



Conscious Communication

Anatomy of Conflict

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The following chart represents the anatomy of conflict in slow motion. Actually it happens in a flash.

In any given moment we usually want something. Consciously or unconsciously, we would like things to happen the way we want them to. We have a vision or a perception of how things should happen and if things happen that meet that perspective we are comfortable, but if they don't we are uncomfortable; we are in conflict. (Position #1, on the Anatomy Chart on the next page.)

When we are in conflict, there may be a change in how we perceive the situation at hand. We may feel sad and disappointed. Similar but unresolved experiences from the past may add energy to the situation and our reaction may be stronger.

We may feel anger or fear out of a sense of self-preservation, a very old and primitive reflex- the fight or flight response. When we sense danger, these instincts are triggered to protect us by fighting or running away. Though most conflicts are not life-threatening, we can still find ourselves seized by panic and adrenaline as if there was an attack on our very lives. (Position #2, on the Anatomy Chart on the next page.)

In this state of reaction, we often "scramble" for some sense of understanding or relief from our distress. (Position #3, on the Anatomy Chart on the next page.) To achieve a sense of inner stability or to gain control of the situation, we move to alienated thinking, thinking that is more concerned with evaluating who is right or wrong, rather than what we are wanting or needing. Alienated thinking is more likely to distance us from the other person and from our own self, separating us from our feelings and needs. (Position #4, on the Anatomy Chart on the next page.)

If we were connected to our feelings and wants, we would discover that behind the alienated thinking are new wants. These new wants are concerned with the stress of the situation, and are looking for connection rather than alienation. (Position #5, on Anatomy Chart on the next page.) However, most of us have difficulty making a connection when we are lost in the alienated thoughts, fear and frustration that arise from conflict. Unable to achieve the connection we need, we store our wants away in our unconscious until another issue brings them up again.

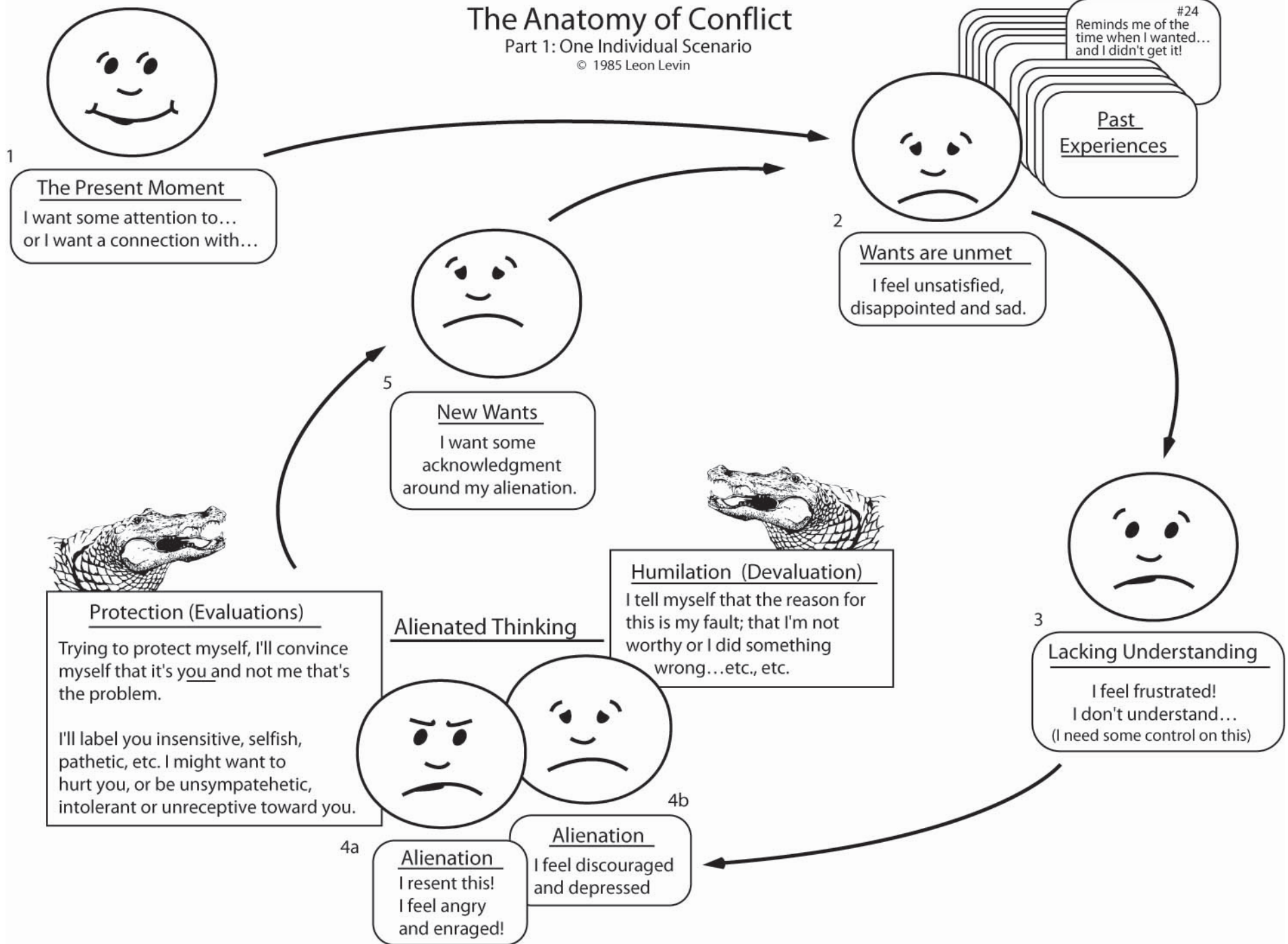
Empathy is a way to make that connection by identifying the wants and needs that are behind other people's reactions. Providing empathy for others with whom we are in conflict sets the stage for us to receive the empathy that we also need.

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The Anatomy of Conflict

Part 1: One Individual Scenario

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Additional Notes

The Anatomy of Conflict is an important concept for me in the understanding of what is happening within each of us when we are “triggered,” having an emotional reaction to some situation, in conflict.

The brain can be divided into three parts: the brain stem or medulla oblongata, mammalian or middle brain, and the neo-cortex, that part which is self reflective.

The brain stem is concerned with basic survival, such as: feeding, reproduction and fight or flight response to danger. This primitive brain has also been referred to as the reptilian brain because it is the complete brain of a reptile.

This brain function is a “short circuit” in the thought process. In other words, when danger appears, we might not have a lot of time to think about whether it’s ok or not ok but need to be in action, running away or fighting to defend ourselves. This brain stops the thought process from going up to the neocortex and just “triggers” into action.

It is this “trigger” reaction that we need to address. In the Anatomy of Conflict I use the alligator to represent that reptilian brain. I’ve

taken a split second of the reaction and spread it out over a chart to show what is happening with our emotions and thought processes. This is the cycle of conflict and it is also the doorway to resolution. I can block connection with this process and I can also create connection through it. If I understand that the response I’m getting or giving is from that reptilian brain I can jump over it and go to feelings and wants, give or get empathy and make the connection within myself and with another.

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