TENTH EDITION

Interpersonal Conflict

Joyce L. Hocker | William W. Wilmot

McGraw Hill Education

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Conflict

Tenth Edition

Joyce L. Hocker

William W. Wilmot

With great appreciation
for the life and scholarship
of
William W. Wilmot
1943–2013

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Preface

Revising this, the tenth of edition of *Interpersonal Conflict,* brought me the opportunity to reflect on how the field has changed since I first began to research the field for my dissertation at the University of Texas in 1973. Since our first edition in 1978, conflict resolution has transformed into many subfields: peacemaking, third-party intervention, prevention of conflict, and the integration of personal transformation with interpersonal communication choices. This edition reflects many of the recent changes in the field.

All chapters reflect recent research on interpersonal conflict. As has been our practice, I have removed earlier citations that are so foundational that they need not be specifically cited. All chapters have been revised and in some cases, reorganized and rewritten for readability and clarity. New additions of "How would this sound?" give examples of dialogue the students may use to enlarge their conflict communication. Clearer organization and subheadings guide the reader through the text. The book still contains the 10 chapters in the same order.

Chapter One, "The Nature of Conflict," retains the resilient definition of conflict that has gained acceptance and use for more than three decades. This definition is now where it belongs, at the beginning of the chapter. Added emphasis on transforming the elements of conflict, with a special focus on perception, reflects the trend in the wider field to view elements as capable of transformation. The chapter includes activities on intrapersonal conflict, introducing the student to self-reflection as a basic first step. Examples and cases referring to same-sex relationships are added throughout. The chapter presents a persuasive case for studying conflict.

Chapter Two, "Perspectives on Conflict," retains the popular section on worldviews that influence one's approach to conflict. The metaphors of conflict section retains the simplified approach, organizing metaphors around danger and opportunity, used in the last edition. A new section on how narratives frame conflict has been added, with an extensive case study that illustrates the approach. The previous "lens view" of conflict has been removed, since it was redundant with new material on perception.

Chapter Three, "Interests and Goals," retains the popular teaching tool of the TRIP acronym (Topic, Relationship, Identity, and Process goals), which helps students analyze layers of any conflict. Several cases are extended to further exemplify the changing nature of goals.

Chapter Four, "Power: The Structure of Conflict," is extensively reorganized, rewritten, and clarified. All sections relating to high and low power and how to deal with imbalances have been reorganized. Many older citations are removed. A new definition of interpersonal power is presented, which focuses on influence. The shifting nature of power is emphasized (power depends on changing relationship dynamics). The power bases section has been updated. Some cases have been expanded and made more challenging. The section on bullying, including cyberbullying, has been revised and expanded. A new classroom activity on bullying and sexual assault has been added.

Chapter Five, "Conflict Styles," retains the popular Rahim styles assessment, with needed corrections in scoring, thus making the section accurate and useful. The section on verbal aggressiveness and verbal abuse is expanded, and placed in the "dominating" section. Integrating or collaborating is presented as the default style of choice, toward which the

teaching in this book is oriented. Violence is presented not as a kind of style, but as an approach that always leads to negative outcomes (along with bullying and verbal violence). References to violence scales are included in this edition.

Chapter Six, "Emotions in Conflict," benefits greatly from a surge of research and writing about the place of emotion in conflict resolution. New class activities that will guide students in the analysis of their emotional life have been added. While most researchers agree that no emotion is, in and of itself, positive or negative, the research literature continues to designate emotions in this way; the chapter reflects language in the research. A new "feeling words" inventory, simpler and more applied to conflict resolution, has been added. Humiliation is added as a separate, powerful emotion, tied to the experience of bullying. Material on how emotions transform as the conflict becomes more integrative is added. Mindfulness is presented as a necessary part of the transformation of conflict.

Chapter Seven, "Analyzing Conflicts," has been reorganized into macro-level analysis and micro-level analysis, which simplifies the approaches. The Comprehensive Guide, which assists students in writing a major conflict analysis paper, is updated to reflect changes in the book.

Chapter Eight, "Interpersonal Negotiation," includes new research on gender, culture, and negotiation. While all the approaches to negotiation covered before are still covered, the perspective of the chapter now clearly guides students toward integrative negotiation in most situations. Integrative negotiation uses all the communication theory upon which most of the book rests.

Chapter Nine, "Third-Party Intervention," presents current writing on communication coaching in an expanded manner. Coaching is presented as a part of many different kinds of third-party intervention, ideally suited for the student of communication. Updates on gender and third-party intervention have been added. The approaches to third-party intervention are presented as they actually occur in the workplace—dynamic and changing forms of interpersonal conflict resolution.

Chapter Ten, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation," written by Gary Hawk at the authors' request five editions back, is updated with new, current cases dealing with sexual violence, trauma, social media, and racial bias. Gary has added a section on cautions when there is an imbalance of power. He has rewritten and retained the popular section on apology, pointing the reader toward examples of excellent apologies.

I welcome your comments, both from students and adopters of this book. Your responses help guide my choices for the future. I will respond to every comment. You may reach me at JoyceHocker45@gmail.com or joyhocker@aol.com. Best wishes as you begin or continue the journey of discovery about interpersonal conflict and the promotion of peaceful relationships.

Joyce L. Hocker,
Fall, 2016
Missoula, Montana

❧ Acknowledgments

To the reader from Joyce Hocker

What a privilege to be working on this tenth edition of a project I began in the early seventies. These days, in semi-retirement, I teach peace and conflict resolution in the Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Montana, and at the Red Willow Learning Center, a nonprofit devoted to serving the needs of trauma survivors and those who serve these clients. I continue to find a sense of purpose as we work together for greater skill in creating peaceful relationships.

The tenth edition is the first revision without my longtime colleague Bill Wilmot, who died in the summer of 2013. His work pervades this book; I missed his wit and perspective as I revised the chapters. I appreciate all his contributions to this project over the years.

My husband, Gary Hawk, not only revised his excellent chapter on forgiveness and reconciliation, but he also supported me through the summer as I worked in our home each day. He helped me move into a large, lovely study affording a view of whitetail deer, birds, Ponderosa pines, mountain ash trees, and the peaceful rock garden he maintains in our backyard. He warmly encouraged me through the whole process. Our cat, Lonestar, maintained his practice of walking on the keyboard and letting me know when it was time to pay attention to him. Keegan Olson, a graduate student in Communication Studies at the University of Montana, served as my research assistant. He found just the right research updates for each chapter. I outlined what I hoped to find each week, and he perceived accurately what would be helpful and sent the citations to me. Additionally, Keegan tutored me in the online library system, organized the references, and made everything look easy. In addition to his technical expertise, Keegan shared a keen enthusiasm for the ideas he found, sharing his own perspectives with me. I could not have asked for a finer research assistant.

Just before this revision, I studied memoir writing with friends Sally Thompson, Cyndy Aten, and Gladys Considine. Novelist Richard Fifield, our teacher, helped sharpen our writing skills. I hope some of his expertise shows up in rewritten sections of this book. Sally Thompson kept track of my progress and shared her wise perspective on aspects of this revision.

Lillian Davis encouraged me during the time we were doctoral students at the University of Texas. She continues to be my dear friend, taking interest in this project. She and I are the only continuing witnesses of my early effort. In many ways, she is responsible for the inception of the conflict resolution project in my early years. I am deeply grateful to her.

My family members, the late Janice Hocker Rushing, my sister, and Jean Lightfoot Hocker and Lamar Hocker, our parents, continue to live in memory. Our parents taught us equality, fairness, and justice in a loving family environment where our individuality was welcomed. My brother Ed and I carry on their values and live with their love for us. I am grateful to Ed for encouraging me in this and my other writing projects. Anne de Vore, Jungian analyst and life guide, continues to enrich my life with her wisdom and counsel.

I am humbled to have worked with clients in my practice for decades now; they and all my former students have truly taught me the meaning of all these practices of interpersonal peacemaking.

May we learn to live in peace.

To the reader from Gary Hawk

As we complete this tenth edition I feel deeply grateful for 18 years of students in The Davidson Honors College, the way they trusted me with their stories, demonstrated resilience in the face of adversity, and showed kindness toward one another in the circle of our mutual instruction. Also, I remain truly grateful that Joyce Hocker gave me an opportunity to harvest my experience in the field of forgiveness and reconciliation and allowed me to express my own discoveries and the insights of others in a language that makes sense to me.

Supplements

The tenth edition of *Interpersonal Conflict* is now available online with Connect, McGraw-Hill Education's integrated assignment and assessment platform. Connect also offers SmartBook for the new edition, which is the first adaptive reading experience proven to improve grades and help students study more effectively. All of the title's website and ancillary content is also available through Connect, including:

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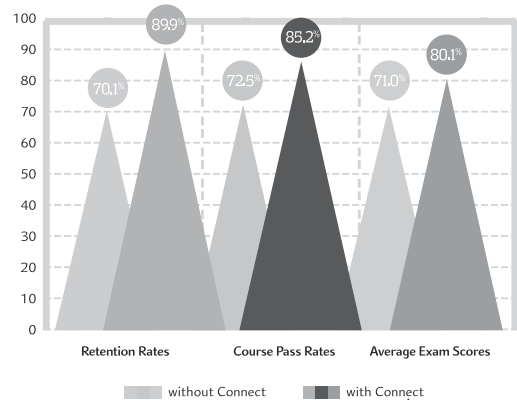
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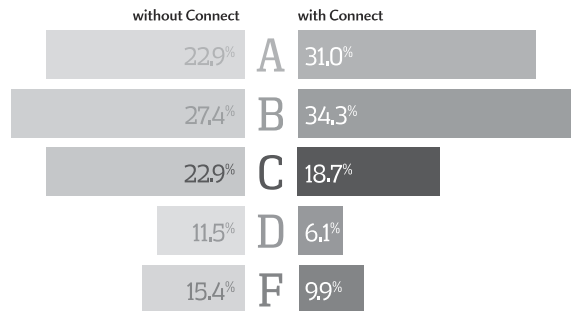
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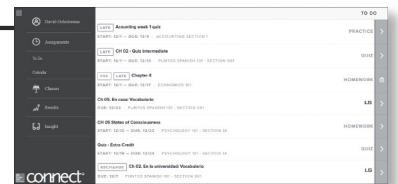
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Part One

Conflict Components

Chapter 1

The Nature of Conflict

❧Interpersonal Conflict Depends on Interpersonal Communication

Welcome to the study of communication during conflict. Communication is the medium for conflict management, whether face-to-face, written, or with technology. When we transform communication itself, we begin to engage the process of conflict resolution. Constructive communication shifts potentially destructive conflict into an arena of resolution (Fisher-Yoshida 2014).

Conflict participants communicate in an effort to generate shared meaning, solve problems, and preserve the relationship to accomplish shared goals. Effective communication in conflict management propels the twists or shifts in the direction of a conflict best described as transformations, or "aha" moments (Putnam 2010). In this book we focus on communication that is primarily:

- *Face-to-face* most of the time
- *With people you know* or who are *important to you*
- *Complicated and difficult.* If it were not so, you would not be in conflict.
- *Shaped by the context* in which the conflict takes place—romantic, family, work, or friends
- *Oriented toward constructing and sharing meaning*
- *Goal directed*

As you proceed throughout the book and class exercises, you will be challenged to alter your cherished habits of doing conflict. The goal is to teach you to become a more effective communicator in future conflict situations. Conflict is a fact of human life. It occurs naturally in all kinds of settings. Nations still struggle, families fracture in destructive conflicts, marriages face challenges and often fail, and the workplace is plagued with stress, bullying, avoidance of real communication, and blaming.

❧Conflict Defined

Perception is at the core of all conflict analysis. In interpersonal conflicts, people react as though there are genuinely different goals, there is not enough of some resource, and the other person actually is getting in the way of something prized by the perceiver. Sometimes these conditions are believed to be true, but sorting out what is perceived and what is interpersonally accurate forms the basis of conflict analysis.

Careful attention to the elements that make up conflict will help you understand an apparently unresolvable conflict. When conflicts remain muddled and unclear, they cannot be *resolved.* When you first perceive that you are in conflict with others, you may want to immediately get them to change. Usually, that initial attempt fails. You may feel hopeless. Instead, you will need to learn to change your own behavior (Miller, Roloff, and Reznik 2014). That's where conflict resolution begins.

> *Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals.*

An Expressed Struggle

An *interpersonal* approach to conflict management focuses on the communicative exchanges that make up the conflict episode. **Intrapersonal conflict**—internal strain that creates a state of ambivalence, conflicting internal dialogue, or lack of resolution in one's thinking and feeling—accompanies **interpersonal conflict.** One may endure intrapersonal conflict for a while before such a struggle is expressed communicatively. If you are upset with your father yet you do not write him, or you phone him less often and avoid expressing your concern, do you have a conflict?

Application 1.1   My Intrapersonal Conflicts

Think of an intrapersonal strain you may be feeling right now, or felt for a while in the past. What is the struggle you feel? Think of a picture or metaphor to describe what you are feeling. What words describe the internal strain? Have you ever lived through an intrapersonal conflict that did not ever become expressed? If you answered yes to this question, ask yourself if you might have expressed the conflict ever so slightly in some way. How might you have expressed the internal conflict non-verbally, or by actions you did not take?

Conflict is present when every person's perception of the struggle is communicated. The verbal or nonverbal communication may be subtle—a slight shift in body placement by Jill and a hurried greeting by Susan—but it must be present for the activity to be inter-personal conflict. Therefore, although other conditions must also exist before an interaction is labeled "conflict," Jandt (1973) asserts, "Conflict exists when the parties involved agree in some way that the behaviors associated with their relationship are labeled as 'conflict' behavior" (2). Often, the communicative behavior is easily identified with conflict, such as when one party openly disagrees with the other. Other times, however, an interpersonal conflict may be operating at a more tacit level. Two friends, for instance, may both be consciously avoiding the other because both think, "I don't want to see him for a few days because of what he did." The interpersonal struggle is expressed by the avoidance. **Intrapersonal perceptions** are the bedrock upon which conflicts are built; but only

when there are communicative manifestations of these perceptions will an "interpersonal conflict" emerge.

Communication is the central element in all interpersonal conflict. Communication and conflict are related in the following ways:

- *Communication behavior often creates conflict.*
- *Communication behavior reflects conflict.*
- *Communication is the vehicle for the productive or destructive management of conflict.*

Thus, communication and conflict are inextricably tied. How one communicates in a conflict situation has profound implications for the impact of that conflict. If two work associates are vying for the same position, they can handle the competition in a variety of ways. They may engage in repetitive, damaging rounds with one another, or they may successfully manage the conflict. Communication can be used to exacerbate the conflict or to lead to its productive management.

The following example explains how to move a conflict from an internally experienced strain to an interpersonal communication:

Leslie: (To new husband, Greg, referring to Greg's 15-year-old son.) I've noticed Brennan is using my towels and other stuff from our bathroom instead of the things from his bathroom. Do you think he's annoyed because he can't share our bathroom any more? Or he is just being thoughtless? I don't want to share our bathroom and I can't stand it when he leaves damp towels all over the place!

Greg: I don't know. He hasn't said anything. Do you want me to check it out, or do you want to?

Leslie: (Sigh.) Well, I'm uncomfortable, but it's my job to check it out. I won't make assumptions. I'll just ask him.

This situation could have escalated into a "war of the towels," or been handled unproductively by the stepmom leaving curt notes, the stepson avoiding contact, and both building up negative assumptions about the other. As it happened, the boy did admit to his new stepmother that he was irritated. He and his father had lived together for years without bothering much about which towel was whose, and he resented being told which bathroom and towels to use. Leslie had a chance to say what privacy and neatness meant to her. The three of them talked it through, defusing what could have been a big conflict that would have been over the wrong things (towels instead of the new relationships).

Another example demonstrates how you might make an intrapersonal conflict into an interpersonal conflict:

Greg, your co-worker, looks up briefly when you settle at your desk, but looks down quickly.

You: What's up, Greg?

Greg: Nothing.

Notice your choices here. You could say nothing, while wondering what might be going on with Greg. Your avoidance might start an avoidance spiral. Or, you might say,

You: We haven't checked in since I was added into your work/life balance project. Any concerns I should know about?

Greg: Not at all. (He is not engaging yet.)

You: I have some ideas. I'll write them up and bring them to our team meeting Tuesday.

Greg: We don't have management buy-in yet. Seems like we might be wasting our time.

Notice that Greg appears to be worrying about the entire project, not your involvement. If you had taken his nonresponse personally, you would have misperceived his thoughts. This is a good place to stop until the next meeting.

Most **expressed struggles** become activated by a *triggering event.* A staff member of a counseling agency is fired, setting off a series of meetings culminating in the staff's demand to the board that the director be fired. Or, in a roommate situation, Jon comes home one night and the locks are changed on the door. The triggering event brings the conflict to everyone's attention.

Interdependence

Conflict parties engage in an expressed struggle and interfere with one another because they are **interdependent.** "A person who is not dependent upon another—that is, who has no special interest in what the other does—has no conflict with that other person" (Braiker and Kelley 1979, 137). Each person's choices affect the other because conflict is a mutual activity. People are seldom totally opposed to each other. Even two people who are having an "intellectual conflict" over politics are to some extent cooperating with each other. They have, in effect, tacitly agreed, "Look, we are going to have this verbal argument, and we aren't going to hit each other, and both of us will get certain rewards for participating in this flexing of our intellectual muscles. We'll play by the rules, which we both understand." Schelling (1960) calls **strategic conflict** (conflict in which parties have choices as opposed to conflict in which the power is so disparate that there are virtually no choices) a "theory of precarious partnership" or "incomplete antagonism." In other words, even these informal debaters concerned with politics cannot formulate their verbal tactics until they know the "moves" made by the other party.

Parties in strategic conflict, therefore, are never totally antagonistic and must have **mutual interests,** even if the interest is only in keeping the conflict going. Without openly saying so, they often are thinking, "How can we have this conflict in a way that increases the benefit to me?" These decisions are complex, with parties reacting not in a linear, cause–effect manner but with a series of interdependent decisions. Bateson (1972) presents an "ecological" view of patterns in relationships. As in the natural environment, in which a decision to eliminate coyotes because they are a menace to sheep affects the overall balance of animals and plants, no one party in a conflict can make a decision that is totally separate—each decision affects the other conflict participants. In all conflicts, therefore, interdependence carries elements of cooperation and elements of competition. In true conflicts, the parties are "stuck with each other."

Even though conflict parties are always interdependent to some extent, how they perceive their mutuality affects their later choices. Parties decide, although they may not be aware of this decision, whether they will act as relatively interdependent agents or relatively independent agents. Both or all may agree that "we are in this together," or they may believe that "just doing my own thing" is possible and desirable. A couple had been

divorced for 3 years and came to a mediator to decide what to do about changing visitation agreements as their three children grew older. In the first session, the former husband seemed to want a higher degree of interdependence than did the former wife. He wanted to communicate frequently by phone, adopting flexible arrangements based on the children's wishes and his travel schedule. She wanted a monthly schedule set up in advance, communicated in writing. After talking through their common interest in their children, their own complicated work and travel lives, the children's school and sports commitments, and their new spouses' discomfort with frequent, flexible contact between the former partners, they worked out a solution that suited them both. Realizing that they were unavoidably interdependent, they agreed to lessen their verbal and in-person communication about arrangements while agreeing to maintain e-mail communication about upcoming scheduling. They worked out an acceptable level of interdependence.

An example of negotiating interdependence occurred with Katie, a junior in college, and her mother, Sharon. Katie wanted to set up a 30th anniversary party for her parents, who live just 2 hours from her college. Her mother, Sharon, kept saying on the phone, "Don't bother. Don't go to any trouble. It's not worth it." Katie persisted that she and her younger sister really wanted to do this (she insisted that they were interdependent). Mom stopped answering the phone and returning e-mails. Katie drove home the next weekend and asked Mom to talk the whole thing through with her. Katie learned that Mom was so angry with Dad for ignoring the upcoming event that she wanted to withdraw. She couldn't imagine enjoying a party that came only from her kids while she was simmering with resentment at her husband. So Katie talked to Dad about helping plan the party. Mom told her husband that she had been feeling hurt and slighted. They all got involved and had a good time. Now, notice that it was *not* Katie's role to play therapist with her parents—but she helped by asking them to talk to her and to each other. In a healthy family, everyone can talk to every other member. This builds healthy interdependence.

Sometimes parties are locked into a position of **mutual interdependence** whether they want to be or not. In some cases, interdependent units do not choose to be interdependent but are so for other compelling reasons. Some colleagues in an office, for instance, got into a conflict over when they were to be in their offices to receive calls and speak with customers. One group took the position that "what we do doesn't affect you—it's none of your business." The other group convinced the first group that they could not define themselves as unconnected, because the rest of the group had to be available to fill in for them when they were not available. They were inescapably locked into interdependence. If a working decision had not been made, the parties would have almost guaranteed an unproductive conflict, with each party making choices as if they were only tenuously connected.

When you are stuck in unproductive interdependence, these conflicts turn into **gridlocked conflicts.**

You Know You're in Gridlock When . . .

- The conflict makes you feel rejected by your partner.
- You keep talking but make no headway.
- You become entrenched and are unwilling to budge.
- You feel more frustrated and hurt after you talk than before.
- Your talk is devoid of humor, amusement, or affection.

- You become more entrenched over time so you become insulting during your talks.

- More vilification makes you more polarized, extreme, and less willing to compromise.

- Eventually you disengage emotionally or physically or both (Gottman 1999, 132–33).

Think about how you feel when you are gridlocked in traffic. You may feel full of road rage, derisive of the stupid other drivers, furious at the system, defeated and hopeless, or numb and tuned out. The same emotions happen in a gridlocked interpersonal conflict. Trying harder often doesn't work. That's when you need to try smarter instead of harder. When nothing is working, try something different. Destructive conflicts rely on the same old (unproductive) strategies.

Most relationships move back and forth between degrees of independence and interdependence. At times there will be an emphasis on "me"—what I want—and on separateness, whereas at other times "we"—our nature as a unit—becomes the focus. These are natural rhythmic swings in relationships. In productive conflict relationships, dissonance (clashes, disharmony) and resonance (harmony, deep positive response) become balanced in a natural rhythm (Putnam 2010). Just as we all need both stability and change, conflict parties have to balance their independence and dependence needs.

Relationship and interdependence issues precede other issues in the conflict. Actually, these negotiations over interdependence permeate most conflicts throughout the course of the relationship, never becoming completely settled. Address the interdependence issue openly in ongoing, highly important relationships. In more transient and less salient relationships, the interdependence may be primarily tacit, or understood.

Perceived Incompatible Goals

What do people fight about? (We use the word *fight* to mean verbal conflict, not physical violence.) People engage in conflict over *goals that are important to them.* One company had an extreme morale problem. The head cashier said, "All our problems would be solved if we could just get some carpet, because everyone's feet get tired—we're the ones who have to stand up all day. But management won't spend a penny for us." Her statement of incompatible goals was clear—carpet versus no carpet. But as the interviews in which we discovered intrapersonal strains progressed, another need emerged. She began to talk about how no one noticed when her staff had done good work and how the "higher-ups" only noticed when lines were long and mistakes were made. There was a silence, then she blurted out, "How about some compliments once in a while? No one ever says anything nice. They don't even know we're here." Her stated goals then changed to include not only carpet but also self-esteem and increased attention from management—a significant deepening of the goal statement. Both goals, carpets and self-esteem, were real, but the first goal may have been incompatible with management's desires, whereas the second might not; the need for recognition may have been important to both the cashiers and management.

We do not support the overly simple notion that if people just communicated they would see that their goals are the same. Opposing goals remain a fact of life. Many times, people are absolutely convinced they have opposing goals and cannot agree on anything to pursue together. However, if goals are reframed or put in a different context, the parties can agree. Recently a student teacher's supervisor outlined her goals for the student. Included in the list was the demand that the student turn in a list of the three most and least positive experiences in the classroom each week. The student asked to be transferred to another

teaching supervisor. The chair asked why, saying, "Ms. Barker is one of our best supervisors." The student said, "That's what I've heard, but I can't be open about my failures with someone who's going to give me my ending evaluation. That will go in my permanent files." In a joint discussion with the supervisor and the student, the chair found that both were able to affirm that they valued feedback about positive and negative experiences. Their goals were more similar than they had thought; the means for achieving them were different. The supervisor agreed to use the list as a starting point for discussion but not to keep copies; the student agreed to list experiences so the supervisor would not feel that the student was hiding her negative experiences. Trust was built through a discussion of goals. Perceptions of the incompatibility of the goals changed through clear communication. *Are you noticing that it's difficult to resolve conflict without talking with each other?*

Goals are perceived as incompatible because parties want (1) the same thing or (2) different things. First, the conflict parties may want the same thing—for example, the promotion in the company, the one available scholarship, or the attention of the parents. They struggle and jockey for position in order to attain the desired goal. They perceive the situation as one where there "isn't enough to go around." Thus, they see their goal as incompatible with the other person's because they both want the same thing.

Second, sometimes the goals are different. Mark and Tom, for example, decide to eat out. Mark wants to go to Bananas and Tom wants to go to Pearl's. They struggle over the incompatible choices. Sometimes the goals are not as opposed as they seem. Two roommates would like to move out of the dorm and into an apartment. After looking around, Janet tells Allison that she thinks she'd "better just stay put." Allison was, naturally, hurt. As they talked about the situation, Janet told Allison she was afraid Allison wanted to spend more than Janet was able to. They found an acceptable budget and agreed to stick with it, thus resetting their goals more clearly. Of course, many times the content goals seem to be different (like which restaurant to go to), but beneath them is a relational struggle over who gets to decide. Regardless of whether the participants see the goals as similar or different, **perceived incompatible goals** are central to all conflicts.

Perceived Scarce Resources

A resource can be defined as "any positively perceived physical, economic, or social consequence" (Miller and Steinberg 1975, 65). The resources may be objectively real or perceived as real by the person. Likewise, the scarcity, or limitation, may be apparent or actual. For example, close friends often think that if their best friend begins to like someone else too, then the supply of affection available to the original friend will diminish—a **perceived scarce resource.** This may or may not be so, but a perception that affection is scarce may well create genuine conflict between the friends. Sometimes, then, the most appropriate behavior is attempting to change the other person's perception of the resource instead of trying to reallocate the resource. Ultimately, one person can never force another to change his or her valuing of a resource or perception of how much of the resource is available, but persuasion coupled with supportive responses for the person fearful of losing the reward can help.

Money, natural resources such as oil or land, and jobs may indeed be scarce or limited resources. Getting a class you need for graduation might be a scarce resource, if the class is closed. Intangible commodities such as love, esteem, attention, and caring also may be perceived as scarce. Information can be perceived as a scarce resource. If you are lost

because you wandered away from the marked ski trails, and you don't have a map, you need to know where to go, and how to reach the ski patrol. If your cell phone won't work, you desperately need people to come along and help you. All these are, for this desperate moment, scarce resources because of the situation you are in, not because cell phones, maps, and friendly strangers are inherently scarce. When rewards are perceived as scarce, an expressed struggle may be initiated.

*And sometimes resources really **are** scarce.* No amount of effort to change the perception will make the resource abundant. Some other conflict strategy will have to be employed.

In interpersonal struggles, two resources often perceived as scarce are **power** and **self-esteem.** Whether the parties are in conflict over a desired romantic partner or a change in work hours, perceived scarcities of power and self-esteem are involved. People engaged in conflict often say things reflecting power and self-esteem struggles, such as in the following scenarios:

"She always gets her own way." (She has more power than I do, and I feel at a constant disadvantage. I'm always one down.)

"He is so sarcastic! Who does he think he is? I don't have to put up with his attitude!" (I don't have ways to protect myself from biting sarcasm. It feels like an attack. I feel humiliated. The only power I have is to leave or try to compete with equal sarcasm, which makes me feel awful.)

"I refuse to pay one more penny in child support." (I feel unimportant. I don't get to see the children very often. I've lost my involvement with them. Money is the only way I have to let that be known. I don't want to feel like a loser and a fool.)

"I won't cover for her if she asks me again. She can find someone else to work the night shift when her kids get sick." (I feel taken advantage of. She only pays attention to me when she needs a favor.)

Regardless of the particular subjects involved, people in conflict usually perceive that they have too little power and self-esteem and that the other party has too much. Since each person thinks and feels convinced this imbalance is "true," something needs to be adjusted. Often, giving the other person some respect, courtesy, and ways to save face removes their need to use power excessively. *Remember, people usually think the other person has more power and self-esteem. We don't perceive other people the way they perceive themselves.*

Interference

People may be interdependent, perceive incompatible goals, want the same scarce resource, and still may not experience what we call conflict. *Interference,* or the perception of interference, is necessary to complete the conditions for conflict. If the presence of another person interferes with desired actions, conflict intensifies. Conflict is associated with blocking, and the person doing the blocking is perceived as the problem. For instance, a college sophomore worked in a sandwich shop the summer before her junior year abroad. She worked two jobs, scarcely having time to eat and sleep. She was invited to a party at a cabin in the wilderness, and she really wanted to go. She worked overtime on one day then asked for a day off from the sandwich shop, but the employer was reluctant to say yes, because the student was the only one the employer trusted to open the shop and keep the till. For an angry moment, the employer, who was interfering with what the student wanted