

What You Don't Know about CONFLICT & CONTROL Can Sabotage You

My 17-year-old son stood in his bedroom, looked at me and said, "Everything you are doing right now makes me NOT want to do this... and I know I need to write the essays for the college application. Can you stop making this harder?" Stellar parenting moment, right? That's the response I got when I asked one too many times, "When will you have those essays done?" The truth is I was worrying about his applications. In that worry, I became controlling. Sinning. Not useful to a good outcome. In business, we create this same experience through "micro-management," where this behavior communicates to our employees or coworkers that they can't be trusted and need to be treated as children. In marriage, church or other contexts, we too often create power struggles where one spouse jockey for control in one way or another.

Knowing how our desire to control negatively impacts our relationships at work, home and church is important. Knowing how to deal with other people who are controlling is just as important. Whether it is you or the other person, if you don't deal with this, you'll have more conflicts and lack the deeper connections you long for with those around you.

You are probably familiar with how control impacts relationships. We all have that person where everyone's walking on eggshells around them because we never know when the next shoe's going to drop. These people are easily offended, must be right, need to get their way, are argumentative and the simplest of discussions can turn into difficult conversation or an onslaught of accusation and negativity. I'm guessing you can relate. But do you see what happens to us when dealing with those people? We succumb to

people-pleasing and barely share anything with them because of their reactions, so the relationship isn't even real—it's based on a persona we put on to keep the eruption at bay. It's also preventing real connection because who we really are is not safe with that person.

And we do the same thing to others. We literally create people-pleasing and sabotage our own relationships by taking offense, needing to be right, being argumentative and taking things personally. People lie to us about who they really are because that isn't safe and they don't go deep because who knows when offense will bare its sharp teeth?

But what to do?

I've been helping people overcome relationship challenges and deal more effectively with conflict for over 30 years. We know what works and what doesn't. Here's a few tips to help you move forward in this area today:

1. Get feedback—ask a few people close to you if you are hard to approach, safe to talk to or if they worry you'll take things personally when they speak to you. Ask them if they hold back, telling you things because they're worried about the reaction. Get examples. Don't argue with them either. Just listen. Take the information to God and ask Him for help apologizing for what's yours to own in the feedback you receive. Know there's no condemnation in Christ! Don't dish shame all over yourself.

2. Find the fear—dig into what you're afraid of that's causing you to lash out or “mother” other adults by over-managing. God may bring a moment to mind where you've been burned in the past—ask Him to help you heal from that. Find out what He wants you to know about that moment. The truth will set you free. Confess the lie you believed and repent by choosing to believe and align with God instead of Satan.

3. Set boundaries—for yourself in spaces where you are

controlling and when you are dealing with a controller. One may not have conversations when emotional. Another could be putting, "I'll let you know," or "I need to pray about that," before giving an answer. Another might be limiting the number of challenging topics you approach in a week or day, based on your own resilience and energy.

4. Listen and validate—know your controlling person has a really good reason for acting the way they are—at least it's a good reason to them! Trying to understand where he or she is coming from means setting down your agenda and trying to walk a mile in their shoes. Being able to verbalize their position usually helps to lower the intensity as naming and normalizing their feelings and position moves the topic from the emotional part of their brain into the systematic part of their brain. They'll be calmer.

5. Be okay with conflict—if you are afraid of conflict in general, or if you struggle with things like asking for your fries when you didn't get them at the drive-thru, you might want to pursue coaching to level up your skills in this area. Developing the confidence of being able to handle someone else's emotionality and not take it personally takes time but is worth it and can overhaul your life in many areas!

And here's a special note to men ... according to research done by Dr. John Gottman out of the University of Washington, in marriages where a husband doesn't share power with his wife, there is an 81% chance those marriages self-destruct. Don't create a marriage that's based on power, maybe like the one you had with your dad ruling over you.

Want to learn more? Join us in coaching to level up your skills, step into being someone who is no longer afraid of conflict and become the leader your people need to achieve even more. You can find us at

Check out these podcasts:

3 Ways Control is Causing Conflict – and what to do about it!

3 Proven Things to DO so You Don't Destroy Your Relationship

The Trouble with Control... {eo}

*Since 1991, **Nina Roesner** has been helping people solve their relationship and leadership challenges as a communication coach. She has a master's degree in communication, spent 15 years with Dale Carnegie Training, is a Harper Collins author and has led Greater Impact since 2005. She has been a wildly effective personal development coach in the areas of relationships, public speaking, communication and leadership. Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.*