

If you're involved in a conflict, you'll want to know the art of compromise.

How to COMPROMISE

by Mark Rafenstein

Martin Luther King, Jr., once said that the people in our country "must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools." Glancing at the newspapers or the TV news, one wonders whether the fools have the edge. Conflicts are as abundant as dandelions in spring.

We all experience conflicts. But are we fools for becoming involved in them? Not necessarily; many conflicts are unavoidable. We are fools if we refuse to learn how to solve them.

As Spock Says, "Think Logically"

First, we need to go about solving our conflicts in a logical, commonsense way. Often people fail to patch up their problems because their solutions benefit only one of the parties in the dispute. This can cause resentment and angry feelings in the person who received no benefit—and may be the reason for even bigger problems down the road.

According to Laurie Clark, a California teacher who specializes in peace studies, "Another

way to look at conflicts is to try to find a win-win solution, in which both sides can benefit. In this way, conflicts are turned into opportunities to grow and make things better than before."

A *compromise* is one type of win-win solution, although it requires that both parties give up something in order to solve the problem. In the long run, however, giving up something can really be like getting something if the conflict is solved.

Learning how to compromise is not always an easy thing to do. Indeed, some peo-

ple refer to the skill as "the *art* of compromise." As with any art, it takes lots of practice to become proficient. Try these scenarios for practice.

Try Problem Solving

The following scenarios portray conflicts that teenagers typically experience. After reading each of the cases and the "Win-Win Problem-Solving Plan" below, brainstorm with a classmate to develop compromise solutions for the parties involved. Afterward, you might want to compare your solutions with those of the rest of your classmates. What was

Win-Win Problem-Solving Plan*

Use this plan to solve some of your everyday conflicts.

1. Each person agrees to work things out. If either person is too angry to talk, he or she should take some time to cool off and agree to work on the problem later.
2. Each person gives his or her version of the problem. Avoid using blaming language or name-calling.
3. Each person listens to the other without interrupting.
4. Each person summarizes what the other has said. This will ensure that each person understands the other person's point of view.
5. Brainstorm to develop solutions. Any idea that is offered should be discussed and written down. At this stage don't discuss the merits of the solutions. Just try to develop as many solutions as possible.
6. Choose the best win-win solution. To be a true win-win solution, both parties must either gain or lose something of equal value.
7. Decide how and when to put the solution into action.
8. Forgive or thank each other for working it out.

*Based on a Pathways to Peace model (www.WeThePeoples.org)

the most creative solution offered? Which do you think is most likely to benefit both parties?

Scenario 1

Sarah and her mom have been having frequent disagreements about some of Sarah's friends. Sarah's mom considers them a "bad influence," because she has heard rumors that they have been experimenting with drugs. Although Sarah's mom has never met these friends, and she has no proof that they are involved with drugs, she has forbidden Sarah from seeing them.

Sarah insists that her friends are really not a bad influence. "They are just different," she says. She also maintains that the rumors are untrue. She believes her mom is being unfair.

To spite her mom, Sarah has sneaked out of the house on several occasions to visit with her friends. Sarah's mom caught her sneaking out and now wants to ground her. If something is not done soon, the problems between the two will only escalate. What would be a good compromise solution?

Scenario 2

When Miguel turned 16, he announced to his parents that he felt they no longer needed to impose a curfew. He told them, "I'm 16 now, and I think

I'm old enough to be able to make my own decision about when to come home."

Miguel's father believes his son is mature for his age and he trusts him. But he still thinks a curfew is in order. When Miguel asked him why, he replied, "Because your mother and I care for you and worry about you." Miguel's dad also said that he thinks Miguel's grades would suffer if he were allowed to come and go as he pleased.

Miguel replied, "But I have always gotten good grades. What makes you think that will ever change? I don't think it's fair to be treated just like a little kid. I'm 16 now!"

Can Miguel and his parents find a compromise that would make them all happy? What might that compromise be?

Scenario 3

Jamie and Gillian decided to start a business together during their sophomore year in high school. Their idea was to start a Web site to sell a new type of mousetrap that they had developed together during a science project. Jamie has several thousand dollars in her bank account. She wants to invest half that money in product advertising on other Web sites and search engines.

Gillian also has money to invest. But because she thinks their product is not perfected yet, she wants to put the money into product development.

The two young entrepreneurs are in danger of breaking off their business arrangement entirely. What compromise would make them happy? ♦

