

# TOOLS TO COOL CONFLICT AND CONFRONTATION

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## Overview:

It is important to realize that no human being controls any other human being's behavior. Thus there are no "guaranteed" skills that will always de-escalate every situation. There ARE elements of build-up which are common to nearly all serious confrontations. The skills presented in this workshop counter those elements of buildup, and so make it more difficult for a confrontation to keep escalating. Since tension begets tension, one of the easiest ways for people to build their own tension is if they can get tension coming back from someone else. For example, an upset customer can build off the tension of fear as well as the tension of anger and belligerence. This presentation includes both verbal and non-verbal tools/anchors that can help maintain calm and still present a firm and strong demeanor in a tense situation.

## Some Key Elements of Non-verbal Tools/Anchors:

**STRONG BODY LANGUAGE** - Have a "base" (position of legs and body imitates a pyramid, rather than an upside down pyramid), and be in a position where it is easy to take a deep breath (even if you don't choose to take one at that moment).

**TONE OF VOICE** - A quieter voice when trying to keep a situation from escalating is usually the best course, but in a situation that HAS escalated to an extreme, sudden loud behaviors might startle the aggressor long enough to buy you some time and enable you to get to safety. In both instances your voice will be more effective if you vocalize from your diaphragm.

**EMPHASIS OF VOICE** - Be aware of possible negative effects from too much use of a questioning voice (always goes up at the end of a sentence), or a commanding voice (always goes down at the end of a sentence).

**DISTANCE** - Be aware of the physical and psychological importance of "handshake distance". Moving or backing away does not have to look like "backing down."

**YOUR BACK TOWARDS A HOSTILE PERSON** - Be aware that it is easier for an upset person to physically escalate if you have your back to them.

**OBLIQUE ANGLES** - To approach/sit/stand in a "straight on" angle towards a person (180 degrees) can have a very different effect than using a slight angle (something less than 180 degrees). Be aware of the situations where each might be useful.

**EYE CONTACT** - To look at someone in a way that makes them feel acknowledged (without being too personal or possibly intrusive/provoking), use a more diffuse kind of eye contact. You can do this by looking at the more general area of the person's face that includes the eyes-to--shoulders, rather than looking just at the eyes).

## **Some Key Elements Of Verbal Tools/Anchors:**

In a confrontation, people sometimes think they have to keep coming up with something new to say in order to keep the person from escalating. This comes from thinking that what you have to do is out-argue them. It is best to avoid arguments in these situations. Sometimes just restating the same thing with slight variations is the best course, because in a confrontation the person (consciously or unconsciously) is often trying to draw you into something, get a rise out of you, or get you off the track. When a confrontation is brewing, use statements and keep them simple. Do not give reasons or try to justify, because that can leave room for argument, manipulation or intimidation. An easy way to cue yourself on these anchors is think "I need a vehicle to steer me through this touchy situation." The most common vehicle in this country is a car. So think of the acronym C. A. R.

### **C = Commonalities**

Keep coming back to the common problem, the common policy, the common task or the common goal. Explain the procedures, the guidelines or the policy if that seems helpful, but don't get drawn into argument or justifications. Try to keep yourself as separate as possible from those procedures and guidelines. Also try to stick to the facts and concrete behaviors in the situation and not get into personalities.

### **A = Acknowledgment or Attention**

Acknowledging someone's opinions or feelings is different from agreeing with them. For example, to say "other people have felt the way you do" is only stating a fact, and it may help the person feel you are really listening. It is amazing how much a little acknowledgement can ease a situation, even if you still cannot give them what they want. If they tell you about a problem, restating it back to them lets them know you are listening to them. Asking questions to more fully understand the problem can also be useful this way.

### **R = Redirect**

Suggesting other resources they could check out can help to redirect. Asking questions can be acknowledging, but it can also be a way of redirecting their attention. Sometimes attempting to organize their thoughts with a response to a question can help draw people away from their emotions. If the person is amicable to sitting down that can help. Another way of redirecting is to create an interruption.

Most people who deal with confrontation have a style that leans heavily on one of these three and which feels the most natural to them. It is good to know your strengths. It is also good to have an idea of something else you can try if your usual style isn't producing the desired results.

## **Conclusion:**

This is not a suggestion to memorize response "A" to situation "53", response "Z" to situation "41", etc. It is not a one-size-fits-all method either. This method is intended to help you analyze situations and adapt the strengths of your own unique personality toward successfully defusing confrontations. While these skills do not guarantee you can stop someone from escalating, they are useful because they tend to: **1)** slow situations down, **2)** help you assess what IS going on with the other person, **3)** help you deflect violence/anger away from you, **4)** help you keep or get maneuvering room. That gives you a better chance to defuse a situation before violence erupts.

Mary Brandl is also the co-author of a book and DVD, both entitled <i>Scenarios In Self-Defense</i> . For more information on purchasing or streaming, contact the website or email listed below.
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