

To Resolve a Conflict, First Decide: Is It Hot or Cold?

by Mark Gerzon

MG

Mark Gerzon is the author of Leading Through Conflict: How Successful Leaders Transform Differences Into Opportunities, and is the president of the Mediators Foundation.



Reading comprehension

Hot conflict is when one or more parties are highly emotional and doing one or more of the following: speaking loudly or shouting; being physically aggressive, wild or threatening; using language that is incendiary; appearing out of control and potentially explosive.

Cold conflict is when one or more parties seem to be suppressing emotions, or actually appear “unemotional,” and are doing one or more of the following: muttering under their breath or pursing their lips; being physically withdrawn or controlled; turning away or otherwise deflecting contact; remaining silent or speaking in a tone that is passively aggressive; appearing shut down or somehow frozen.

Circle which of these pictures depicts a hot conflict



4 Points



To Resolve a Conflict, First Decide: Is It Hot or Cold?

by Mark Gerzon

Neither of these types of conflict is constructive. Conflicts that are warm — that is, already open for discussion but not inflamed with intense hostility — are far more likely to be productive. So, if you're dealing with cold conflict, you need skills to "warm it up." If you're dealing with hot conflict, you need skills to "cool it down."

Conflict resolution, like cooking, works best at the optimal temperature. If too hot, your conflict may explode, burning your deal or causing your relationship to flame out in anger or overt hostility. Cold, and your deal may be frozen, not moving forward at all, or the relationship may become icy with unexpressed emotions and withheld concerns. As a leader, you want to bring conflict into a temperature zone where it can become useful and productive.

Explain each of these conflict types in your own words in no more than two lines each:

1 Hot: _____

2 Cold: _____

3 Warm: _____



To Resolve a Conflict, First Decide: Is It Hot or Cold?

by Mark Gerzon

If the conflict is hot: You don't want to bring participants in a hot conflict together in the same room without settings ground rules that are strong enough to contain the potentially explosive energy. For example, if you are dealing with a conflict between two board members who have already attacked each other verbally, you would set clear ground rules — *and obtain agreement to them* — at the outset of your board meeting before anyone has a chance to speak.

Try this approach. Have everyone sit in a circle, and then ask each person to speak in turn with strict limits (e.g. 3 minutes each). Pick a question for everyone to address that requires that they speak about themselves and their own feelings.

e.g. 'How does the way the company deals with its differences affect you and your family personally?'

Mark with an X those action you would not recommend in a hot conflict:

- 1 Bring them together and let them go at it, to clear the air.
- 2 Start a team building exercise, doing archery together.
- 3 Bring them together under strictly agreed ground rules.
- 4 Bring them together under strict ground rules.
- 5 Place them in a circle, get them to hold hands and express appreciation for each other.
- 6 Get them in a circle and ask each to answer a question about themselves and their feelings, so that others just listen.

4 Points



To Resolve a Conflict, First Decide: Is It Hot or Cold?

by Mark Gerzon

If the conflict is cold: You can usually go ahead and bring the participants or stakeholders in the conflict together, engaging them in constructive communication. That dialogue, if properly facilitated, should “warm up” the conflict enough so that it can begin to thaw out and start the process of transformation. But you will still need to be vigilant and prepared. Conflict is often cold precisely because so much feeling is being repressed. So you need to skillfully know how to warm it up without the temperature unexpectedly skyrocketing.

Use debate and dialogue. If a group is avoiding tackling a tough issue, frame the difference as a polarized debate. Form two (or, if necessary, more) teams and hold an actual debate. This will accentuate the differences and inspire the group to recognize the conflict that is under the surface.

Mark with an X those action you would recommend in a cold conflict:

- 1 Bring them together for constructive communication.
- 2 Let them talk about what went wrong and how to fix it.
- 3 The facilitator needs to be highly aware of the situation.
- 4 In groups that skirt the problem start a 2 sided debate.
- 5 Force them into round of controlled boxing to warm up the conflict and bring emotions to the surface.
- 6 Gradually and carefully warm up the group to open up.
- 7 Never let them carry on, as normal, without resolving it.

6 Points



To Resolve a Conflict, First Decide: Is It Hot or Cold?

by Mark Gerzon

Whether the conflict is hot or cold, the goal is not compromise, but rather *bridging* the divide and *innovating* new options or solutions. Bridging means creating stronger ties and deeper trust between the former antagonists. Innovating — which is distinct from compromise — means that some new resolution or possibility has emerged.

1. Make time your ally. Don't rush to act. Unless you're in danger, take stock of your options. Otherwise you might say or do something you regret.
2. Determine your goal and focus on it. Don't get distracted; stick to what matters.
3. Avoid name-calling and finger-pointing. Focus on the problem, not the people.
4. Beware of self-righteousness. Keep an open mind; you may find that you can learn something of value.

Use your own words to describe each of these terms:

1 Bridging means: _____

2 Innovating means: _____



To Resolve a Conflict, First Decide: Is It Hot or Cold?

by Mark Gerzon

5. Listen to everything, but respond selectively. You don't have to address every point — just the ones that make a difference.

6. Take stock before you take sides. Don't speak — or take any other action — until you've really heard the other person out. Don't leap to conclusions before you have a firm grasp of the situation at hand.

7. Consider calling in a third party. Someone who is not involved in the conflict may be able to provide vital perspective for both parties.

8. Let your adversary know you. Letting down your guard and letting the other person in may help them understand your point of view.

Use your own words to describe each of these:

1 Responding selectively means: _____

2 Leaping to conclusions means: _____

To Resolve a Conflict, First Decide: Is It Hot or Cold?

by Mark Gerzon



OPTIMUM
BUSINESS
ENGLISH

9. Check the temperature gauge. If the conflict is still too hot, don't try to resolve it right away. Agree to come back when things have cooled.

10. Observe the Golden Rule. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Be polite. Be compassionate. It may inspire your adversary to do the same.

Use your own words to describe each of these:

1 Check the temperature means: _____

2 Golden rule means: _____

2 Points

30 Total Points