

# Chapter 7

## Compromise Is Key to Our Learning to Live Together: The Resolution of Key Issues Is Not Possible Without It



In a previously published blog,<sup>1</sup> I asked whether Moderates and Progressives can learn to “work together.” Given the enormous differences between them, the broader question is whether they can co-exist and thus learn to “live together.” While Progressives played a key role in President Biden’s victory and early successes, it’s putting it mildly to say that things have turned South in recent days. Overall, his job approval ratings are at an abysmal low.

Take Climate Change. While both Moderates and Progressives agree that it’s a major problem that needs immediate attention, Progressives insist that it has to be at the center of any deal, or there’s no deal at all. It’s no exaggeration to say that they’re in a prolonged state of serious Conflict. The key question is what if anything can be done to resolve it.

My life-long colleague and good friend Ralph H. Kilmann and his colleague Ken Thomas have developed the most comprehensive approach to the management of Conflict of which I know. It shows in no uncertain terms the Psychological processes that need to be acknowledged and worked through if one is not just to be able to work together productively, but more importantly, to live together harmoniously. It thus adds a further dimension to our deeper understanding of human behavior.

Two dimensions are key to the Kilmann-Thomas framework. They are best understood in terms of a pie. The first deals with how much of a pie a person wants solely for him, herself, or they. The second deals with how much of a pie one is willing to give to another. The first dimension is best captured by the catchphrase “Get,” and the second as “Give.”

Whatever the issue, if one always strives to “get a whole pie solely for oneself,” then one’s Conflict Handling Style is Competing. If on the other hand, “one habitually gives a pie to another,” then one is Accommodating. If both parties strive to avoid a Conflict situation altogether, and hence neither one of them gets any of

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationofchange.org/2021/09/28/can-moderates-and-progressives-find-any-way-to-work-together/>

the pie, then they are Avoiders. If both parties are satisfied with half of the pie, then they are Compromisers. Finally, if both parties are willing to work together as Collaborators, then then in principle they can expand the pie such that they both get a full one.

Notice how each of these play a key role in making important decisions. If one party is clearly an expert in a critical area, then Accommodating to her, him, or they is not only appropriate, but best. By the same token, the party who is an expert in a particular area is justified in asserting their position, and thus in being Competitive. If in comparison to other issues the particular one is not important, then Avoiding is called for. Compromise is appropriate if that's the best one can get, and further, if it preserves "group cohesiveness." And while it often takes the most time and energy to achieve, Collaborating is best of all because it results in a "win-win" for all parties.

Once again, Covid 19 is the premiere case in point. It requires that one defer and thus Accommodate to the expertise of those more knowledgeable and qualified than one is, especially when it comes to Medical matters.

Notice that not only are these descriptions of their key attributes but of the main arguments upon which each of their positions rest. So once again, it boils down to arguments.

Ideally, one would have the ability to enact for all five conflict modes: Competing, Accommodating, Avoiding, Compromising, and Collaborating. Depending on the particular situation, one would then be able to respond appropriately.

If this were the case, then the four Myers-Briggs Personality Types would be able to work together harmoniously. Indeed, it's an essential requirement for their being able to do so.

Importantly, notice how they are affected by the states of mind that we described in Chap. 2. Take Paranoia. In this case, one distrusts all others so that the Conflict Modes collapse into Fight, Flight, or Freeze. Fight if one feels that there is no alternative but to assert one's position. Parenthetically, it does not necessarily mean to Fight physically, but to assert oneself aggressively. Flight if one feels threatened and has to leave a situation at all costs. Freeze if one feels paralyzed and literally unable to move.

In the end, the prime issue is what's more important, winning or preserving group harmony? Compromising is as much about living together amicably than it's about resolving key issues. Indeed, one is not possible without the other.

Just when we need it more than ever, Compromise is more elusive than at any time.

## Reflections

As before, what Conflict Styles best describe you? Which ones are least like you? What are the obstacles to your getting along with those Styles that are least like you? Does the chapter help in this regard?

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

