Six Conflict Rules For Ongoing Relationships

1. **Do not withdraw from or ignore conflicts.** When the goal is not important and you do not need to keep a relationship with the other person, withdrawing from the conflict may be appropriate. If the relationship is going to continue, however, ignoring a conflict keeps emotional energy tied up in resentment, hostility, or fear. In the long run, it is almost always easier to face a conflict in an ongoing relationship.

2. **Do not engage in “win-lose” negotiations.** When the goal is very important to you but the relationship is unimportant, forcing the other person to give in may be appropriate. In an ongoing relationship, however, you almost never use go for the “win” because the loser may be resentful and want revenge. In the long run, it is almost always easier to ensure that the other person is satisfied and happy with the resolution of the conflict.

3. **Assess for smoothing.** When the goal is unimportant to you (or far more important to the other person than to you) and the relationship is very important, smoothing may be appropriate. Giving up your needs for the needs of another person only works in the long run if the other person reciprocates. It is a mistake, however, to smooth if in fact the goal is very important to you.

4. **Compromise when time is short.** When the goal and the relationship are of moderate importance to you, you may wish to compromise. Usually, compromising is used only when there is not enough time to solve the problem.

5. **Initiate problem-solving negotiations.** When both the goal and the relationship are important to you, you initiate negotiations to solve the problem. You ask the other person to join with you in problem-solving negotiations if he/she is rational and able to do so.

6. **Use your sense of humor.** Humor is very helpful in keeping conflicts constructive. Laughter usually does a great deal to resolve the tension in conflicts and help disputants think more creatively about how to solve the problem.