

Nonviolent NZ Communities & Core Purpose Limited

Bringing Authentic and Compassionate Communication to Individuals, Communities and Organisations
Based on the work of Marshall B. Rosenberg and the Centre of Nonviolent Communication and
Daniel Goleman and Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organisations

The 4 components to NVC and how they are used in conflict resolution

1. Observation

The first step of NVC is to separate our evaluations and judgments from *observations* of the facts at hand. This is difficult for many, because in our culture we are conditioned to believe that our evaluations are factual observations. When people evaluate and judge what is happening for another person, the receiver is likely to feel hurt and defensive and will reject what the sender is saying. This is not only the source of much conflict in the workplace, but is often a key obstacle to resolving disputes.

Through the mediation process, I encourage people to distinguish between their evaluations/judgments and their observations. For example, an employee may say to a colleague, "I wish you would stop being so selfish and show up for team meetings on time." This is an evaluative statement, which is likely to put the receiver on the defensive thus creating or escalating a conflict. By contrast, an example of an observation statement would be, "I feel frustrated when you show up for team meetings after our agreed start time. We can't start until you are here as you are the designated facilitator." Through the mediation process, I help the parties re-frame their evaluative statements as observations thus de-escalating the conflict and helping them listen to and understand one another more deeply.

2. Identifying and Expressing Feelings

The second component of non-violent communication as applied to the mediation process is *identifying and expressing feelings*. When the parties make an observation of the other person's behaviour, I help them identify and express their feelings about the behaviour they observed. Again, this is challenging for many, as our culture does not teach or encourage the expression of feelings.

Instead, many people express their thoughts when asked to express their feelings. For example, when an employee says to a supervisor or manager, "I feel like you are treating me unfairly" she is actually expressing a thought: her judgment of the situation as being unfair. A more accurate expression of her feelings might be, "I feel hurt and discouraged when you give all of the more interesting work to Jane." In this statement, the employee is not expressing her evaluation or judgment of the situation, she is simply expressing the way she feels when observing the behaviour. This is an important first step toward identifying her underlying needs.

Helping people articulate their feelings in the mediation process allows them to appreciate one another's point of view more fully and connect with each other on a much deeper level. This is critical to successful, long-lasting conflict resolution.

3. Awareness of the Underlying Needs That Pertain to the Conflict

The third component of the NVC model that I apply to the mediation process is helping the parties to **identify and express the needs** connected to the feelings expressed. This component involves helping employees take responsibility for their feelings, as opposed to blaming the other party for causing them by acknowledging that their feelings result from their own needs which are, or are not being met in the situation.

Employees come to acknowledge that another's behaviour may be the stimulus for their feelings, but not the cause. This viewpoint helps the parties recognize that their feelings result from how they have chosen to *receive* what the other party has said and done. In addition, they are helped to see that feelings also arise from their *needs* in the particular moment. These needs can often be met in many more ways than have been considered prior to the conflict.

Examples of Rosenberg's universal human needs that underpin many conflict situations in the workplace:

- **autonomy:** to have some choice in one's work-life and some ability to plan how one goes about completing the work; to be trusted to complete one's work on time
- **celebration:** to celebrate successes such as promotions and completion of deadlines; to celebrate losses of roles and responsibilities or of other employees
- **integrity:** to work with authenticity; express creativity and to have meaning and self-worth about work
- **interdependence:** to be treated with respect and kindness from colleagues and supervisors; to feel appreciated and valued as an employee; to feel part of a community in the workplace
- **nurturance:** to have ample time off for meals and breaks; to have a pleasant physical work environment
- **play:** to enjoy one's work; to have fun while working with others
- **spiritual communion:** to have a peaceful and harmonious work environment where one feels safe and relaxed; to have things in order and to feel inspired by the work one does
- **respect, consideration, trust:** important qualities in the workplace

During a mediation process I use empathy to help the parties in dispute articulate their needs along with their feelings. For example, if I saw that John appeared to have a need for autonomy I might say something like, "John, it seems like you have a need to work on your part of the project without Frank interrupting you to give suggestions after you have already agreed on the manner in which it was to be completed. When he interrupts you, you lose your concentration and then feel angry, is that right?"

Stated in this way, John is encouraged to take responsibility for his needs that underlie his feelings of anger. This makes it much easier for Frank to hear and understand John's point of view without taking it personally. He may then be more open to agreeing to a solution to the conflict that takes John's needs into consideration.

4. Making Requests as Opposed to Demands

After the parties in dispute state their observations and express their feelings and needs, I help them make *requests* of each other that will allow these needs to be met. Requests are made with the understanding that the other person is free to say no to the request.

Demands, on the other hand, are expressed in a manner that does not give the person the option of saying no. Demands tend to put people on the defensive, making them more likely to resist complying and often make conflicts worse. Requests are more respectful and less threatening than demands and are therefore more likely to be received positively and constructively.

Even if one party rejects the request of the other, the mediation can continue with this quality of respect and cooperation. Other options can then be considered until a solution is found that is acceptable to both parties.

An example of a request might be, “Would you be willing to speak more softly when we talk on the phone?”

The overall benefit of the NVC approach used in mediation extends beyond the conflict situation; it aims to strengthen the connection of the relationship. As in the transformative approach to conflict resolution described above, this perspective ultimately establishes trust in relationships. This deeper understanding of one another will, if not eliminate conflict completely; at least allow a much easier and efficient resolution of any future conflict.