

Principle

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anti-principle

Pin the blame

Finding blame focuses the conflict on the past

principle

Figure out what's happening

Orient the focus on the future and finding solutions. Focus on what happened and why in order to understand how people contributed to the conflict.

Blame

1. You make it impossible to run a meeting when you're constantly shouting at everyone!"
2. I can't get my ideas out because you never let me talk. It's always about you. You don't listen to anyone else."

Contribution

1. Look, I think I've been making this whole thing worse by trying to micro-manage everyone. I'm going to try to step back some."
2. "You shot down my ideas before I could explain them. I lost my nerve and didn't try again. I'd like you to hear me out."

Practice:

"Do you have any idea how hard I work to pay for that school? I have no life because of you, and you've wasted my time and money partying with your friends."

Restate

Principle

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anti-principle

Ignore conflict

Avoiding conflict allows it to fester and escalate. It becomes a chronic source of frustration, stress, and pain. We complain behind people's back or attack them in indirect ways.

principle

Acknowledge conflict

Define the problem and make specific, do-able requests.

Ignore

1. "Stop driving like a maniac. You're going to get us killed."
2. "You are so lazy and irresponsible. You're taking advantage of me. You've been out of college for a year. Do you think I'm going to keep paying for everything forever."

Practice:

"You are hopeless with money, and you spending is out of control. I want to be in charge of the household finances from now on."

Acknowledge

1. "I get nervous when you drive this fast. Would you be willing to stay under 70 mph?"
2. "I want us to have a fair financial arrangement. Would you be willing to start contributing money toward household costs each month."

Restate

Principle

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anti-principle

Assume there are no good options

Treat an option as the final solution. Disregard what is important to others.

principle

Assume undiscovered options exist

Don't rush into finding a solution. Allow new ideas to emerge and acknowledge strategies as options and not as final solutions. It can help people find out what is important to everyone and what needs must be met.

Practice:

Father: "You obviously can't keep up with your schoolwork and play varsity basketball at the same time. I'm taking you off the team."

Daughter: "I am not quitting the basketball team, Dad. I don't care about grades. I'm probably not going to college anyway."

Restate the question

Principle

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anti-principle

Make vague agreements

It is tempting to be glad that some agreement has been found and let the fuzzy areas slide, especially around the most difficult parts of the conflict.

principle

Make clear agreements

Clarify expectations and make sure everyone is agreeing to the same thing, especially around the uncomfortable areas. Don't rely on assumptions. It may be necessary over time to adjust agreements due to changing circumstances. Check to clarify changes are mutually acceptable.

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anti-principle

Ignore the possibility of future conflict

Treat conflict as abnormal. Act surprised when conflict arrives.

principle

Expect and plan for future conflict

Conflict is continual as our story overlaps, weaves and strikes together with the story of others. Open discussion prevents unnecessary escalation and destructive outcomes.

Communication strategies

1. "It is easier for me if you bring problems up in private, not in front of others."
2. "I have a hard time listening if you yell at me. Can you wait until you can say it without yelling? Just say something like "not now" so that I know what's happening."
3. "How about if we make a hand signal or something, so we can let each other know when we are getting tense."

Look for Ways Forward

anti principle

principle

Ignore conflict

Positive statement: _____

Take away: _____

Assume there are no good options

Positive statement: _____

Take away: _____

Make vague agreements

Positive statement: _____

Take away: _____

Abandon your curiosity

Positive statement: _____

Take away: _____