

Families Are Forever!

The Conflict Quandary: Judging, Forgiving and  
Reconciliation

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*In matters of truth and justice, there is no difference between large and small problems, for issues concerning the treatment of people are all the same.*

*Dr. Albert Einstein*

*One may value forgiveness but be so angry that one continues to hate for many moons.*

*A life's journey that is primarily based on emotions will be full of ups and down. If you want to live a more level life, chose another vehicle in which to travel.*

**Dr. Dennis Cogswell**

**Sleep Thinking**

John Bearister went to sleep thinking and he woke up thinking. He liked to think during sleep because it was a time of great creativity, a time to originate ideas and plans. For example, one night, he slept-thought up the idea of building a two story greenhouse-storage shed-playhouse for himself and his grandchildren which saved him the money, time and space of building two separate buildings. <sup>1</sup> Tonight he slept-thought about conflict in families and at work, as he had extended family relationships in both places. He had read two books (Lencioni, 2002) (Gulley,

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<sup>1</sup> His plan that he carried out was to have it be A-frame in shape with the playhouse upstairs and his storage area/greenhouse downstairs. The kids like being up high, he could easily take things in and out of the double downstairs doors, the roof slanted in upstairs but that was ok with the kids as that gave them a feeling of closeness and he had the whole building facing south so that the south facing roof was all Plexiglas. Because half of the building was for the kids, they took ownership of it from the start and helped him greatly in building it. That alone was sop great as he got an extra pair of hands when he needed it and got to do something with his kids, for his kids and then for himself.

2010), one business team building conflict management and one on conflict in church and religious life. He thought the comparison between the two was allowable. He had never really studied psychology but he thought that field would have something to say here as well, along with social work, and medicine, as they all dealt with people. He liked the six levels of relationships he read about in the previous chapter that had already helped him know when to increase his past-timing to build relationships with the new people at work and when to decrease it in order to bring in a work project on time. He had even heard that higher order mathematics and quantum physics were about relationships but he wouldn't be reading much in those areas.

### **Family Conflict: Misunderstood Thus Mismanaged**

The process of sleep-thinking focus for John Bearister on his families' conflict was between generations and genders on how to manage the time that they spent together on holidays. In his sleep-thinking he mostly replayed the arguing, leaving and separateness that was happening as his extended family struggled to find a plan to get together over Thanksgiving, followed quickly by Christmas and then the New Year's. He decided that during lunch today he would read in a religious book about conflict and the cycle of resolving it through a judgment-forgiveness and reconciliation cycle.

Conflict is everywhere in today's world between individuals, couples, groups, institutions such as the courts and churches, and countries as is the longstanding situation between Israel and the Palestinians. The same is true in business cultures where people fight for sales turf, market share, union and management are enemies and only a few manage to both cooperate while still being competitors. There are as many ways to look at this as there are ways to judge which apple pie is the best when the four new cooks in the family all bring their best to T-day meals.

The Forever Family, especially Dr. D. and Nana, have talked about this often between themselves. Kelly knows firsthand about conflict as her marriage only lasted two years, plus she now does family and business conflict resolution based on what she learned in graduate school. All three think that a religious model and a business model work very well in providing a way to deal with conflict in families. Thus we have developed a Forever Family recipe for our readers. This recipe recognizes that not all people are actively religious nor do all people work for a living. Even so the religious and business ideas they are sharing are so common that most family members will understand and relate to them.

### **Initial Influences Are So Important to the Next Steps**

Kelly, Nana, and Dr. D. know that the way they think about anything influences where they will end up. Most people realize that the first move in chess, the first card led in the card game of bridge, the first thing said to a prospective client or having a good lead-off hitter in baseball is so important. Kelly learned in a graduate philosophy class about “absolute thinking”<sup>2</sup> or “dualistic thinking” where there are few explanation or options, and then about the Chinese Ying-Yang Continuum, which we have called “Salt-Or-Pepper”. We are championing a version of that “Salt-to-Pepper” approach to thinking about anything which we are going to call “HobsToBear” thinking as that is a new word phase that has no baggage for any of us.<sup>3</sup>

### **Switching America’s Thinking Process from “Salt-Or-Pepper” to “Hobbs-To-Bear”**

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<sup>2</sup> A tip-off to the process of absolute thinking or dualistic thinking that prevails in America today is if the little word “Or” is in between the two poles or positions i.e “Good Or Bad; Winners Or Losers, You are either with me OR against me. The much more logical continuum based thinking used in this book substitutes the little word “To” and that little word opens up a much bigger world for all to consider.

<sup>3</sup> The reason that is the case is because even “Salt-To-Pepper” has feelings and preferences already connected to it. For example, many people can’t use salt or don’t like pepper. However, “the phrase “Hobs-To-Bear” is a new term, unknown to all until now except its two authors. Thus we can begin to assign and generate by use a meaning of looking at anything from a varied, broad perspective as that is what happens the majority of time in human life.

The terms of “absolute and/or dualistic thinking” are very complex and yet it is the process that influences so much that has to do with families in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This way of thinking not only influences family interaction but policy formation and thinking everywhere.

Some examples may help this polar thinking so it can be stopped and discarded at the very earliest time. Moving to “Hobs-To-Bear” Continuum thinking offers many options, especially family conflict resolution. One example comes from an argument Dr. D. had with a fellow council member after a church council meeting one evening. The argument started as they were talking about the characteristics needed in a new director of the churches’ Day Care Center that was beyond educational background, experience in administration with a non-profit and supervisory experience.

#### **Absolutely Absoluteness Interferes With Unity**

**Dr. D.** “ Steve, what would it be good for us to look for in our new director of day care?”

**Steve:** “I want someone who takes a strong stance on corporal punishment and will not allow it to happen at all in our center. I want this man or woman to go beyond what our Colorado law requires regarding spanking to the point that we practice what we preach. There will be no physical punishment, in fact no punishment of any kind in our child care center. Our approach will be one of loving care and seeking out behaviors we want in our kids. We won’t even talk about discipline as we won’t need it. If a child does a wrong thing, s(he) will be hugged, lightly of course, and told what to do, not what not to do. The only physical contact allowed between staff and children will be light touching and an

arm around a child for a couple of seconds. We don't want any parents to think we are abusing a child in any way. ”

**Dr. D.** “Wow, that covers a lot of ground. It sounds good in listening to you but when I think a bit about it, some real questions come up.”

**Steve:** “Ask away. I have thought this through and have answers for anything asked.”

**Dr. D.** “There will be no discipline of any kind? And almost no touching at all?”

**Steve:** “Absolutely not any of either.”

**Dr. D.** “What if a staff member grabs the arm of a four year old child to stop from walking out in front of a car or to stop them from touching a hot stove in the center?”

**Steve:** ‘ Absolutely “No” to both. “Don't ever do either! Both are preventable incidents and I will expect if the new center director sees either behaviors from a staff person, s(he) will be warned and on a second occurrence then then they will be fired on the spot.”

**Dr. D.** “Your absoluteness give me pause and I am sure it will be a hindrance to our staff. We want loving staff who use discipline correctly and whose first job it is to protect our little day care persons. What you say is too extreme for me. What if when I am at the center picking up my grandchild to take her home and I want to hug one of our neighbor kids who comes to the center as I do at home or grab him by the hand to control them?

**Steve:** “If I see that, I know I can't fire you but will take you to court for child abuse!”

**Dr. D.** “This conversation ended up in court awful quickly. I will think deeply for a response. If this comes up in our council meeting, I will challenge your absoluteness as you are wrong. I can’t fire you either but will seek to get you voted off our council!”

**Absoluteness Breeds More of the Same,  
Unless a Switch to Continuum Approach is Made**

This is an example, not unusual today, where there is only “good or bad”, “yes or no” in any situation. Most life issues are not as clearly defined as Steve thought they were. There are clearly different types and degrees of physical contact/touching and that not all touching is bad. The absoluteness of Steve had such a strong emotional component that even Dr. D. became an “absolutist” as he ended up immediately wanting to get Steve off of the council. In the argument between Dr. D. and Steve, there is much room to come up with a policy that all can agree to, that takes care of the child as long as all are willing to move away from any one pole of an argument. The same thing can be said for our American debates on abortion, gun control, tax (revenue) increase or decrease, yes or no on services cuts, and many more public policy debates.

Helping the person with an absolutist position to understand that there is an alternative way to think on anything, let alone the topic at hand, is a difficult one that must be faced by all Americans eventually. Start by sharing with all involved Einstein’s famous quote of “one can not solve an issue at the thinking level at which it became an issue. Add a negotiation of switching from little words “To” too little word “Or”, beginning to use the “Hobs-To-Bear” Continuum recipe that has one neither shaking or mixing, but doing both when needed. Thirdly, use a process where all parties examine the pro’s or positives of anything and then the negatives, and then using brain storming, synergistics, and creative hurdle moving logic or thinking to come up with solutions. If these do not work, one is left with a very serious issue of

a major value or attitude conflict which can generally only be resolved by repeated exposure to others of a different value, belief and/or behaviors.

The business recipe makes much clearer statements than the religious recipe that conflict isn't inherently bad. Actually for both recipes, some conflict is quite desirable. (Lencioni, 2002, pp. 202-203) shares this about conflict on a business team:

All great relationships, the ones that last over time, require productive conflict in order to grow. This is true in marriage, parenthood, friendship and certainly business.

Unfortunately, conflict is considered taboo in many situations, especially at work. And the higher you go up in the management chair, the more you find people spending inordinate amounts of time and energy trying to avoid the kind of passionate debates that are essential to any great team.

It is important to distinguish productive ideological conflict from destructive fighting and interpersonal politics. Ideological conflict is limited to concepts and ideas and avoids personality-focused, mean-spirited attacks. However, it can have many of the same external qualities of interpersonal conflict-passion, emotion, and frustration- so much so that an outside observer might easily mistake it for unproductive discord

But teams that engage in productive conflict know that the only purpose is to produce the best possible solution in the shortest period of time. They discuss and resolve issues more quickly and completely than others, and they emerge from heated debates with no residual feelings or collateral damage, but with an eagerness and readiness to take on the next important issue.

Ironically, teams that avoid ideological conflict often do so in order to avoid hurting team members feeling, and then end up encouraging dangerous tension. When team members do not openly debate and disagree about important ideas, they often turn to back-channel personal attacks, which are far nastier and more harmful than any heated argument over issues.

It is also ironic that so many people avoid conflict in the name of efficiency, because healthy conflict is actually a time saver. Contrary to the notion that teams waste time and energy arguing; those that avoid conflict actually doom themselves to revisiting issues again and again without resolution. They often ask team members to take their issues 'off-line which seems to be an euphemism for avoiding dealing with an important topic, only to have it raised again at the next meeting.

The belief that all competition has to be negative and conflicted has been ruled out by many business leaders. They now know that having many businesses in the same area draws more people to that area. This is evidenced by the success of malls and shopping centers. The restaurant business is very competitive yet restaurants find that when they stand alone in a neighborhood, they tend to only attract people from that neighborhood. When there is more than one of the same type of restaurant, additional people are drawn to the area. Some businesses plan their operations on this factor. Burger King has a small national planning and development staff as they rely on McDonalds to do the majority of marketing research on a geographical; if McDonalds builds in an area, most of the time Burger King soon follows. The same is true with Walgreens and CVS, two mega drugstore chains; they almost always end up in the same area although who goes in first is not as clear as it is with McDonalds and Burger King.

People wonder how lawyers have heated arguments in court and then go out to eat together afterwards. Lawyers are taught in law school how to argue and how to use themselves to work for the best interest of their clients. What they do in court is a part of the process of justice, not a personal attack on them. Professional writers submit samples of their chapters of forthcoming books for review and comment, and the good writers accept the good and negative feedback together as long as the process has the critique's positive comments coming first, followed by the concerns<sup>4</sup>. The most competitive rivalries in the National Football League, such as the Pittsburgh Steelers-Baltimore Ravens rivalry usually ends up each year with the opposing

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<sup>4</sup> Think about your own reactions to feedback. Are you more likely to change when you feel attacked, or when you feel neutral or generally good about your product and yet want to improve? Real change agents always want to go from change from a strength's position or perspective.



players admiring the other team's member's skills, physical prowess and determination that they had just experienced used against them in a playoff game.<sup>5</sup>

### **A Judgment-Forgiving-Restitution Recipe from Christianity Adapted for Use in Families.**

A study of mainline religions reveals differences but many more similarities. We will offer the Forever Family Conflict Resolution Recipe based on commonness. We start with the belief that good and bad both exist but on a continuum that varies from situation to situation. The prime judge of these differences has always been a supreme being, usually known as "God" or Messiah or Allah. As America still is primarily a Judo-Christian based country, those two religious views and history will be used to explain the cycle. In the Old Testament one finds both a vengeance-seeking God and a forgiving one. Thus when God was angry, his followers had to seek his other side or use the process of appeasement or placating<sup>6</sup> Philip Gulley, in "If the Church Were Christian: Recovering the Values of Jesus (Gulley, 2010, pp. 51-52) offers this brief history and interpretation on how religious beliefs guide most human's beliefs on forgiveness, step three of the cycle.

The church of my youth.....communicated in varied ways that God was angry and compulsive, as likely to curse as to bless. This theological tendency wasn't limited to my church. Indeed, God's judgment was (and remains) a dominant theme in much of Christianity, whose preaching and teaching were designed to assuage God's wrath and secure God's favor. Of course, when the goal of religion is appeasement, fear escalates, judgment increases, reason and mercy fall by the way, and all manner of absurd "solutions" arise to placate God. In traditional Christian theology, the solution to God's theoretical wrath was to satisfy it with the gruesome, cruel death of Jesus, which

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<sup>5</sup> When the ancient Olympics were first started, no team scores were kept as the emphasis was on bringing the best athletics from each country in each sport to a place where they could enjoy the process of completion, not the winning or losing. Who, what and when changed that is unknown, but the present day system of country score keeping really hurts and limits all.

<sup>6</sup> Placating or enabling are common terms used in family counseling sessions today to discuss well-meaning interactions and processes that make family conflict worse.

somehow mollified God, allowing God to forgive and bless us. Consequently, another feature of my early religious training was the reminder to continually praise Jesus for interceding with God on my behalf.

.....I can't help but think our misunderstanding of divine mercy has distorted our understanding of human forgiveness. In my years as pastor, I've met with many persons for spiritual direction. Time and time again the issues that bring them to my door have to do with forgiveness and reconciliation-husbands and wives estranged from each other, parents and children no longer speaking or sharing meals, families torn asunder by long-ago slights-the gall and bitterness still fresh, neighbors at odds, friendships risen by misunderstanding and churches split by theological dissension.

Our choosing the New Testament version of this judging and forgiving cycle which we follow, not because it is newer, but because it actually works better and much faster, comes from the clear commandments of Jesus: (1). Do not Judge. (2) Forgive. We of the Family Forever know that it is very difficult not to judge but that it can be done, even more so in serious situations as the stakes there are higher and the rewards are clearer and better if we don't judge. Judgment is something we offer about the behavior, values or feelings of another human or on the same variables for ourselves. It is not a logical process but one that involves our internalized values. It is done by all humans, regrettably in many cases. Judging is not the same as evaluating something which is a logical process that involves more factual standards and information<sup>7</sup>.

However if we do judge then we can remove the effect of our judgment by forgiving. When we forgive, we are released from the curse we thought we were putting on another for their behavior that we judged to be bad, AND from our act of judging. When we judge another's behavior to be bad, we are really judging ourselves and speaking from our internalized standards, often supported by external standards. We are judging ourselves!!! What a horrible thing to do to us.

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<sup>7</sup> Those who really think deeply about the difference between judging and evaluating usually conclude that everything is a judgment. A similar philosophical conclusion is related to thinking deeply about being objective or subjective. The same conclusion results. Everything is subjective ultimately. I thus coined the 'Turism' "In the world of humanness, values trump logic, always, but feelings often trump values." Our values are awful important parts of our lives.

When we forgive, we seem to be forgiving others but are also forgiving ourselves for judging as well as forgiving the other person who has been involved with us in the transgression. The confusion here that is happening as most read this is the same confusion that came up in Book One when we revealed that feelings are caused within ourselves, not by others. We cause our own feeling, influenced by others!

In the same way, a judgment was made about another. To make that judgment, we had to judge. Both are to be forgiven and ended, our judgment, and our judging. OUR JUDGING. Not just our judgment.

Thank God for both. Thank God for the power we have to control our own feelings and Thank God for the power we have to control our own judging and to forgive ourselves so we can forgive others.

### **The Reconciliation Phase**

The reconciliation phase is very important as it is what we can control the most and can enjoy the most. This final phase can only occur in present time or “Now” or can be planned for in the future which we also we can control. When we have difficulty with this phase, it is because some part of us is still in the previous two phases, still judging or haven’t completed our forgiveness. To move on to reconciliation, go back and do “Track down” and decide what are the hurdles to moving on and then find a way to remove the hurdles. Always remember that we humans will always face hurdles and will always be jumping over them. Doing so, clearing a hurdle is in itself a joyous process and time.

Many people think that it takes time, often a lot of it, to move anywhere in the cycle. It is true that for many of us, sometime will appear to be needed but in actuality, stopping

judgment/judging, and forgiveness comes very quickly. From a religious base, many believe that God has already forgiven our sins (or transgressions, known today as mistakes) before they occur. A lot of time for any forgiveness is thus a human myth. Einstein, the scientist with a strong religious sense, clearly stated and proved “time is relative”<sup>8</sup>

For many, the process of reconciliation is a new one. That may be if one has an overriding “glass is half-full” philosophy and wants to avoid conflict. Reconciliation brings one in touch or conflict with those with whom you want to spend time and have a relationship. Relationship building is a planning process that can be great fun in itself and for some, more fun than actually doing what is planned. I have great fun planning a trip, anticipating what is to come that will be so much fun. I can have the fun by doing as well but there I have to also actually face the hurdles. I have decided to enjoy both planning and doing; in this case the planning of reconciliation and doing it can be very pleasurable with an attitude adjustment. Our values and feelings are always with us; we can control the volume of both. . Often even though we make the logical decision to be reconciliatory, some negative feelings and values are still hanging around and will get noticed. Then we wait to change our behavior until those feelings or values change but the opposite is needed. Feelings and values only change as a result of either a thought change or a behavior change, often both. If one waits for feelings or values to change before we change our own behavior, we will be waiting a long time and worse, we are giving up the control we have over our lives, something no one wants to do. Bottom line; see those hang-on values and feelings as hurdles and behave in some way i.e. jump higher until you get over them. Young

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<sup>8</sup> See the chapter to come entitled “Tick Tock” The Clock Rules” for more detail on time and Einstein’s proofs.

kids enjoy jumping; rejoin them and do just that. Learn from those who are not yet contaminated by myths and half-truths. Reconcile!<sup>9</sup>

The process of reconciling is a planning and then doing process. It involves making contact with those people you want to re-establish a positive relationship with and to negotiate the amount of time you will spend with them “Now” and in the future to meet your human needs and desires. Then the ‘doing’ part comes. To do anything, muscles somewhere, often many places, have to be moved. It is important in doing that reports be given to ourselves and the others on how “doing is going”. Not only do we want to discuss going over the hurdles we will face from ourselves and others in doing, but we want to process “doing” to both get double enjoyment and to reinforce the process.<sup>10</sup>

Dr. D., Nana and Kelly will now demonstrate the processes of reconciliation that we have offered here. The next chapter, our extensive Family Fable, will use a detailed case presentation on how a family would not give up judging, thus they didn’t forgive and what negatively happened for that family. They remained stuck in this cycle until an angel named Sarah was called upon to intervene and she did, to the relief and joy of all.

### **Dr. D’s Judgment, Nana’s Forgiveness and Kelly’s Plan of Reconciliation**

**Note: this is a scripted, agreed to argument for demonstration purposes and does not really represent the attitudes, beliefs and styles of each.**

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<sup>9</sup> A great true story I read was where in this small mid-western town there was a group of Alcohol Anomalous formed to deal with so many town citizens having major drinking problems. They were so successful that soon all in this small town no longer drank nor gave any sign of moving backward. This caused a problem in that there was no longer a need for the wonderful group that had solved the town’s problem. This was to be a real loss until some of the town’s real leaders volunteered to go back to their drinking, at least a bit, so there was thus still a need for the Alcohol Anomalous group that all valued so much.

<sup>10</sup> Educators know that people learn best when they hear verbally about that which is to be learned, see a visual representation on that information, carryout some steps towards learning (move muscles) and finally process the experience. This is a research based process for all over 18 years of age and perhaps for those under 18.

**Dr. D. (judging and feeling bad)** “I am sick and tired of all this waiting that you two are having me do on where we will spend our holidays. I know that you are doing it to get me back for something. That would be just like you! Why would you do this to me? I am a busy person, I want to spend time together over the holidays, but I have many other demands to meet. Start paying attention to me, not just to what you want!”

**Nana: (listening and forgiving)** “You certainly shared your feelings there which is ok. However, some of your judgments are limited because of the information that you have. You are unaware that I too have a book publisher after me to finish my assignments and that yesterday she changed her demands considerably. That has left me with a lot less time today and fewer choices. I think I can figure some plans out to share with you by this evening, if you will listen to me now and wait until this evening?”

**Dr. D.:** “That sounds good on paper but how do I know that will actually happen?”

**Kelly** (suggesting movement by both, a reconciling step). “Regardless to how you both are feeling and what you think is necessary, I want you to join me in the coffee shop in the Baker’s Dozen Deli at 7:00pm where the three of us will again compare needs, other’s demands and talk about what is or is not accomplished by that meeting. I don’t want to hear any feelings right now, just tell me whether or not you will take this step forward? We will process feelings later. Ok?”

**Nana:** “That will work for me if we can start at 7:30pm so I can get Vincent and Lucy off to choir practice? Would that work for you two?”

**Dr. D.** “Actually 7:30pm is also better for me. It doesn’t feel right waiting all day but I will follow your lead.....see you two at 7:30pm.”

**Kelly:** “Great. I love to negotiate. See you both then.”

**Dr. D.** “We have looked at what conflict can do to families when not handled as a hurdle to overcome and as something that could be beneficial. There is great religious, work experience and historical precedents to follow if we will do so. We have updated them and offered them to you in a Forever Family recipe. Test it out and learn from this part of your life journey. I think this is a way to move forward with family relationships, but then it may be just the opposite. Until the next time, Goodbye.”

**“Kelly:** “Keep relating. It is much better than not doing so. Goodbye until our next contact.”

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