

Possible

How we survive and thrive in an age of Conflict

William Ury

William Ury is the co founder of the Negotiation program at Harvard law School. He has served on negotiation and conflict management councils for more than four decades. He wrote the worlds best selling negotiation book Getting to Yes.

The phenomenon of polarization is not limited to the US. It is a global trend separating families, communities and societies across the world.

For the first time in human history, thanks to the communication revolution, all 15,000 language communities are in touch with each other.

Thanks to new ways of communication, we are aware of conflicts in other parts of the world than ever before.

**Conflict is not going away.
The world needs more conflict, not less.**

Conflict is defined as a clash between opposing positions arising from a perceived divergence of interests and perspectives.

Forty years ago when we wrote getting to yes, yes meant a mutually satisfying agreement.

Today yes means to lean in and embrace conflicts. The new yes is a transformative yes.

I am not n optimist, not a pessimist, I am a possibilist.

**The challenge we face is not the outside world, but inside us. It is not a technical problem, it is a human problem
what is made by us, can be changed by us.**

Transforming conflict is one of the hardest work we humans can do. It calls us to engage when we feel tempted to attack or to avoid.

Conflict can make us think small. We reduce the whole thing to a win lose battle between us and them. Often the bigger the conflict, the smaller we think.

The secret , I find is to start from possible and work backwards.

There are three elements to good negotiation

The balcony from where you see the situation,

the bridge you need to build to and

the 3rd side, someone who is on the other side

In 2003 President Carter asked me to work with President Chavez in Venezuela.

Before a challenging meeting, I take a few minutes of silence to center myself. Even a single minute with my eyes closed, helps me center my thoughts.

“Observe all men, thyself most” – Benjamin Franklin

What do I really want?

This might sound simple but is a difficult question to answer especially when we are in conflict.

In the language of negotiation, what do I really want helps focus on the interests that lie underneath our positions.

Positions are the things we say we want, interests are our underlying motivations- desires, aspirations, concerns, fears and needs.

**Positions are what we say we want,
interests are why we want what we want.**

We each have the power to zoom put in negotiations, by zoom out I mean, simply to expand the picture you are seeing, to see the bigger picture.

BATNA is the best alternative to the negotiated agreement

WATNA is the worst alternative to the negotiated agreement.

I organized exchanges between the US and Russia to avoid Nuclear conflict.

In contentious conflicts, we tend to frame the issue as essentially as zero sum – more for one means less for another.

In heated conflicts, no one wants to make a painful decision, but everybody loves to criticize.

Listening is the most basic act of human connection. We associate negotiation with talking, we tend to think of a effective negotiator as someone who can talk, the most effective negotiators are great listeners, they listen more than they talk.

Listening is the golden key that opens door to human relationships.

In deep listening, we listen to not only what is being said but also what is unsaid.

I have noticed in negotiations that creative ideas rarely happen in formal forums, they happen in informal settings between individuals who know each other and trust each other.

Most people are guarded and wary in formal settings.

A picture is worth a thousand words, design with photoshop a likely picture or an image or a story of what you want. That's what I did when I photoshopped the south Korean president, Kim and Trump in one photo. This came true a year later.

**At the core of every deep seated conflict is
exclusion**

The only remedy I know for exclusion is inclusion.

With power comes responsibility. The more power is exercised, the more respect needs to be shown if that power is not to backfire.

The first rule of reality TV is “whatever you do, don’t be boring”. This is what was followed to script the Kim – Trump meeting

Good ideas are vital, but are useless if you cannot get them before the decision makers involved.

We cannot end conflict, but we can embrace it and transform it and can choose to handle it constructively using our innate curiosity, creativity and collaboration.