

# Responding Effectively to Conflict

- ❑ Understanding the Impact of Conflict
- ❑ 3 Insights
- ❑ Key Mediator Skills



# This guy was fed up with his classmate. He's gone viral for calling out his own ignorance.



**Thomas McFall**  
@thomas\_\_mcfall

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Hey guys, I know I usually just post shitty jokes on my Twitter but bear with me because I wanted to share something.

So in one of my Management classes I sit in the same seat in the front every day. Every single day I sit there.

Now, I also sit next to some foreign guy that



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Replying to @thomas\_\_mcfall

barely speaks English. The most advanced thing I've heard this guy say in English is "Wow, my muffin is really good".

This guy also has a habit of stacking every item he owns in the exact space I sit. His bag, his food, his books, and his phone are ALWAYS right on my desk space.



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Now, every single time I walk into class this guy says "Ah, Tom. You here. Okay." And starts frantically clearing my desk of his belongings. He then makes it a habit to say "Ready for class, yeah?" And gives me a high five. Every day this guy gives me a high five.



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I was ALWAYS annoyed with this guy. I'm thinking "Dude, you know I sit in this seat every day. Why are you always stacking your shit here? And the last thing I want to do is give a guy who barely speaks my language high fives at 8 in the morning"

Just get your shit off my desk

# Understanding the impact of conflict

Think of your own difficult workplace situation that you were personally involved in, no matter how it turned out. Take a moment to think and talk about your situation and answer the following questions:

- The fundamental experience of conflict
  - What is conflict for you?
  - Think back to a recent conflict:
    - ❖ What was hard about it?
    - ❖ How were you impacted?
    - ❖ What emotions did you experience
    - ❖ How did you judge/experience the other person(s)
    - ❖ How did you react (vs. when you are calm/happy)
    - ❖ How did you “recover” from this experience



# Conflict Insight #1



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## The Universal Experience of Conflict

*Awareness of the incapacitating effects of weakness and self-absorption is the first step to responding, rather than reacting, to conflict.*

# Defining “Conflict”

- Conflict can be understood as a crisis in human interaction
- It can be de-stabilizing internally, as well as relationally



**People in conflict tend to experience a sense of both:**

**Weakness:** unsettled, confused, fearful, disorganized, vulnerable, powerless, and unsure

**Self-absorption:** self-protective, defensive, suspicious, and incapable of stepping outside of their own frameworks



Sorry my self-absorption  
got in the way of yours.



# Experiencing Weakness & Self-Absorption

## 1<sup>st</sup> Level of Awareness

- ▶ What are your personal triggers?

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Level of Awareness

- ▶ What happens to you emotionally and physiologically when these triggers occur?
- ▶ What does it *feel* like when you are acting from a place of weakness (e.g. frustration, etc.) and/or self-absorption (e.g., defensiveness, etc.)?

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Level of Awareness

- ▶ When do your reactions to what is happening in the moment tend to be driven by these feelings?

## 4<sup>th</sup> Level of Awareness

- ▶ What helps you *not* react to your emotional triggers?



# Destructive Conflict Cycle

*When I start to get triggered and into conflict, I feel.....*





# Conflict Insight #2



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We can choose to **respond effectively** to conflict rather than **REACT**.

# Insight #2: Choosing to Respond Effectively to Conflict

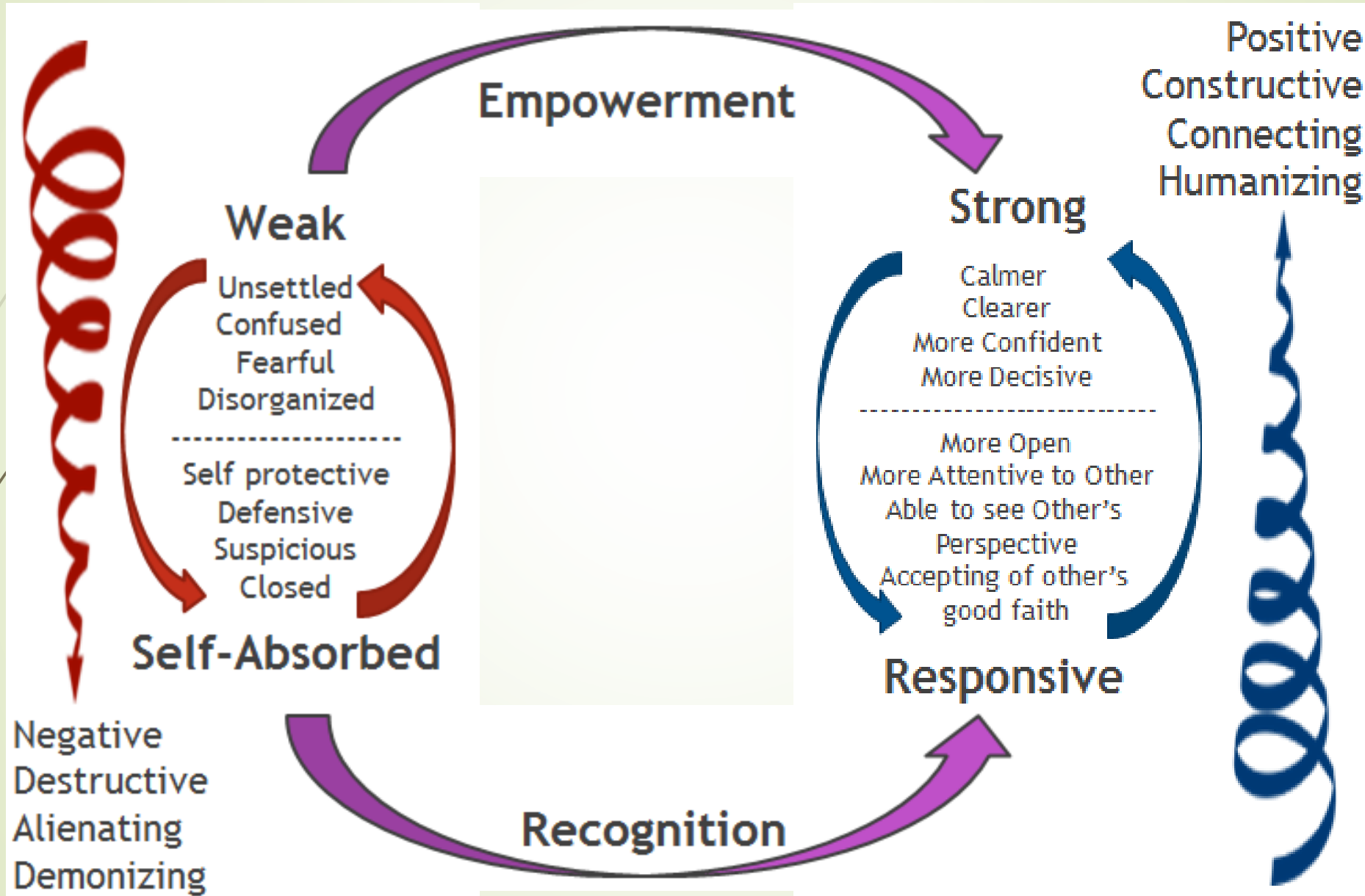
People *can* and *do* make dynamic shifts along two dimensions while conflict unfolds:

- ▶ **Strength**: shifts toward increasing clarity, confidence, personal strength, self confidence, organization, decisiveness
- ▶ **Compassion**: shifts toward increasing attentiveness to the other, responsiveness to the other, openness to the other's humanity, and appreciation for the other's situation



# Destructive & Constructive Cycles

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# Spotting Thomas's shift from self-absorption to compassion



**Thomas McFall**  
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Replying to @thomas\_\_mcfall

But today I came to class and was running a few minutes late. I'm standing outside because I had to send a quick text. I could see my usual space through the door out of the corner of my eye. Of course, my desk was filled with his belongings. The usual.



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Replying to @thomas\_\_mcfall

As I'm standing there on my phone another guy who was also late walks into the class before me and tried to take my seat since it's closest to the door.

The guy sitting next to me stops this dude from sitting down and says "I'm sorry. My good friend Thomas sits here."



**Thomas McFall**  
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Replying to @thomas\_\_mcfall

It was then that I realized this guy wasn't putting stuff on my seat to annoy me. He was saving me the seat every morning.

And this whole time he saw me as a friend but I was too busy thinking about myself to take him into consideration.

Cheesy as it sounds, I was touched.

# Look again – what *caused* the shift?

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^Learns new information

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\*Shifting from red to blue (kinda purple...)

# How Thomas operated from *his* compassionate strength

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Replying to @thomas\_\_mcfall

I ended up going into class and of course he cleared the seat and said "Ah, Tom. You here. Okay." And I did get a high five.

At the end of class I ended up asking him if he wanted to get a bite to eat with me. We did. And we talked for a while. I got through the broken English

**\*Responds with strength & compassion**



Replying to @thomas\_\_mcfall

I asked him how he liked America as well. He said he misses his family but it's exciting to be here. He also said "Not every American is nice to me like you are, Tom."

I bought lunch, of course. Dude deserves it. He gave me a high five for buying lunch. Gotta keep up tradition.



Replying to @thomas\_\_mcfall

The guy moved here from the Middle East to pursue a college education in America. He plans to go back after he gets his degree. He's got two kids and a wife. He works full time and sends his all his left over money back home to his wife.



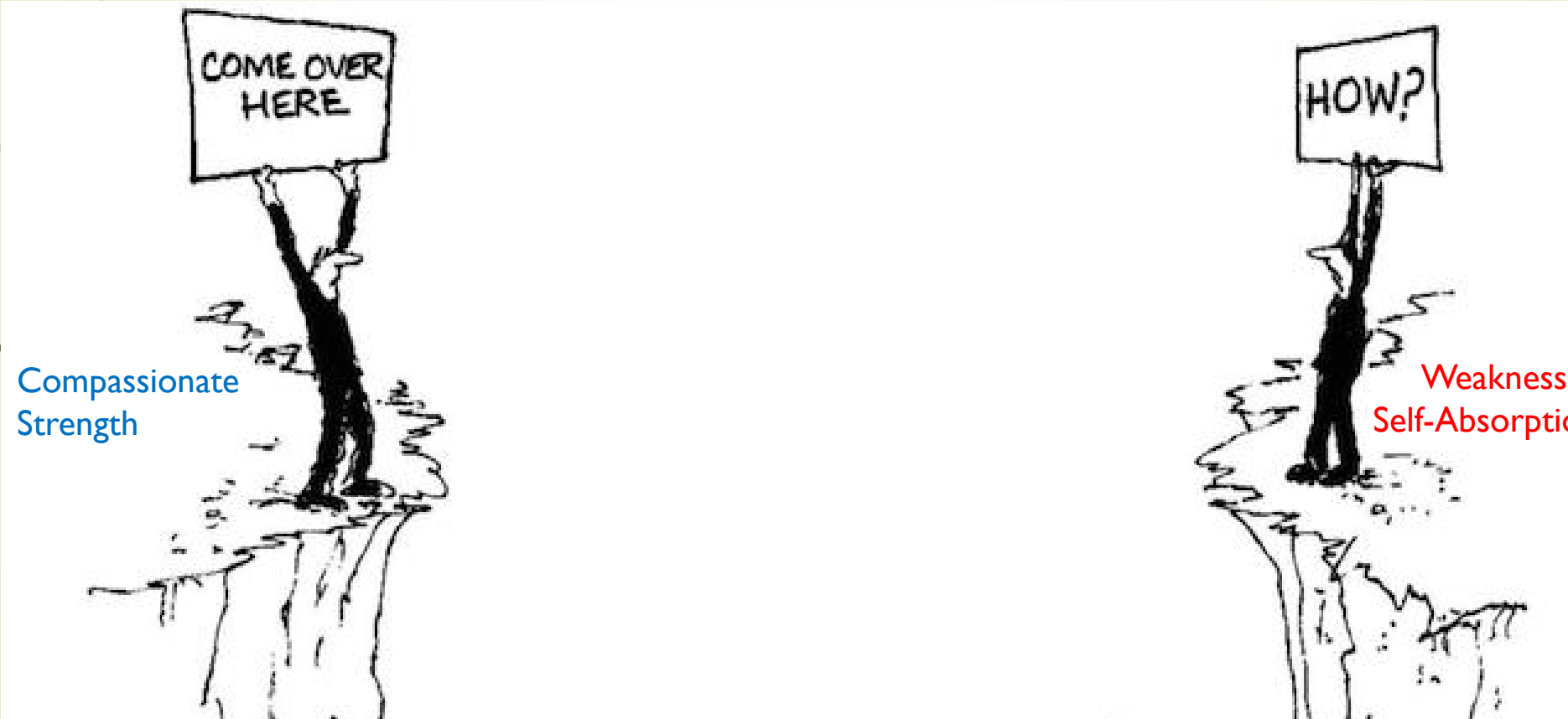
Replying to @thomas\_\_mcfall

Moral of the story? Don't do what I do and constantly only think about yourself. It took me nearly the entire semester to get my head out of my ass and realize this guy was just trying to be my friend. Better late than never I suppose.

**\*Thomas' moral growth on display**

“Helps” list – what helps you shift from red to blue?

...



Compassionate  
Strength

Weakness &  
Self-Absorption

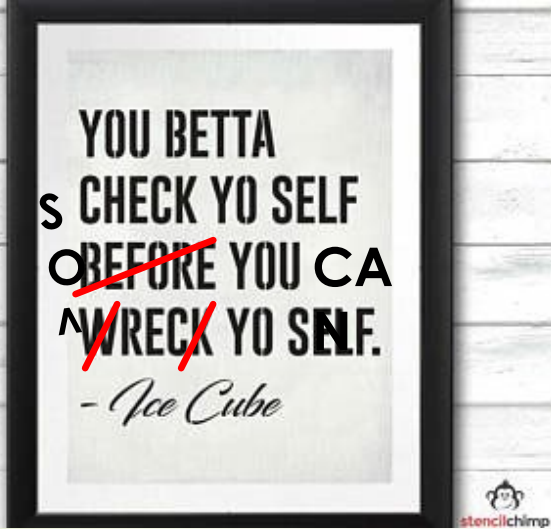


'R.E.C.' Yourself  
Before You Wreck Yo  
Self

*How to Respond  
Effectively to Conflict in  
your relationships*

- **Check It** – Identify that you're feeling weak and self absorbed.
- **Name It** – Ask yourself “*How/why am I experiencing weakness and self-absorption?*”
- **Shift It** – Use your own personal “helps” list to get out of the downward spiral.
- **Ground Yourself** – Remind yourself what your moral standards of personal behavior are.
- **Voice It** – Voice your needs, concerns, challenges, etc. (Empowerment)
- **Hear It** – Listen for their needs, concerns, challenges, etc. (Recognition)
- **Explore It** – Figure out what responding effectively means in your situation, then act accordingly. (Compassionate Strength)
- **Remember** – Coming to an agreement isn't the benchmark for success; *operating from compassionate strength is success - no matter what the outcome may be.*





## How Thomas RECEd Himself

- ✓ **Check It** – Thomas noticed he was upset.
- ✓ **Name It** – Annoyed b/c of his personal space being invaded, he got into a downward spiral.
- ✓ **Shift It** – New information he learned by accident caused a shift (*at least he was listening!*)
- ✓ **Ground Yourself** – Realized he was being self-absorbed and not his “best self,” he decided he didn’t want to be that way.
- ✓ **Voice It** – He didn’t do this, did he? Reminder that strength – compassion = selfishness.
- ✓ **Hear It** – He definitely listened for the other person’s needs, problems, concerns, etc.
- ✓ **Explore It** – He realized he was in the wrong, changed course, balanced his strength with compassion, and realized moral growth.
- ✓ **Remember** – *What would him just “coming to an agreement” about his stuff have looked like? What opportunities would have been missed?*



## Possible “Helps” for Greater Strength and Compassion

- Create the time and space to deliberate and decide.
- Develop strategies that break limited or restricted thinking.
- Seek input/feedback.
- Enhance personal resources for dealing with the conflict.
- Prepare and rehearse communication responses.



# Conflict Insight #3

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*Effective Communication skills can help make shifts happen!*

# Mediator Skills Adapted for Every Day Use

- **Process Observing** – Pay attention to signs of conflict (we'll look at some examples in a moment).
- **Check-Ins** – When you notice conflict (in yourself or others), consider checking in with people in a non-confrontational way early on.
  - Ex. – “I noticed you seemed upset in the meeting, do you want to talk?”
- **Active Listening** – Being attentive, asking clarifying and open-ended questions, using non-verbals to show you're listening, listening for emotions.
- **Reflections** – Reflecting back to people what they've said (helps them know you're listening and that you understand them).
  - “So it sounds like you're upset because...” or “What I hear you saying is \_\_\_\_...”
  - Reflecting can lead to shifts in other people *and* in yourself.
- **Summarizing** – Recapturing the main ideas of what the key issues seem to be and how they seem to be impacting the relationship.
- ***Know when to check in and/or get outside help...***



**INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF  
CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION**  
Fulfilling the Promise of Mediation

# Responding Effectively to Conflict

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