

V1.4 - August 17, 2024

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Welcome!

Working with other humans in any sphere of life -- work, marriage, sports, music -- is going to involve conflict.

This is actually a good thing.

Conflict means you are at the limit of what one individual (you) can bring to the table.

Effective collaboration requires including another perspective to come up with something neither individual could do alone.

That's the healthy case, at least.

That's when the need for conflict is met constructively.

The problem is when the need for conflict is blocked by the need for safety.

This happens when we think our conflict partner is trying to kill us.

I'm serious.

It doesn't matter if it's about logo colors, when the flute comes in, or how long your mother-in-law can stay.

If you're not reacting well, it's because some part of your lizard brain thinks somebody is trying to kill you.

This exercise -- The Collaboration Manual -- is a way of letting your conflict partners know how to help you feel safe.

Ultimately, feeling safe is your responsibility.

It's nobody else's fault if you don't feel safe, unless they're *actually* trying to hurt you!

But, in a healthy collaboration, there is generally a lot of goodwill.

We want to work together effectively.

We want each other to feel safe.

Most of the time, we just don't know how.

This is especially true when you haven't grown up with your conflict partners or known them for decades.

But if your partner has read your Collaboration Manual, or has gone through these exercises with you, they will have a very good idea of what they can do to help you feel safe.

There are four ways to use this manual, each better than the last.

- 1) Read through it. It takes about 7 minutes and will give you interesting food for thought for a few weeks.
- 2) Do the exercises. It takes 60-120 minutes and you'll learn a lot about yourself.
- 3) Share the manual with your colleagues. It'll lead to less doubt and more confidence in your interactions.
- 4) Fill out the manual in a live workshop with your team. You can share your stories and gain a much deeper understanding of why each person is the way they are. (More on this at the end!)

Remember, the point of this exercise is NOT personal growth. It's dusting off the mirror to get a situation report on what healthy collaboration needs to look like for each one of us.

You may or may not like what you see in your manual or somebody else's. But if you want to work together effectively, it's indispensable information.

Enjoy.

Ankur Shah Delight

Part I: Finding My Why

This is a recursive exercise.

You start with an innocuous question like “Why am I doing this exercise?”

Once you come up with an honest answer and write it down, ask yourself “Why” you are doing that.

At some point you'll bottom out with a core belief or axiom about yourself or the world. That's when you're done.

Here's an example:

Q1.	“Why did I take this job?”	Because I like working with cats.
Q2.	“Why do I like working with cats?”	Because a cat saved my life and I want to give back.
Q3.	“Why do I want to give back?”	Because I believe the greatest source of meaning is contributing to other life forms.
Q4.	“Why do I believe that?”	I don't know, I've just always known that.
Q5.	(Done)	

Every answer along the way is important information about your Chain of Inspiration, not just the first (or last) one!

You might have concise ideas or long paragraphs for each question. You might end up with 10 iterations but most people get there in 5.

Q1. Why am I working where I do?

Q2. Why _____?

Q3. Why _____?

Q4. Why _____?

Q5. Why _____?

Part II: R.E.S.P.E.C.T

Most people are pretty clear they would like to be respected, and they think good things will happen if they respect others.

The difficulty arises because we're not the same person.

I didn't grow up in your house you didn't grow up in mine.

We don't have the same preferences, experiences, and traumas.

Honestly, I can't actually know what Respect looks like to other people.

Sure, I can make some good guesses about the use of violence and slurs.

But for me to really understand what you need to feel respected, I need to ask some very specific questions.

Which is exactly what this exercise does.



I'll tell you what
it means to me!

Q1. Share 5 examples of situations where you didn't feel respected

Q2. What are some common themes that show up for you in these examples?

Q3. What are 2 ways you try to respect others in your interactions at work?

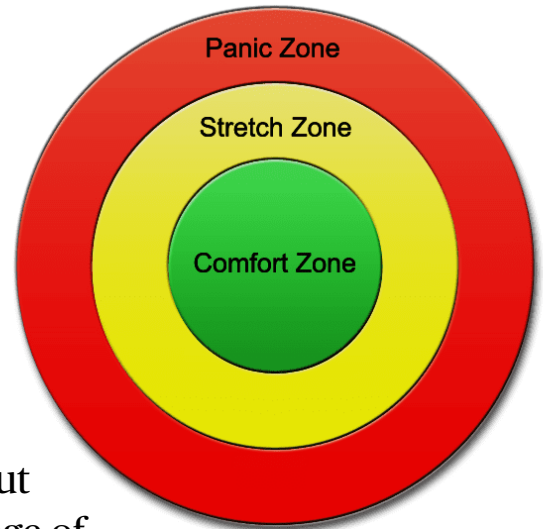
Q4. What are 2 ways you would like to experience respect in your interactions at work?

Part III: Staying in the Stretch Zone

Generally speaking, I see Panic as Bad.

I use a three-zone model when thinking about panic:

The Comfort Zone, The Stretch Zone, and The Panic Zone.



The Comfort Zone is when you're hanging out on your couch and drinking your hot beverage of choice, or reading your favorite book at the beach in just the right amount of sun.

The Stretch Zone is when you're learning something challenging, but you know you can handle it.

The Panic Zone is when you're so far out of your comfort zone that you lose your cool. You are no longer learning and growing like the Stretch Zone. You're floundering and probably making things worse.

Everybody panics differently. Some people lash out at others, while others go into guilt, shame, and self-criticism. Some people shut down and can't communicate. Some people need to smoke.

You might behave differently in the panic zone with your mom than with your manager.

The goal with this exercise is not to change anyone or put anyone in a box. Everybody panics. It's about understanding how we can help each other when we're flipping out.

Q1: Share an example of a panic zone experience - what was the situation and how did it show up for you?

Q2: What's your "favorite" (most-often) way of Panicking? Why does it work for you? (Be positive!)

Q3: What strategies help you exit the panic zone? What do you need?

Q4: How can your companions best support you when you are in the Panic Zone?

Q5: What should your companions avoid doing?

Part IV: Sharing and Accepting Appreciation

Everybody loves being appreciated. If you think "Not me!" it's because you haven't found your appreciation language yet.

In 1992, Gary Chapman came out with the The Five Love Languages book. Most people have heard of them:

Words of Affirmation

Acts of Service

Gifts

Quality Time

Physical Touch

My beef with the book has always been: "Love isn't toothpaste. Why do I have to choose?"

I like all five.

While it's nice to have some landmarks in the field of love and affirmation, for this exercise I want to get a little more specific. Maybe how you like appreciation corresponds to old Gary's list.

Maybe it doesn't.

The idea is to get as specific as possible: the more you know what you like, the easier it is to ask for it from your peers.

Q1. Share 5 specific examples of being appreciated in the last year that resonated with you.

Q2. Share 2 examples of times you wish you had been appreciated (and how you would have liked it).

Q3. What themes emerge? What ways of being appreciated are the most meaningful for you?

Q4. How do you normally appreciate others?

Q5: Share 2 specific instances of you appreciating others that you think were well received.

Constructive Feedback

Everybody is imperfect, makes mistakes, and needs help.

And everybody responds poorly to feedback and attempts at constructive criticism.

Why?

The two main answers are:

- We don't know how (and when) to give feedback
- We end up taking things personally

This section investigates under what conditions we can take criticism well.

This is about “stacking the deck” towards success in a potentially difficult conversation, by knowing what works for you and what doesn’t.

Just like the rest of this manual, the goal is NOT to change yourself.

The goal is to help your conflict partners work with the imperfect and unenlightened person you are Right Now.

Q1. Share 3 examples of receiving feedback that backfired and made you defensive or less likely to collaborate and change

Q2. Share 3 examples of receiving feedback that landed well and “stacked the deck” towards future collaboration.

Now What?

If you read through the prompts, great. I hope it was a great 7 minutes.

You now have an idea of what you need to know about yourself - and every single one of your conflict partners - to lay the groundwork for effective collaboration.

The next most powerful step is to answer the questions. That should take 60-120 minutes and involve some reflection on your part.

The more specific you can be, and the more you can refer to real examples, the more you will benefit.

To get even more out of this exercise, make a legible version of the Personal Collaboration Manual, including your answers, and give it to your domestic and professional collaborators.

Collaborating well requires understanding what it's like to be somebody else. This exercise gives you a massive headstart and can avoid years of arguments, confusion, and misunderstandings.

To really have an experience of connection that lays the foundation for years of future collaboration, do this exercise live and in person with your collaboration team! (Preferably at a retreat that I organized. 😊)

In a live group setting, I would do the following four steps for each question:

1. Take some time to reflect independently
2. Sit together in a circle.
3. Give each person an opportunity to answer.
4. After each answer, have someone in the group restate what they heard to make they got it right

The next step of course is using this information when you have a difficult moment, misstep, or feel the Panic coming on.

That takes many years of practice.

As the proverb goes, the best time to have started that practice was 20 years ago.

The second-best time is now.

Yours,

Ankur Shah Delight

The Personal Collaboration Manual

Courtesy of Ankur Shah Delight, 2024



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