

THE POWER OF MIND

FLIGHT

SPEAK
YOUR MIND
AND GET
THE RESULTS
YOU WANT

JON TAFFER

The logo for William Morrow, featuring a stylized, cursive 'wm' monogram.

WILLIAM MORROW

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1

THE CASE FOR CONFLICT

Why constructive engagement is good for you.

Taffer's Toolkit Takeaways

1. ***Your values matter.*** Standing up for what you know to be right is necessary for your self-worth.
2. ***Constructive conflict can be good for the relationships you want to keep.*** Airing out the grievance instead of allowing it to fester and create resentment will be better for both parties in the long run.
3. ***It's necessary for society.*** For the sake of a true and functioning democracy, we need to be able to freely speak our conscience.
4. ***It's essential for collaboration and creativity.*** Expressing differing points of view results in a better product, whether you are running a business or writing a song.
5. ***It's good for your health.*** Acquiescing, stuffing down your opinions, and not sticking up for yourself can be toxic, causing chronic anxiety, depression, sleeplessness, and weight gain over time.

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THE FIGHT IN MY HEAD

*Embrace internal conflict. Fire-test your position
with new information and opposing views.*

3

Taffer Toolkit Takeaways

1. ***Intentionally expose yourself to opposing views***, be they on social media, via channel surfing, or by reading newspapers and magazines that you know to have different ideological stances. Try to stay open, searching for at least one thing you can agree with on the opposite side, or at least understand how someone might come to that conclusion.
2. ***Don't react. Receive.*** Consciously let the opposing fact or opinion sit with you for a few uncomfortable minutes, or more. Hold the thoughts in your mind and examine them from all possible sides. Sleep on it!
3. ***Think of an issue you feel strongly about, then make a list of points for and points against.*** Look at the two columns to see which points come closest to agreement, then list those views in between the for and against. There's your middle ground!
4. ***Surround yourself with people who you respect but who don't necessarily share all your opinions.*** Pick a topic for a friendly debate in a safe space, all the while agreeing to disagree. Listen carefully to arguments and challenge yourself to find common ground. When the discussion is over, think for a while about what they had to say. You don't have to agree, but you can try to understand or at least step back and contemplate. Have these conversations routinely.
5. ***If a subject comes up and you find someone disagrees with you, lean into it.*** Probe them further, seek new information, and draw out their opinions with follow-up questions. Don't try to argue. Just be curious and open. Again, receive.

PICK YOUR BATTLES

Assess when conflict is necessary and constructive, and when to walk away.

Taffer Toolkit Takeaways

1. **Use your conflict calculator.** Determine whether the person you are thinking about entering into the arena with is a worthy adversary. If you've known this individual for a while, think back on their past interactions with others. Does he fight fair? Is she capable of listening?
2. **Figure out your goal.** Can the issue be resolved through other strategies besides direct confrontation? Does a discussion that could get angry and heated, potentially damaging long-term relationships, further an important goal? What's the bigger picture?
3. **Learn to recognize fake conflict.** Is someone just stirring the pot to get attention or further their own agenda? Is it in your own head? Have you created an external conflict where none exists to avoid facing your own failings?

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THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Fight the good fight: clean and fair.

Taffer Toolkit Takeaways

1. **Be relatable.** Talking down to someone from a pedestal will either fuel resentment or intimidate them into silence, which ends the engagement before it can even begin.
2. **Find the “in.”** Whatever the discussion is, try to read the temperature and understand the person you are working with.
3. **Play it back.** The same set of facts can be interpreted in so many different ways. That’s why it’s important to remember how easy it is to misunderstand the meanings of what is said and done.
4. **Consider the person and the circumstances within the conflict.** If it’s a workplace disagreement and you must show up the next day to face the same people, dial down the passion.
5. **Research the rules of engagement from other institutions,** such as “The Principles of Discourse,” introduced by a former college president during a convocation speech and long since used at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, to provide students, faculty, and staff with a road map for handling disagreements respectfully.
6. **Conflict is not necessarily about winning.** If all you are focused on is scoring that next point, you’re in it for the wrong reasons. True victory can be something as small as planting a mustard seed. Give them a new idea to think about, then sit back and watch it grow.
7. **Never forget your adversary’s humanity.** When you treat someone with respect, when you give them their dignity, the chances are greater that what you have to say will be received. It’s my golden rule.

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DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Even when you can't control the timing of a confrontation, you know it's coming. So be prepared.

Taffer Toolkit Takeaways

1. **Assume nothing.** Before you begin a discussion that may escalate into something more serious, know what you know—and what you don't know—about the situation.
2. **Focus your research.** Imagine what information you would use if you were on the other side of the debate, then gather enough evidence to shoot those points down!
3. **Steer it back to what you know.** If you don't know where a set of statistics or "facts" were sourced or if they are even true, don't allow yourself to be distracted.
4. **Think deeply about the source of the conflict.** Ask yourself important questions to understand the root cause, the timeline of the issue, and what role, if any, you played in escalating the conflict. Be self-aware.
5. **Let them speak first, allowing them to vent.** This can help cool down the temperature, yield more information, and allow yourself more time to think of an answer or solution.
6. **Know the backstory.** Keeping an accurate and detailed history is one way to shut the conversation down before it drifts into destructive, time-wasting territory.
7. **Do a quick recon.** A few smart questions and quick conversations with individuals close to the situation can reveal a lot, as can an online search if you know what to look for. Then, when circumstances permit, take a moment to clear your head and focus.
8. **Get an early start.** If you head out a half hour or so early to the site of the engagement, it will give you more time to think through the coming interaction. Keep a checklist in the back of your head of all the points you want to hit.

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TO YELL OR NOT TO YELL

*Calculate when to go there. Leverage your passion
with strategy.*

Taffer Toolkit Takeaways

1. ***Be the master of your emotions.*** Yelling should never be the product of actual rage. Do it for effect, all the while checking for the physiological reactions of your adversary so they neither explode nor shut down.
2. ***Understand the difference between passion and anger.*** Yes, there should be sincere emotion behind the yelling. But, when passion gets overtaken by anger, your adversaries will revel in your rage, because they can see they've gotten under your skin. Always be in control of the exchange, no matter how emotional it gets.
3. ***Manage the reactions of others.*** This is all about getting your message across with impact. Control the volume and tone of your voice according to how your points are landing. Manipulate through the power of voice.
4. ***Mix up the recipe.*** Yelling should be combined with more subtle tricks that you can apply using your voice and physical presence when you are in a verbal altercation, from connection tools like eye contact, to physical proximity.
5. ***Know when to switch it off.*** There is nothing to be gained by continuing to yell after you've made your point. Once the engagement is over, you are done!

7

LISTEN TO WIN

*Purposeful conflict is not just about being heard.
Your adversary's words matter too.*

Taffer Toolkit Takeaways

1. **Focus on their words, not your next sentence.** If you are constructing that next argument in your head, you're missing some critical information.
2. **Slow it down.** Force yourself to listen. And don't be scared of the silence, because, in constructive conflict, silence can be your friend. Don't be the first person to jump in and lose the point in your eagerness to fill a long pause with words.
3. **Keep them talking.** Utilize encouraging words like "Really?" or "Wow! And?" These terms of engagement will make your adversaries feel good and help you learn the deep-rooted cause of their behavior.
4. **Pay attention to the physical and emotional cues.** There are multiple ways to understand people beyond the words they speak. When you pay attention to these cues, you can control the flow of the discussion.
5. **Employ reaction management.** Shake your head or nod in the direction that you want their views to go, for example. Subliminally, those are powerful moves.
6. **Listen for verbal tells.** The truth often comes out by the third or fourth sentence. Or following the words "but" or "therefore"—according to Dr. Phil!
7. **"So you mean . . . ?"** When you hear a flaw in the reasoning that you may be able to counter, mirror what they just said back to them as an innocent question, to get them to clarify. With every sentence or phrase, more information comes out that you may be able to challenge or expand upon.
8. **Show interest, not judgment.** If you are patient enough to pause, drill down, and understand the intent behind the statement, it can take you in new and unexpected directions. Offer the respect of an open ear.

MEET ME ON THE CORNER

It's not just how you engage, but where. Location is another essential tool for constructive conflict.

Taffer Toolkit Takeaways

1. **Match the location to the adversary.** Anticipate how the confrontation is going to go down and understand the person on the other side of the conflict. Respect and understand the setting as well as the player.
2. **Be hyper-aware of your surroundings.** There will always be moments when the conflict comes to us, even when the setting is less than ideal. Know who is around you and the potential fallout if things escalate.
3. **Crowdsource.** The right audience can foster constructive engagement. Knowing they are being observed by others can often inspire people to be more constructive and accountable in their approach to conflict.
4. **Location isn't just physical.** Engineer a mindset among people that makes constructive engagement possible. Intentionally create conditions—safe spaces—that allow for constructive conflict.
5. **Know your place.** Understanding where you stand on the food chain can be another tool, enabling you to position yourself accordingly.
6. **In-person only.** Conflict on social media is worthless. Hiding behind a screen gives people a false sense of empowerment—a feeling that they can hurt or cancel you while their anonymity protects them from any consequences. Never let that happen. Within days, the peanut gallery will have moved on anyway.

BE THE BRIDGE

Forcing conflict can bring people closer. Seek the healing power of a good old-fashioned dustup, with some ground rules. . . .

Taffer Toolkit Takeaways

1. ***Keep it real.*** Don't let them off the hook as you confront them in real time. Until your adversary can really hear you, that point of contention is always going to fester. Understand that, in many ways, forcing conflict is an act of love.
2. ***Don't apologize.*** Recognize that forcing an open and honest dialogue about the issues is good for everyone. Never say you're sorry for what you believe. Besides, constructive conflict is a means of getting both sides to a better place.
3. ***Gently does it.*** When you force someone to confront the truth, you can crack them open just wide enough that they can receive. But it needs to be done with the utmost care. Forcing the kind of engagement that heals requires plenty of compassion and emotional intelligence.
4. ***Present hard evidence.*** It's much harder for someone to run away from a truth that's written in black and white. Let the facts, or even a neutral third party, help you to utter some uncomfortable truths that can bring greater clarity, understanding, or closure.
5. ***Adjust to different communication styles,*** especially when the other side comes from a different culture. Failure to recognize and act upon these cultural differences could build up a level of resistance that makes it impossible for your arguments or suggestions to be heard in the way they were intended.
6. ***Pave the way.*** Initiate dialogue by making it easy for the other side to speak up. Notice from facial expressions and other body language if they have something to say, then coax it out of them in an encouraging way. Don't ever let them retreat from the dialogue. The whole point of being a bridge is to get everyone to the other side.

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PREPARE FOR THE LONG HAUL

*You may have to fight many battles
before you win the war. Patience and
class are your keys to victory.*

Taffer Toolkit Takeaways

1. **Take it slow and smart.** Engagement with your adversary might happen in stages and take weeks, months, or years. But that's okay. If it's worth the fight, it's probably also worth the wait.
2. **Practice mental toughness.** Don't let the fight drain your energy. Rest and recharge between engagements. Prepare, but also try to compartmentalize. Don't dwell on your adversary; save it for the court date or the face-to-face interaction.
3. **Manage your expectations.** In the extended conflict, you can't expect the satisfaction of an apology or total capitulation to your point of view in the heat of the moment. The immediate resolution—the win or draw—may not be forthcoming.
4. **Use downtime to your advantage.** Plan out your attack and think about the larger goal. There's also nothing stopping you from being your own best champion as you calmly gather your facts to build a case that can eventually bring down the bully.
5. **Find an advocate, or others who will stand beside you in your fight.** Time, patience, and smart strategizing will bring others along with you.
6. **Leverage time in a family conflict.** When tension affects a group of loved ones living in close quarters, the need for patience and persistence is never greater.
7. **Be gracious in victory.** As long and drawn-out as this battle may have been, you need to know when the conflict is over.
8. **Do not risk losing by over-litigating your point.** Recognize when you've won, or at least accept the draw, then gracefully make your exit. And no victory laps!

EPILOGUE

THE EVOLUTION OF A CONFLICT CHAMPION

Your Constructive Conflict Checklist

Before you step into the arena, ask yourself:

1) Have I completed a cost-benefit analysis?

- Make sure the prize is worth it. Trivial matters may not be the best use of your time and effort.
- Calculate all of the costs—personal, professional, emotional, and financial.
- Make sure you are prepared to lose. Many risks are worth taking. Some are not.
- Don't be afraid to walk away—if that's what your analysis shows.

2) Are your emotions in control?

- Approach the conflict calmly. The best way to do this is to have done your homework.
- It's okay to show emotion when you engage—just be sure you are in charge. Keep your comments based on your facts.
- It's okay to express how you feel—but don't presume to speak for your opponents about their feelings.

Once inside the arena, ask yourself:

3) Am I treating opponents with respect and allowing them to maintain their dignity?

- Use proper forms of address—no name-calling, no belittling nicknames.
- Maintain your own dignity—no eye-rolling, sniggering, or other body language cues that convey disrespect.
- Listen to what the other person is saying—and check with them to make sure you understand their meaning.

- Survey to see if the setting is appropriate and not one in which you or your opponent feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or otherwise compromised.
- 4) Are you making an effort to find common ground with your opponents?
- Offer examples of where you and your opponent agree to establish common ground but also to limit the boundaries of the conflict.
 - Share specific examples that pinpoint the nature of the conflict so that your opponent can see “where you’re coming from.”
 - Share, if appropriate, similar personal anecdotes that help establish a shared experience between the two of you.
- 5) Am I focused on presenting my arguments with the most relevant facts and compelling evidence?
- Skip the complaints. Complaining doesn’t change minds or win arguments.
 - Review your facts. Make sure they are accurate, supportive of your argument, and easy to understand. Have examples to show how the facts apply to the situation.
 - Show how your idea or solution is preferable. Use real evidence and examples—not what-ifs.
- 6) Am I giving myself the respect I deserve?
- Do not feel you must be apologetic about holding a point of view or offering a particular solution. You are entitled to your ideas.

Make sure *you* are sure—review your facts and evidence, and if you think they’re not strong enough, go back and do more homework. If you are sure, then present them with confidence and no apology.

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