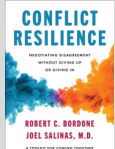


Becoming

CONFLICT RESILIENT:

*Skills for Difficult Conversations
In Polarizing Times*



July 10, 2025
GIA Summer Music Institute
Naperville, IL

Bob Bordone,
Senior Fellow, Harvard Law School
Founder, Cambridge Negotiation Institute



1

What


Why

How

Questions

CONFLICT RESILIENCE:

MINDSET FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS



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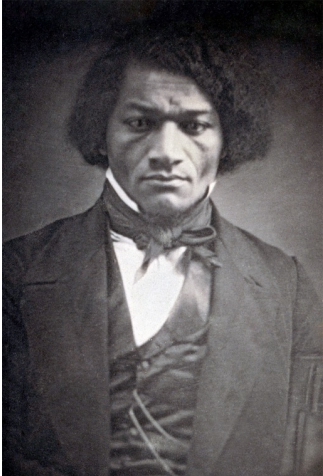
The capacity to sit with conflict & the discomfort of disagreement:

To be fully present around those with whom we have different/opposed views; to listen with generosity; and to share one's own view with authenticity and grace

WHAT IS
CONFLICT RESILIENCE?



3



"If there is no struggle, there is no progress.


Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation... want crops without plowing up the ground.

They want rain without thunder and lightning.

They want the oceans without the awful roar of its many waters."

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

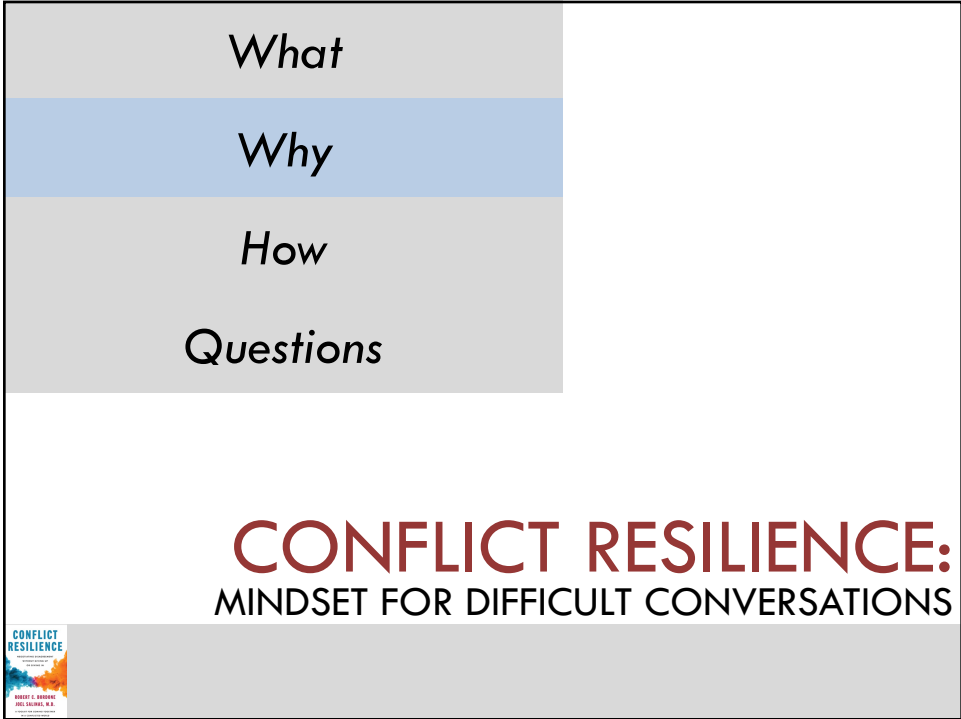
AUGUST 3, 1857



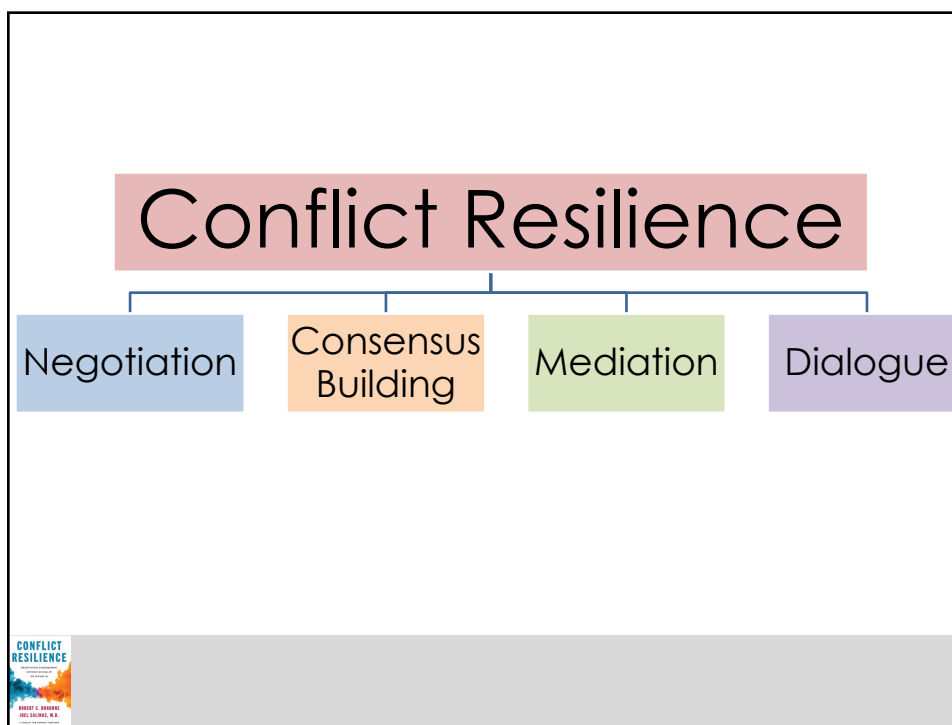
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Growth in empathy

Reduction in demonization

Increase in social capital, trust,
& ability to co-exist peacefully

Increase in patience, tolerance,
& other virtues

Capacity for problem-solving

BENEFITS OF

CONFLICT RESILIENCE

CONFLICT RESILIENCE

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Partner, spouse,
girl/boy friend
& kids

Extended family

Parents,
coaches, alumni,
doctors, clergy, etc.

Boss

Direct reports

Friends
& neighbors

Colleagues

Clients

WHY DOES

CONFLICT RESILIENCE

MATTER?

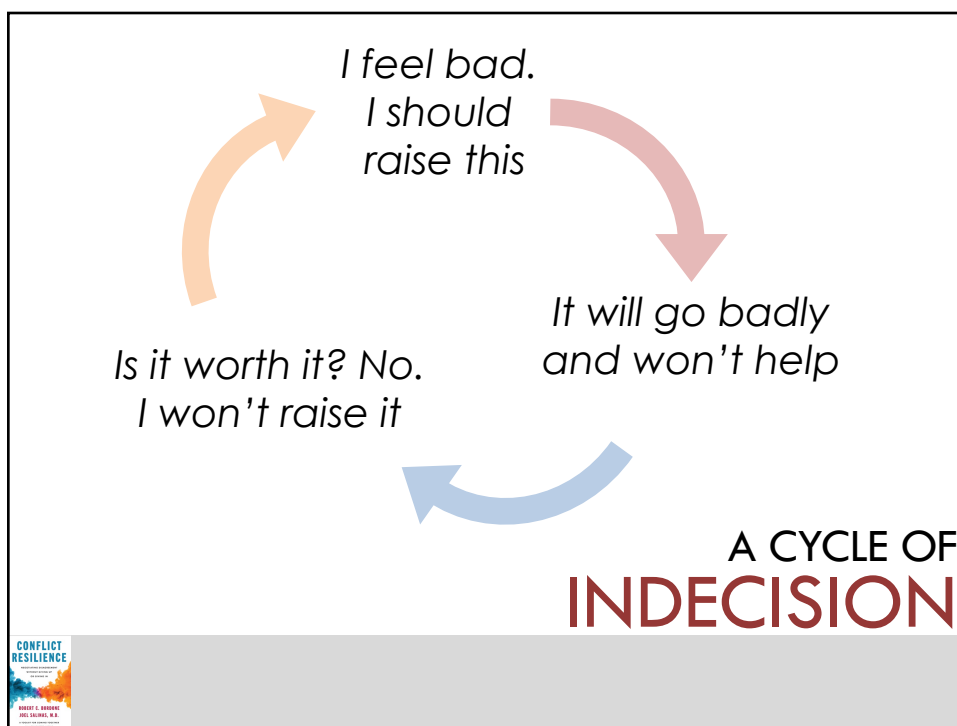
CONFLICT RESILIENCE

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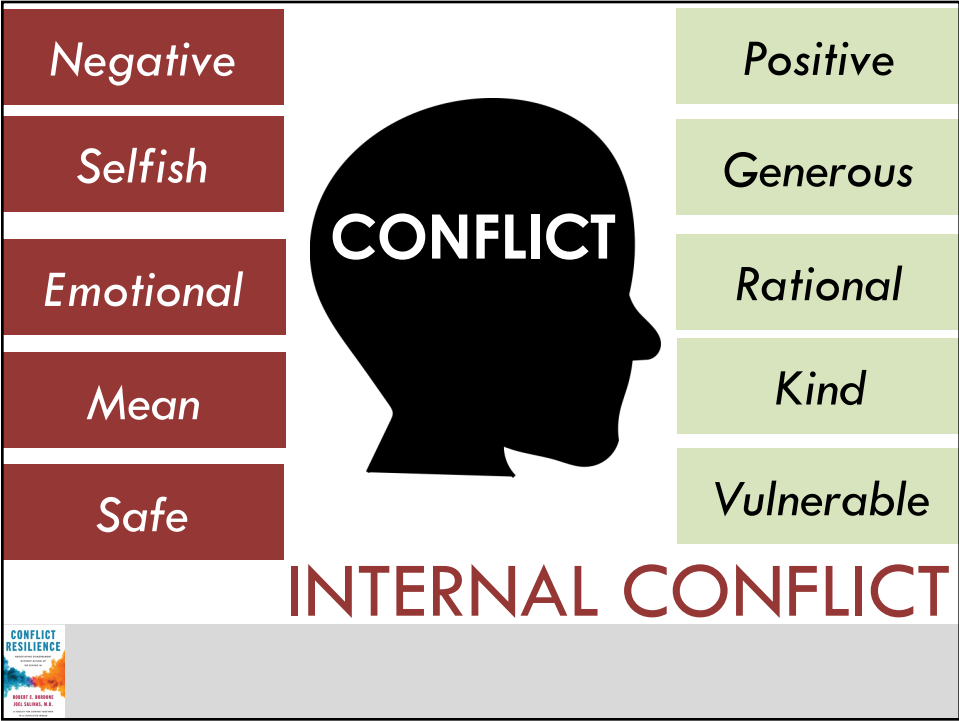
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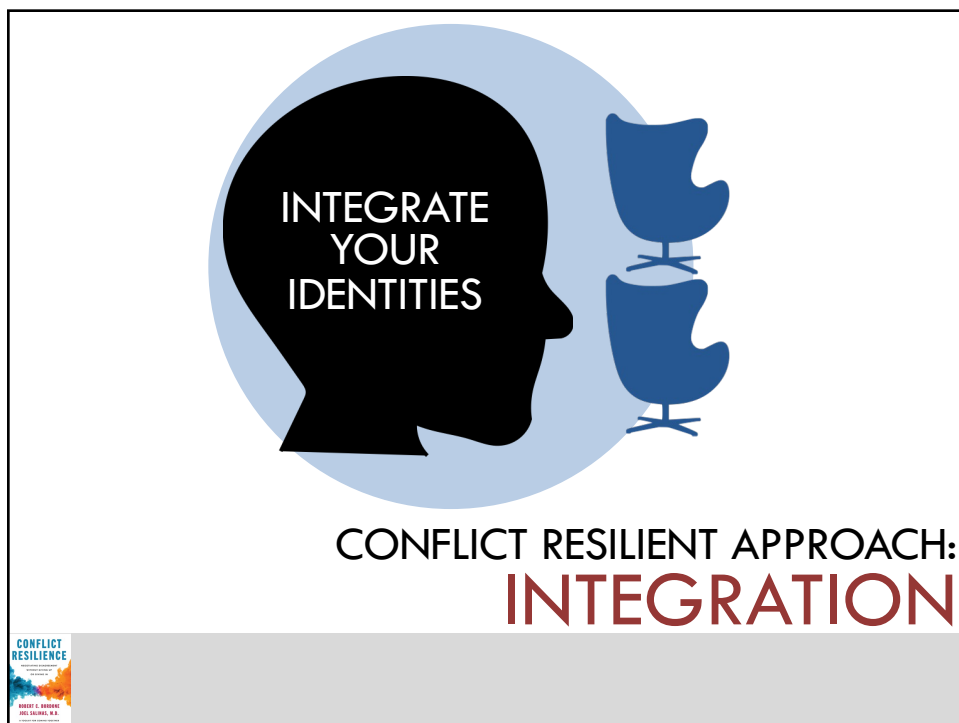
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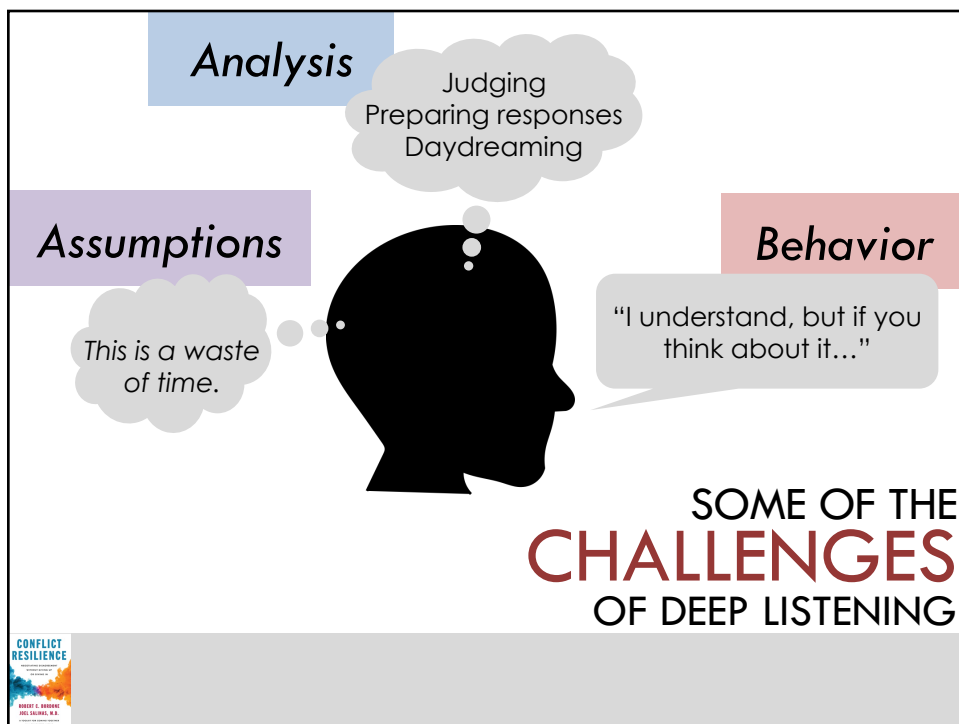
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Some limiting assumptions	Some helpful assumptions
Listening is for those who are weak	"If I listen carefully, I may learn useful information"
I won't persuade them by listening – I need to make arguments	"If I listen effectively I can satisfy their interest in being understood"
Listening conveys agreement, and I don't agree with them	"If I demonstrate good listening, it makes it easier for them to listen to me"
	"I can listen without agreeing"
DEEP LISTENING ASSUMPTIONS	

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Our head is full of our own thoughts, feelings & judgments

There is no room for what they have to say

We think we know all there is to learn

WHY LISTENING IS DIFFICULT

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Judging	<i>"Doing it your way is a bad idea, and anyway, your facts are all wrong."</i>
Preparing our response	Defending: <i>"But this wasn't my fault!"</i>
	Arguing: <i>"That isn't the point, noodlehead. The important point is..."</i>
	Advising: <i>"Obviously, what you need to do is apologize to her and ask her to forgive you..."</i>
Daydreaming	<i>"Uh oh! Do we have enough meatloaf for the in-laws?"</i>

INTERNAL CHALLENGES
WHAT WE DO WHILE "LISTENING"




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A two pronged approach

**BECOMING A GOOD
DEEP LISTENER**



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Negotiate
with yourself
to be *curious*

Realign your
internal voice

Be *authentic*

Resist the urge to judge, defend,
or give advice


Remind yourself why it is
important to understand

DEEP LISTENING
STANCE



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
Questionable	More effective
Grunts & ‘ahems’	PARAPHRASE
Complete silence	INQUIRE
“I understand.”	ACKNOWLEDGE EMOTION
“Ok, BUT...”	DEEP LISTENING BEHAVIORS



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Paraphrase	Restate what you heard the other person say without agreeing
Inquire	Test your understanding by asking open-ended questions
Acknowledge Emotion	Listen for the underlying feelings of the other person and reflect them back to that person to demonstrate understanding

MORE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS



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PARAPHRASING


Restate what you heard the other person say without agreeing

Sounds like:

"It sounds as if, first, you feel that the media is biased, second, that disinformation dominates social media, and third..."

"Let me make sure I got this correctly. The main concerns you have with the process for annual reviews are..."

"OK, what you've told me so far is... and as a result you feel upset and conclude that..."



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INQUIRY

Ask questions in order to learn more about their perspective and to test your assumptions.

Sounds like:

"Can you tell me more about your concerns regarding the work climate..."

"Please help me understand what would have been a better way to provide the support you needed..."

"Say more about why you are a fan of the administration's approach to immigration..."



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BEWARE OF "HOT" INQUIRY

Avoid arguments or judgments disguised as questions.

Questionable

"How can you think that?"

"Don't you think it would be better if..."

"But wouldn't you agree that...?"

Preferred

"Help me understand how you came to see it this way..."

"Talk me through how that would work..."

"What are some pros- and cons- in your view?"



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ACKNOWLEDGE EMOTION

Demonstrate an understanding of the other person's feelings by reflecting them back.

Sounds like:

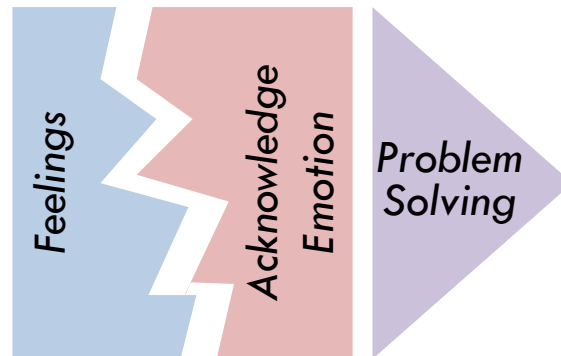
"I imagine that it was disappointing not to have more frequent coaching from me."

"You sound angry with how school district proposes to handle trans athletes in sports."

"It must have been hurtful to feel that others were excluding you from social events."



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IF PROBLEM SOLVING IS STUCK
ACKNOWLEDGE EMOTIONS



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Speak to their interests before you assert

Begin with listening before asserting

Tie your views back to their expressed interests, values, & narratives

Share specific data, thinking, reasoning, & conclusions

Invite additional data and alternative reasoning

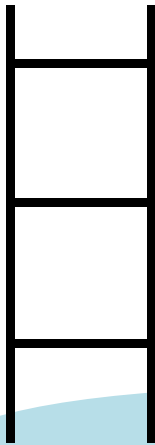
Span the Ladder of Inference

EFFECTIVE ASSERTION
BEHAVIORS

CONFLICT RESILIENCE

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Conclusions
The bottom line: "You are completely wrong here."

Reasoning and interpretations
How do my past experiences impact this? What implicit rules & assumptions underlie my reasoning?

Selected data
What data do I notice? What do I ignore? What might the other person notice that I don't?

Available data

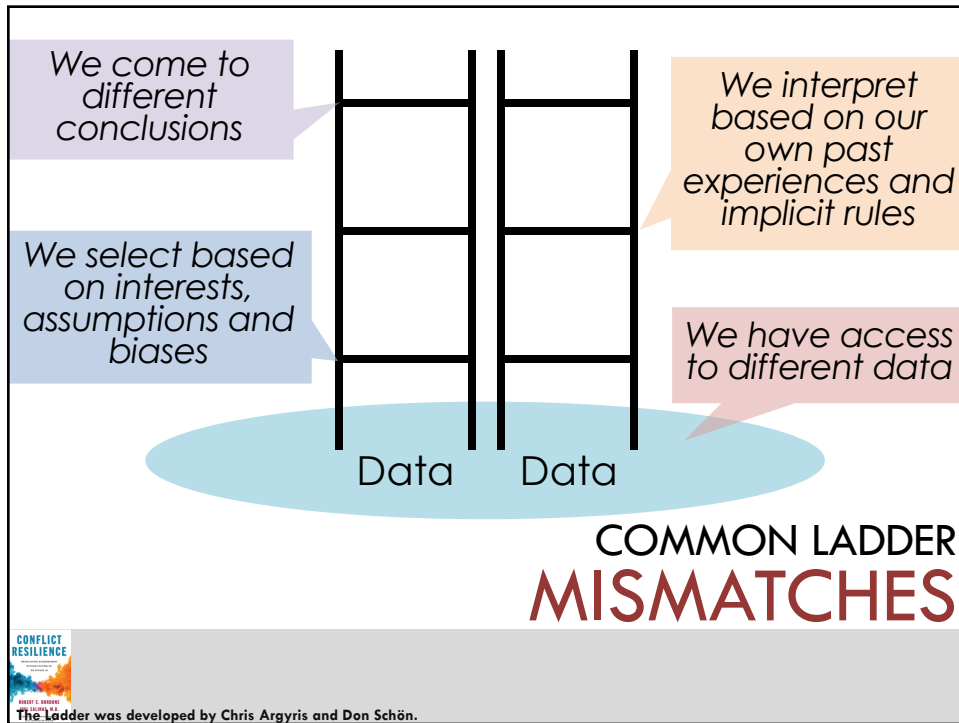
TOOL :
THE LADDER OF INFERENCE

CONFLICT RESILIENCE

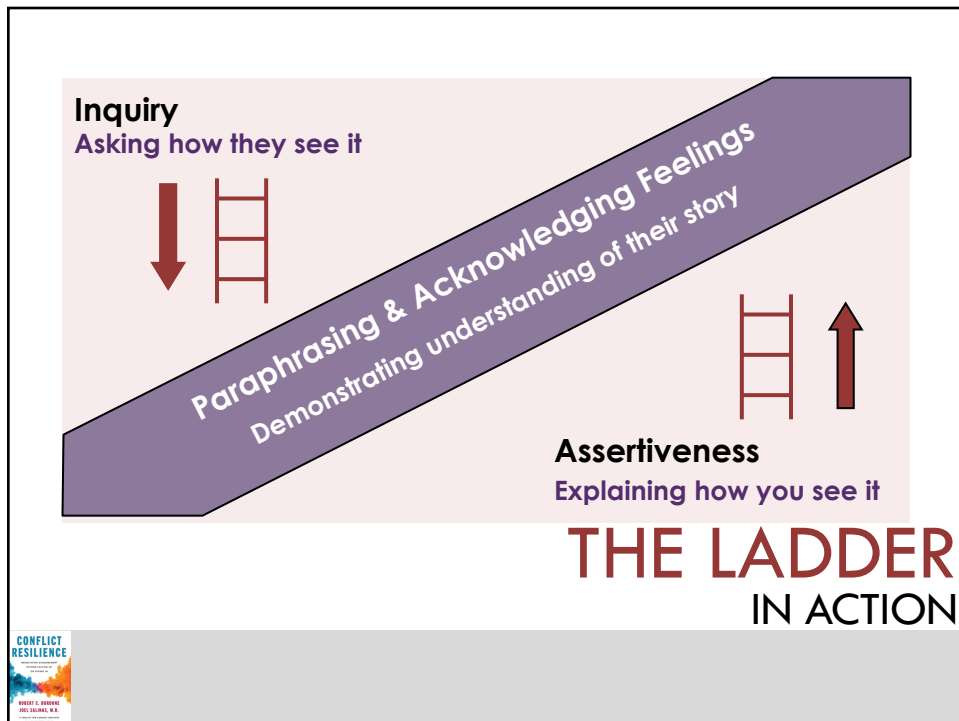
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The Ladder was developed by Chris Argyris and Don Schön.

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<i>Speak to their interests before you assert</i>	Begin with listening before asserting Tie your views back to their expressed interests, values, & narratives
<i>Span the Ladder of Inference</i>	Share specific data, thinking, reasoning, & conclusions Invite additional data and alternative reasoning
<i>Avoid globalizations</i>	"You never..." or "You always..."
<i>Speak from your own perspective</i>	"I am feeling really upset..." not "You are upsetting me."

EFFECTIVE ASSERTION
BEHAVIORS



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1. Deep Listening

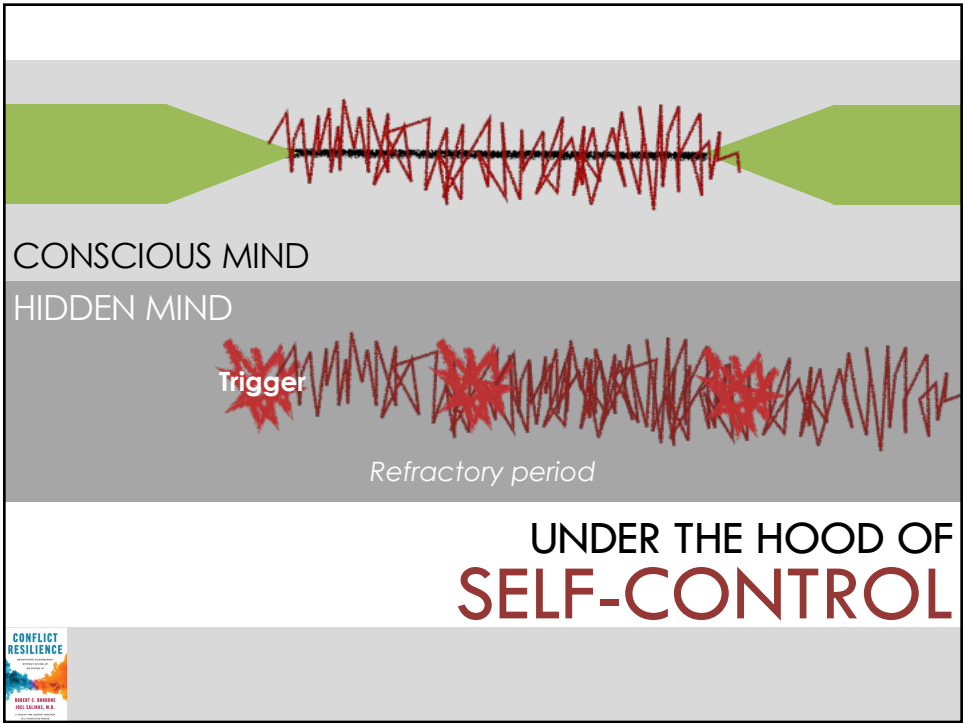
2. Effective Assertion

3. Mindful Awareness

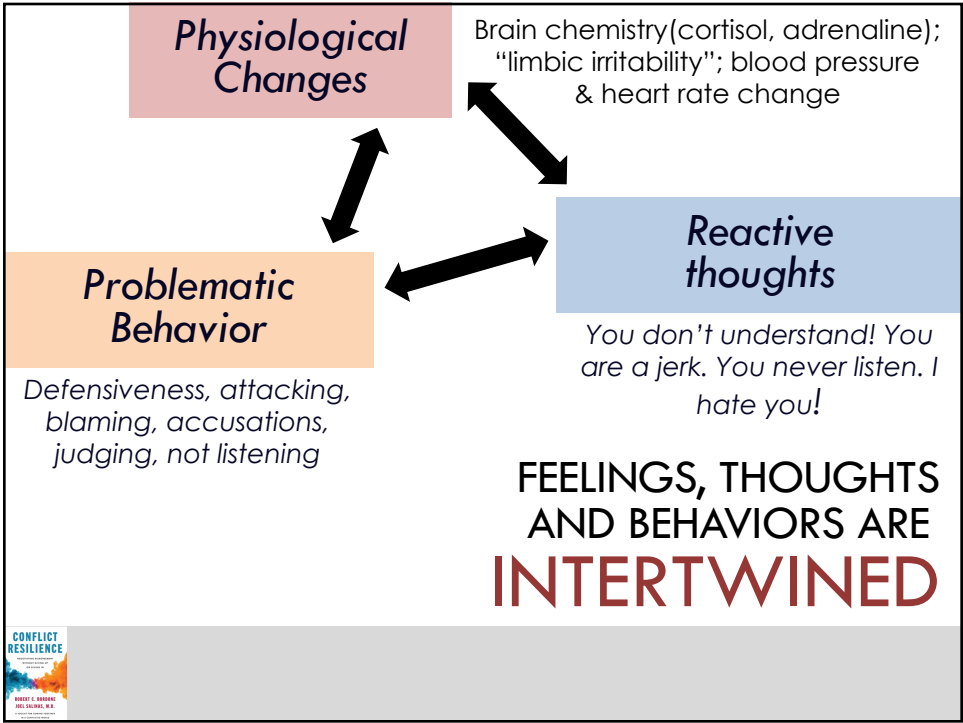
3 PILLAR SKILLS FOR
CONFLICT RESILIENT CONVERSATIONS



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Cultivate “mindful awareness”
“Name it to tame it”

DO NO HARM

Breathe; take a break, if necessary

MANAGING THE
REFRACTORY PERIOD



41

5 minutes daily cyclic sighing reduces anxiety & improves ability to respond purposefully in the face of stress & conflict

Breathwork alone improves mood and physiological arousal more than mindfulness meditation

Cyclic sighing may be the most effective breathwork to improve mood and mindful responses

EVIDENCE-BASED BETTER BREATHING METHOD
CYCLIC SIGHING



(Balban et al 2023, PMID 36630953)

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NOBEL
PEACE
CENTER

The best weapon
is to sit down
and talk

NELSON MANDELA



LEARN MORE!



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BOB BORDONE

New Episodes Weekly

WATCH & SUBSCRIBE



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For conflict resilience-related news, updates, & commentary:
@bobbordone



Connect at **Robert Bordone**



For more on conflict resilience, influence, negotiation, & difficult conversations training/coaching:
bobbordone@gmail.com
www.bobbordone.com

STAY IN TOUCH

