our conventional wisdom recognizes, for example, that often "Two heads are better than one" (collaborating). But it also says, "Kill your enemies with kindness" (accommodating), "Split the difference" (compromising), "Leave well enough alone" (avoiding), and "Might makes right" (competing). The effectiveness of a given conflict-handling mode depends on the requirements of the specific situation and the skill with which you use that mode.
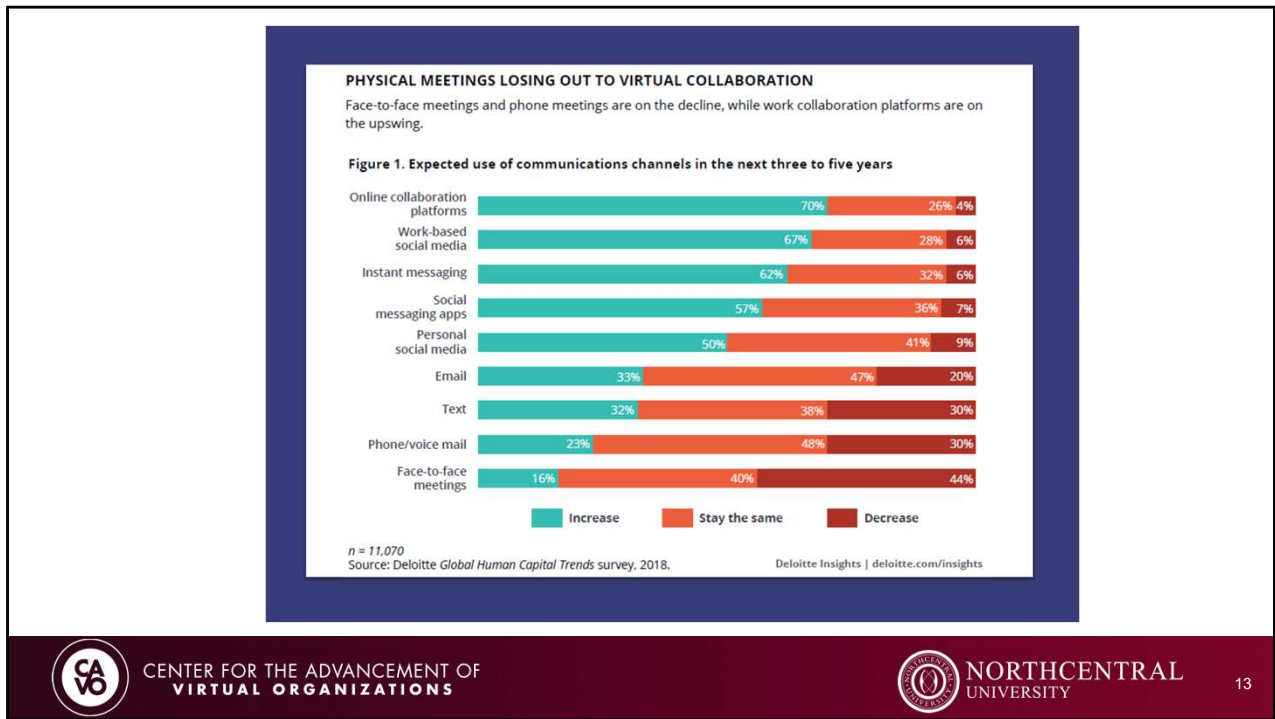
What is your conflict management style?

Avoiding

Accommodating

Compromising

Competing

Collaborating

A mix of all the above

Poll Title: What is your conflict management style?
https://www.polleverywhere.com/multiple_choice_polls/4zyFWzdF2xmJo1T8i76JF?flow=Default&onscreen=persist

PHYSICAL MEETINGS LOSING OUT TO VIRTUAL COLLABORATION

Face-to-face meetings and phone meetings are on the decline, while work collaboration platforms are on the upswing.

Figure 1. Expected use of communications channels in the next three to five years

Channel	Increase	Stay the same	Decrease
Online collaboration platforms	70%	26%	4%
Work-based social media	67%	28%	6%
Instant messaging	62%	32%	6%
Social messaging apps	57%	36%	7%
Personal social media	50%	41%	9%
Email	33%	47%	20%
Text	32%	38%	30%
Phone/voice mail	23%	48%	30%
Face-to-face meetings	16%	40%	44%

n = 11,070
Source: Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends survey, 2018.

Deloitte Insights | deloitte.com/insights

The 2018 Deloitte study found approximately two-thirds of business executives expect use of online collaboration platforms, work-based social media and instant messaging to increase in next three to five years. So, here we are after Covid with more people working virtually than ever before. What would this graph look like if the study were conducted this year?

Trust in Virtual Teams

- A positive relationship exists between trust and team effectiveness
- Research suggests trust is based on three factors: competence, integrity and benevolence
- Building a foundation of trust includes authenticity, collaboration, and transparency

The role of trust in virtual teamwork

Less social clues
fewer opportunities for social control

Risk of conflicts
due to delayed responses and overlooked elements

Higher risk of role ambiguity
as it's harder to target own duty

Poor understanding of events
when the virtual context has no clear boundaries

Increased importance of trust
which leaves an open question:

How do I trust you?

SCIENCE FOR WORK

Adapted from Breuer, Hertel, & Huffmeier (2016)

(Bruer et al. 2016; Clark et al. 2010)

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Importance of Trust in Virtual Teams:

A positive relationship exists between trust and team effectiveness

- Promotes understanding among team members that actions, judgments, and expectations of individuals impacts team as a whole

- Affects attitudes, behaviors, and willingness to share information

- Encourages informal communication networks and sharing of information

Research suggests trust is based on three factors: competence, integrity and benevolence

- Competence: evidence of each members skill and expertise

- Integrity: keeping promises, meeting deadlines, and observing norms

- Benevolence: going beyond what is expected to help teamers

Building a Foundation of Trust:

- Be an authentic leader

- Use emotional intelligence

- Promote creativity and innovation

- Provide appropriate collaborative tools

- Practice clear and consistent communication with expected dependability

- Promote relationship-building by providing scheduled times for socializing

- Monitor team and individual progress toward goals.

- Show your trust for team members

- Act with transparency and share information

- Implement team building activities

Sometimes the best way to understand something is
to go over what it is not...

Managers need to create channels where people can safely and professionally resolve their issues. One way to do this is through active listening...

Think of a time when you felt unheard.
1. What did the person in the story do that demonstrated non-listening, and
2. 2. What impact did this behavior have on the speaker?

Now, develop guidelines for good listening by reversing what happened in the stories.

Good questions to ask in a team setting when you're actively engaged and ready to listen:
• "I sense you're not in full agreement, am I right?"
• "How does this approach align with your other responsibilities?"
• "Am I wrong in thinking this might create some problems for you?"
• "What other information would you need to make a decision?"
• "What's the best approach, in your opinion?"

Guidelines for effective listening:

Poll Title: Guidelines for good listening:
https://www.polleverywhere.com/free_text_polls/JE4k6UjOvsy4yNb323kB5

Check-in with group:

- We talked about active listening... how does that fit into culture and team building?

- In talking about the antecedents, does forgiveness seem like a team virtue or a value? Or something else?

- Any questions so far? It's time to pull together the antecedents to a culture of forgiveness… but first –

Poll Title: What does forgiveness mean to you?
https://www.polleverywhere.com/free_text_polls/g1noomSLTLcqcqI578qFl

Forgiveness

- What is it?
  - Reframing one's anger and hurt from the past
  - Recovering peace in the present
  - Revitalizing purpose and hopes for the future
  - Having empathy

- What is it *not*?
  - pardoning, excusing, condoning, forgetting, denying, and in some cases, reconciling

Tibbits (2006)

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What it IS:

This definition implies that dealing with forgiveness is a three step process/phase:

Phase one: deals with the question of how I handle the memories of painful things said and done to me in the past.

Phase two: how I overcome the negative emotions I feel right now.

Phase Three: how I fee myself form a hurtful past to achieve my desired future.

Quote: "Forgiving is not forgetting; it's actually remembering -- remembering and not using your right to hit back. It's a second chance for a new beginning. And the remembering part is particularly important. Especially if you don't want to repeat what happened." -- Desmond Tutu

Skill development – forgiveness:

Empathy – to feel into. It is best described by a quote from Jacob M. Braude "Consider how hard it is to change yourself and you will understand what little chance you have in trying to change others". In other words, acknowledge others are human too – compassionately see their struggles and hurts.
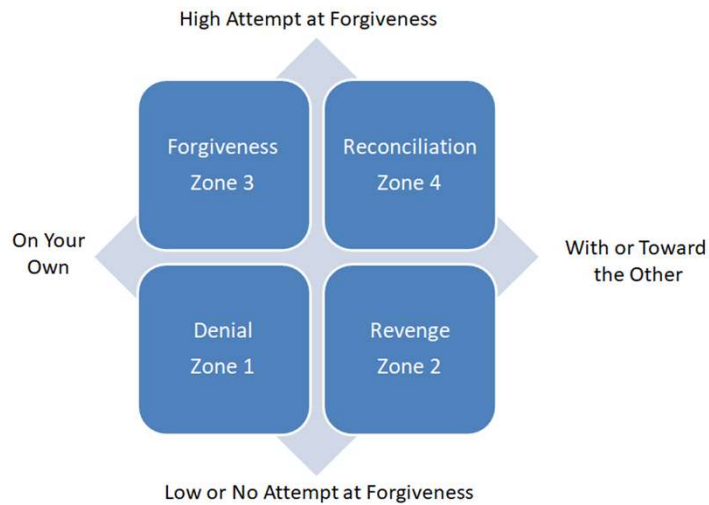
How to deal with the hurt in the past implies forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past and instead (it is a journey) of planning for a better future. Tolstoy

quote: "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but not one thinks of changing himself"

What is it NOT:
1. Forgive and forget is unreal and only confuses the situation as the mythical notion of the "delete key" does not exist;
2. Forgiveness that implies 'it is ok' is not ok as the wrong committed will never be right;
3. Forgive and make up is not always the case; and
4. Forgive and set others free is possible but accountability is important;

Tibbits D, Ellis G, Piramelli C, Luskin F, and Lukman R (2006). Hypertension reduction through forgiveness training . Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling. 60 (1-2): 27-34.

The Importance of Forgive**ness**

- Health/Well-being
  - Rumination linked to poor health outcomes
- Motivation
  - Life and work

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Rumination = an event-specific brooding, such that as a victim of an interpersonal offense ruminates on the specifics of the hurtful event, and initial reactions of anger, fear, surprise, or confusion become bitterness, vengefulness, and lingering hurt, all of which discourage forgiveness.

Signs of Rumination:
- I can't stop thinking about how I was wronged by this person.
- Memories about this person's wrongful actions have limited my enjoyment of life.
- I have a hard time getting thoughts of how I was mistreated out of my head.
- I try to figure out the reasons why this person hurt me.
- The wrong I suffered is never far from my mind.
- I find myself replaying the events over and over in my mind.

Thinking about Forgiveness as Self-love

- Think about why you're angry, hurt, sad, etc.

- Try to find a positive way you've grown from the situation.

- Think about the other person (and why they may have gone about meeting their needs in this way that was particularly hurtful to you).

- Decide whether you'd like the other person to know you've forgiven them.

- Remember, forgiveness is a way to honor yourself; so, let go of that which does not serve you, and move forward and be open to happiness.

| I Statement	You took my ideas and now I won't get that promotion.
Accepting Responsibility	When you took my ideas, I was hurt and angry. I would have preferred you let me share and take credit for them, but you did not. When I think about what you did, I let myself feel bitterness. I no longer choose to hold on to the tension and hurt that accompanies my memory of the situation and cancel the expectations I placed on you to be honest. You are responsible for your own actions.

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Reflect on what happens when conflict goes unresolved for an extended period. Identify a conflict of your choice that has spiraled and examine it through the lens of "what bad things will happen if this problem goes unresolved".
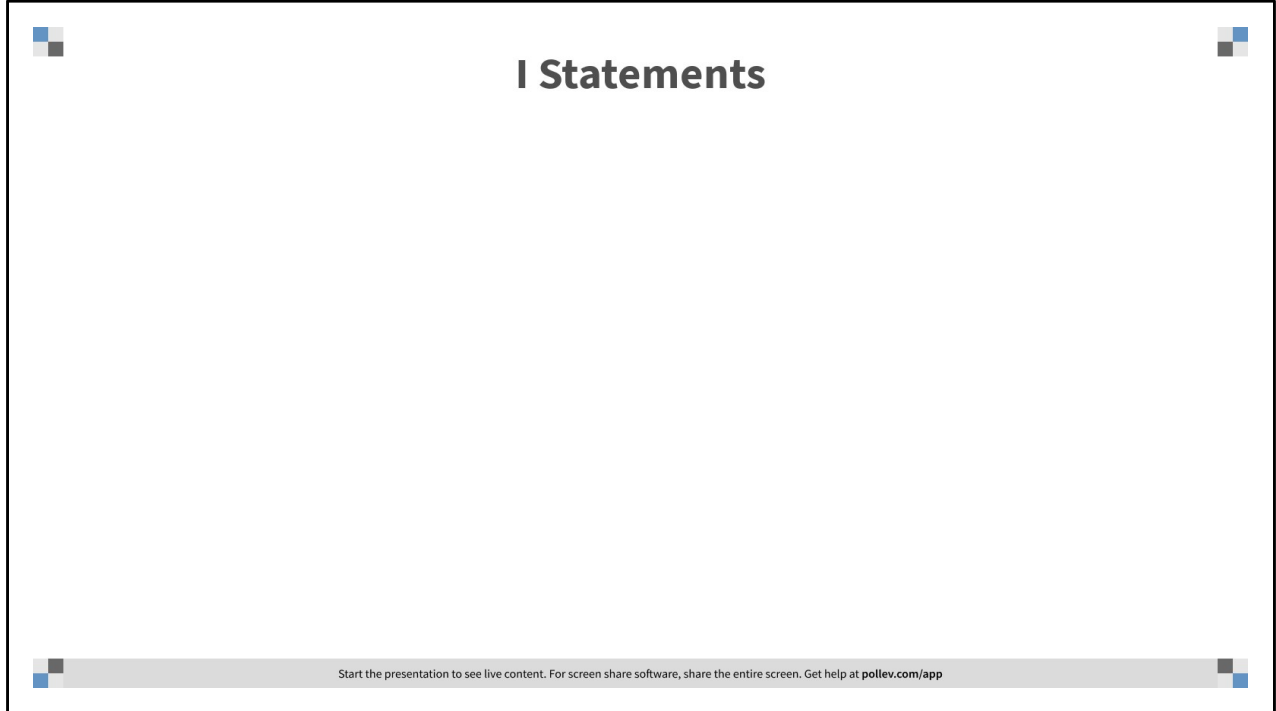
I Statements

Poll Title: I Statements
https://www.polleverywhere.com/free_text_polls/LnDuOVVjvy3mDF7MDpu6X

Turning 'you' statements into 'I' statements can help release the person who feels wronged. Try turning the following statements into "I" statements:
You make me angry because you're always late
You don't do your work so I have to pick up your slack
You're not a team player
What else? (from the audience?)

Preventative Practices

- Create a team charter with team input
    - Define a team
    - Set up clear communication guidelines and include rules for netiquette
    - Define and communicate team norms
    - Reinforce organizational values through identifying team values
- Maintain open lines of communication
- Teambuilding with attention to culture

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Characteristics of a team that forgives...

We highly recommend creating a team charter to collectively define the purpose of the team by clarifying factors that will lead to success for the team, team goals, deliverables, milestones, key values and behaviors.
In addition to the team charter, help your team understand what a team really is. Not to be hokey, but there is no "I" in team. Teams are interdependent and helping the members understand other members are depending on them helps build commitment.

Setup clear communication guideless and don't forget netiquette. We recommend a team communication plan is an important resource that helps project stakeholders to communicate clearly and effectively with one another.
The communication plan achieves this by establishing clear guidelines for factors, such as:
What information should be shared
When information should be shared
How information should be shared

Whom information should be shared with
Who is responsible for sharing information

Be sure to maintain open lines of communication by being consistently present and available – communication should be dependably predictable.
Finally, use team building activities often with intention on building a culture of trust, accountability which can lead to one of forgiveness.

Building a
Forgiving Team

- See everyone as an ally, build mutual trust and respect
- See the big picture, stay goal oriented – recognize wins
- Facilitate excellence and improvement in a transparent manner
- Create frequent opportunities for interaction
- Facilitate empathetic listening
- Set an example

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Building a culture of forgiveness is more than just clearly defining roles and responsibilities (i.e. more than making a charter)

Apollo 13 – proof that well-coordinated teams can perform miracles.

Covey said, 'Trust is the glue of life'. This goes both ways... You need to trust your team, and your team needs to trust you... how can you make sure of it? Start small. Tell someone you think you can trust something that would be ok if it gets back to you – and see if it comes back through someone else.

Group activity!

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What are you doing now... what could you be doing better... how can you do it?

- Think about your current organizational culture – what are you doing now?

- Where would you like to be?

- How can you get there? Do you have the tools? What things will you need?

- Remember – anyone can be a leader... You don't have to be in a position of authority to get the ball rolling here...

The team charter acts as a vision for the team, helping to get crystal clear on why the team exist and on their focus. It serves as a touchstone for decision making and day to day behavior.
The benefits of a team charter are numerous including:
Ensuring buy-in from all team members
Holding all team members accountable
Clarifying roles and responsibilities within the team

Demonstrating the team's purpose to the rest of the organization
Providing clarity and reducing confusion in cases where conflicts may arise.
A team charter is created collectively, therefore it encourages buy-in and support from every member of the team. It motivates, inspires and energises providing the clarity around the who, what, and why of the team. When team members come and go it is important to review and revise the team charter to allow new team members equal contribution, support, and buy-in.

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Poll Title: Add your name and email here if you want to create a group and stay in touch!
https://www.polleverywhere.com/free_text_polls/8Yy9YOXn0Qb9hcoYFxQII

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