

Feeling Bullish

By Stuart White
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I have found myself walking on egg shells recently. And because I am as clumsy as a bull in a china shop most times, I generally walk rather awkwardly and when I walk awkwardly there is no balance so I end up breaking the silly shells anyway. And all because I am scared of hurting others by upsetting them and creating conflict.

You see I have always feared conflict and confrontation. I think most of us do. I can break into a cold sweat, feel my voice start to quaver, sometimes my face will flush and I might even tremble slightly whilst this feeling of anxiety overcomes me, a feeling that I would rather be anywhere else than in the midst of a conflict situation. I want to run, hide and avoid it at all costs. I don't, however! My cerebral sense and rational self knows that the fear isn't real. It exists only in my head. The mind conjures it up to protect itself from situations that it believes to be painful. Thus, it instills fear to turn us back from the situation that we are about to enter into. Knowing that, despite the fact that I fear conflict, I work hard at not avoiding it.

Don't get me wrong. I haven't always been like that. There have been many times I have avoided people and situations fraught with conflict rather than face them and face up to them, but as I get older and hopefully wiser, I realise there is nothing to be gained from avoiding it – in fact conflict not dealt with is a surefire, full-proof strategy for more conflict, failure, or some other form of bad outcome.

I think we avoid conflict for two reasons; the first is because we view it as such a negative thing associated with all dysfunctional emotions that are hard to bear and deal with, and secondly because we don't have the skills to deal with it. Realising that most of what we fear never comes true is a tool against fear of conflict. A rational person would not take instructions from something he/she knows does not exist. Knowing that fear is a figment of our imagination allows us to discard what it dictates much easier. Would you listen to a little green Martian sitting on your shoulder telling you what to do? Fear is as real as that imaginary alien. Discard what it tells you since it has no basis in reality!

Having gone through a traumatic divorce (the mother of all conflicts) I know that conflict is wrapped up in anger, fear, frustration, sadness and a whole host of other emotions that are downright unpleasant. So we stop talking, start fighting or avoiding... but it gets us nowhere and only serves to exacerbate an already stressful situation. The real problem, both professionally and personally, is that without conflict-handling skills, we are doomed to have more of it.

So what if we started to see conflict in a more positive light and stopped dreading it and avoiding it? Conflict is merely the manifestation of differences. If we embrace the idea that different views and opinions, wills and viewpoints are just what they are – differences and nothing else – then the whole situation becomes less scary. It's the essence of synergy. $1 + 1 = 3$. We can only achieve that if we value the difference. Let's face it if you have two people who see things the same way then one of them is unnecessary. When a man and woman unite it's because there are differences and we value them; man meets woman, comes together and produces a child... $1 + 1 = 3$ - impossible if they were both the same. Value the difference and together they can produce more than either could produce separately. When you think like this you start to view conflict as an opportunity and not a threat. Instead of a springboard to bruised feelings, conflict becomes an opportunity for creativity – an opportunity to produce something that wasn't there before.

Success in life is only ever a result of getting involved. One cannot win by standing on the sidelines. Fear of rejection, confrontation, and loss keep us from trying new things. Of course there is always a degree of risk that things will not go as we planned. Successful people understand this, minimise the risk, and take action in spite of what their mind is telling them. Overcoming of fear is what allows us to get ahead. It is said that courage is not the absence of fear, but, rather, the taking of action in spite of it! Remember this the next time you feel fearful about a particular situation – usually one fraught with potential conflict. Everyone has fear to some degree. Rationalise that what you are about to face will not be as bad as you imagine and bravely go forward. Nature loves and rewards those who take action.

So embrace the conflict as a force for progress and productivity. Our fear of it is all in the mind. As Franklin D. Roosevelt so famously put it, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself". And if we are capable of conjuring up such abject terror of what might be, we can just as easily fast forward to conquering not only our inner demons but the whole wide world.

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