



UB Department Chair Leadership Program

Workshop Series

Effective Communication and Managing Conflict

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Agenda

- Experiences with conflict
- Case
- Effective communication approaches to address conflict
- Framework for resolving conflict (and a resource)



Common Issues and Complaints That Chairs Encounter

- Complaints about academic issues (example: grades/financial aid).
- Student and parent complaints (example: courses and advisors).
- Staff complaints about faculty treatment.
- Diminished faculty morale.
- Issues related to tenure, promotion, renewals, and salary.
- Conflicts between faculty, students, staff, and administrators.



Not All Situations Require Conflict Resolution

- Some complaints can be easily addressed through proper channels and with the application of policies, guidelines, or practice (grade complains, advisor complaints, staff complaints, etc.). Technical problems vs. Adaptive Problems. Policy is your friend!
- But not addressing conflict (when it is present) will only make the situation worse.
- Often times, a chair is surprised by a new conflict that he/she “didn’t see coming.”
- Other times the chair is aware that a conflict has been building for weeks, months, even years and has been left unaddressed.



Address Conflict

For The Good of The Department

- Conflict is inevitable in higher education administration because leadership is often about change. “Dispositional outliers”
- Regardless of whether the conflicts are new or old, as the department chair it is your job to do your best to address them for the good of the department.
- Gambling that the conflicts “work themselves out” is a losing bet.
- Left unresolved, conflicts can damage the department in many ways and make your job more difficult. “Frictional loss”.
- Unresolved conflicts will often extend past the departmental barriers to the Dean’s, Provost’s, and President’s Offices.
- Some conflict has positive aspects if it can lead to learning and growth for the department. No conflict may equal stagnation.



Questions

- 1. What are of the types of conflicts have you encountered?**
- 2. What forms of communication were most effective in resolving those conflicts?**
- 3. What forms of communication were least effective in resolving those conflicts?**



Why Communication Strategies for Conflict Resolution?

Because your communication affects the conflict:

- Communication behavior can create or increase conflict.
- Communication behavior can mirror the conflict that already exists.
- Communication can help you manage conflict productively.



Case Study

Review the case and discuss at your table:

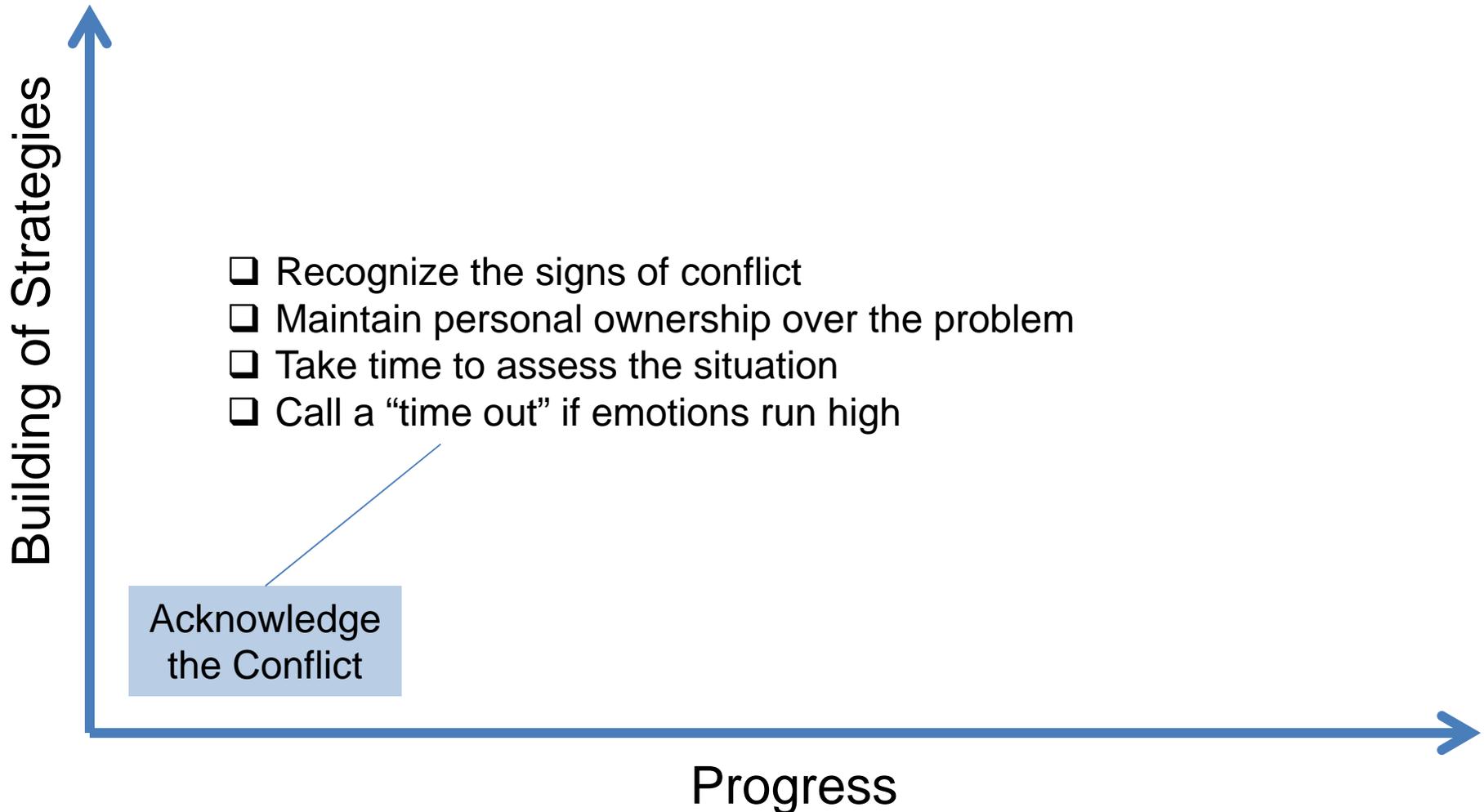
- What is the best approach to take to addressing the conflict in the department?
- What communication strategies or tactics might you need to use?



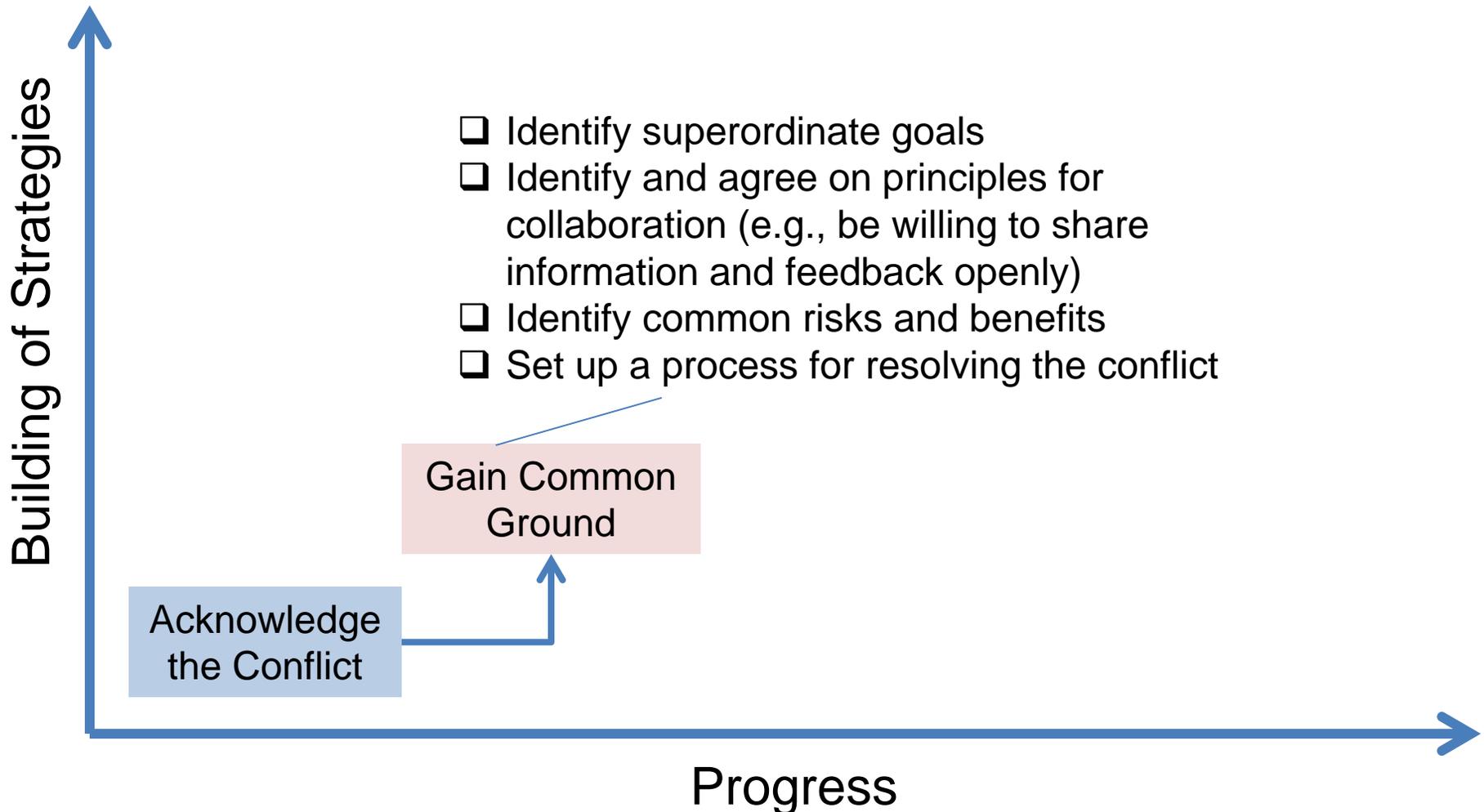
Strategies for Resolving Conflict Constructively

1. Acknowledge the conflict
2. Gain common ground
3. Seek to understand
4. Attack the issue, not the other
5. Develop a plan of action

Strategies for Resolving Conflict Constructively

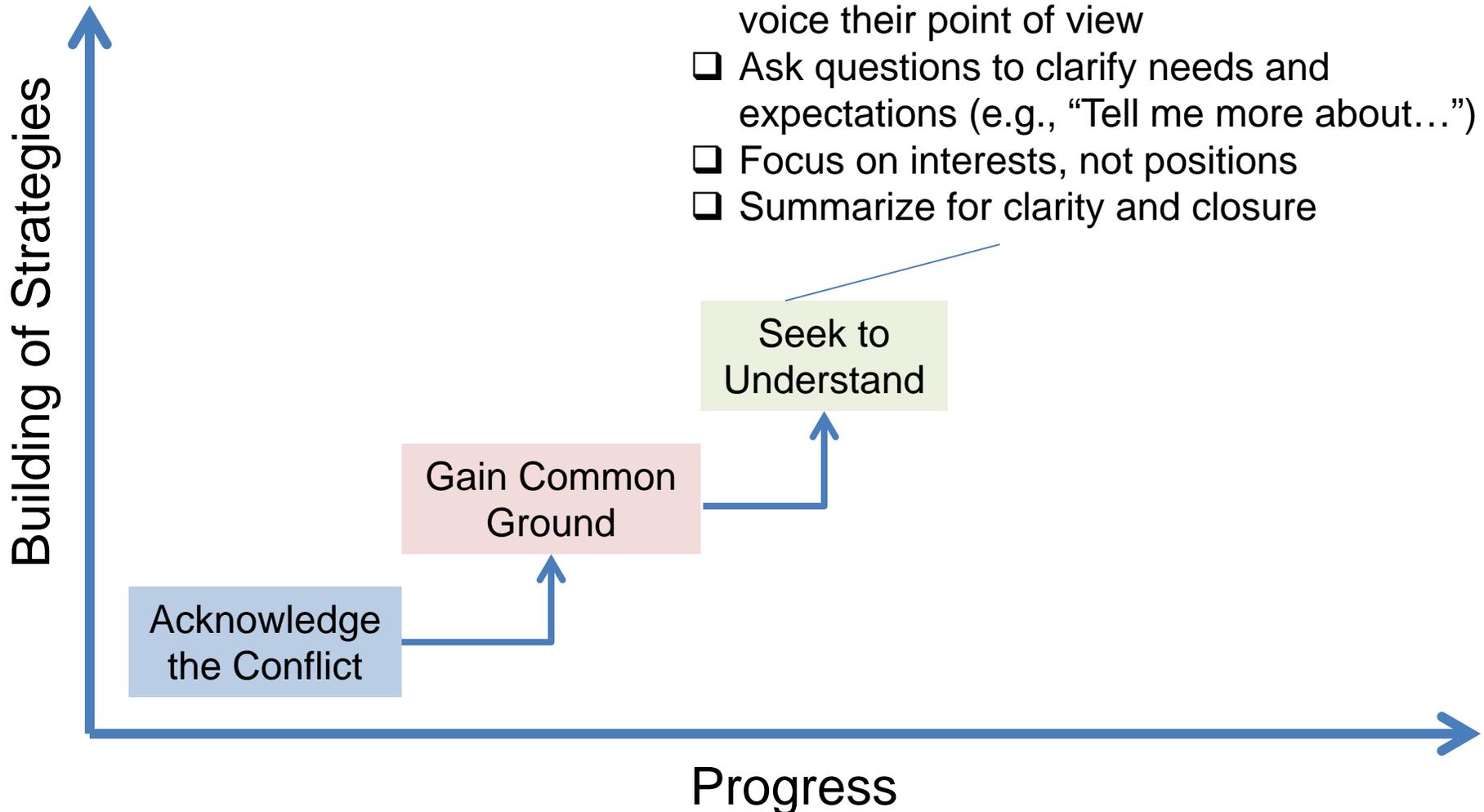


Strategies for Resolving Conflict Constructively



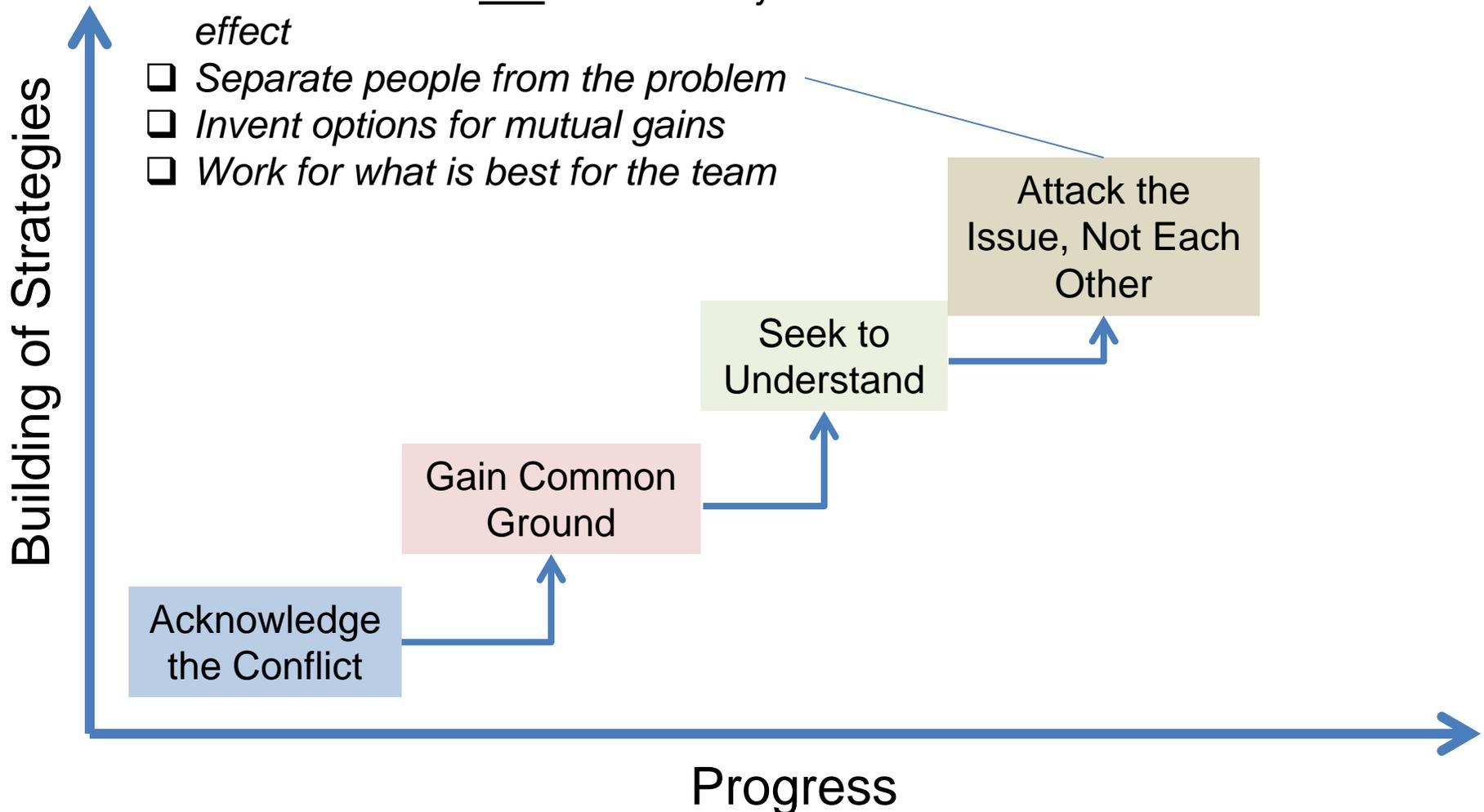
Strategies for Resolving Conflict Constructively

- Provide everyone with the opportunity to voice their point of view
- Ask questions to clarify needs and expectations (e.g., “Tell me more about...”)
- Focus on interests, not positions
- Summarize for clarity and closure



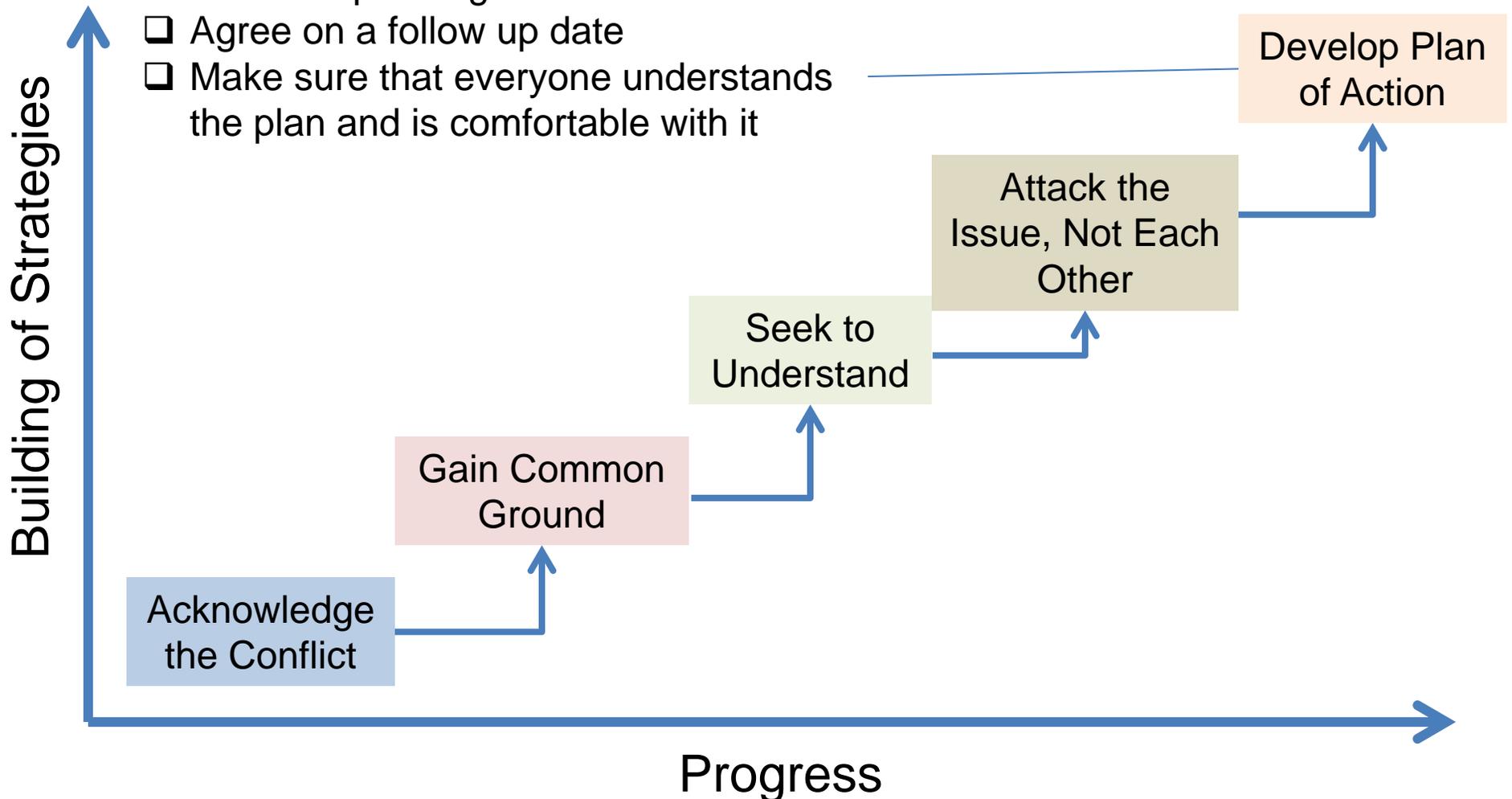
Strategies for Resolving Conflict Constructively

- Focus on cause and effect – not just the effect*
- Separate people from the problem*
- Invent options for mutual gains*
- Work for what is best for the team*



Strategies for Resolving Conflict Constructively

- Write the plan together
- Agree on a follow up date
- Make sure that everyone understands the plan and is comfortable with it





Five Communication Strategies

- Active listening
- Summarizing
- Problem solving communication
- One-on-one session management
- Facilitation

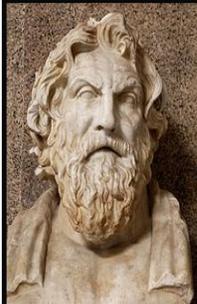


1: ACTIVE LISTENING

- *When you actively listen, you are:*
 - a) Paying attention (not just sitting quietly).
 - b) Appropriately asking encouraging questions.
 - c) Briefly repeating important points back.
 - d) Being patient (not rushing or jumping to the end).
 - e) Working hard to hear them from their perspective.
 - f) Taking notes (appropriately).

a) Paying attention

- Not just sitting quietly
- Nodding appropriately
- Maintaining eye contact
- Interrupting when appropriate



Pay attention to your enemies, for they are the first to discover your mistakes.

(Antisthenes)

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b) Asking questions



- Appropriately asking encouraging questions:
- “How did you interpret that remark/ action/behavior?”
- “How did that remark/action/behavior make you feel?”
- “Have you had similar experiences in the past with this person/group?”
- “What has worked/not worked for you in the past in similar situations?”
- “Why do you think he/she said/did that?”
- “How would you have handled that if you were him/her?”

c) Repeat important points back



repeat
after
me...

- Briefly repeat important points back:
 - *“So his visit to your office last week was when you first became aware of his interest in teaching the research methods course.”*
 - *“You attempted to contact her in person on three different occasions before sending her the email.”*
 - *“You feel that the student’s excuse was forged from an old excuse from the same doctor.”*
 - *“You believe that she is rude because she will not look at you.”*

d) Be patient

Latin *patientem* "bearing, supporting, suffering, enduring, permitting"



- Do not rush them. Often just the act of being able to tell you about their issue will make the situation better from their perspective.
- Do not ask them to “jump to the end,” you may lose important context.
- Do not worry if you run out of time, just say, “we are out of time but I want to hear more, can you come back later/tomorrow/next week?”

e) Hear their perspective



- Work hard to hear them from their perspective:
- You do not have to agree to be empathetic/supportive.
- Set aside your preconceived ideas and embrace their view while you listen.
- Understanding their view may give you the insight you need to address their needs from your position.
- Avoid personalizing criticism!!!!



2: SUMMARIZING

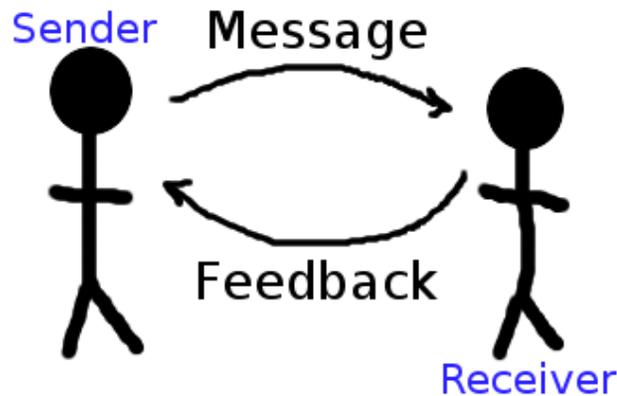
- Summarize to show that you have heard and understand:
 - By correctly summarizing what you have heard, you reinforce the fact that you are listening.
 - It helps to show that you understand their perspective.
 - Allows you to represent their points in a unbiased way, even if you do not agree.
 - Allows you to clarify what you can and cannot do.



3: PROBLEM SOLVING COMMUNICATION

- Put aside all urges to assign blame or point out where they made mistakes.
- Focus on how can you get the parties to an agreed upon resolution or a positive change (in behavior, practices, etc.)?
- How can you get the parties to focus on how things can be better in the future so that they can move forward?

3: Problem Solving Communication



- The way you communicate can help:
 - *“Your perspective on the proposed curriculum change is old-fashioned and you are clinging to it out of stubbornness.”* (Focuses on blame.)
 - *“I can see your points, but can you imagine other options that might work?”* (Engages them in a possible solution.)

3: Problem Solving Communication

- *“Your course is not required so you can not have the new lab at that time!”* (Leaves them with no options to help.)
- *“Is there another time or lab on campus that will meet your needs?”* (Engages them in a possible solution.)





4: 1-on-1 SESSION MANAGEMENT

- Effective conflict resolution requires you to interact with the various participants in one-on-one sessions in order to get each person's story and perspective.
- This time is very important because it allows you to better understand the conflict from multiple perspectives.



4: 1-on-1 Session Management



- You must remain calm and encouraging even when the communication becomes very negative.
- You must be able to be assertive enough to keep the discussions on track without damaging the rapport.
- Feel free to take a break, if the conversation is getting too heated.

4: 1-on-1 Session Management



- Ending the session without “completing” the session is acceptable. Just schedule another session.
- Summarize important points and assign a task for further follow up. (*“Dan, I have a better sense of your concerns. Please send me a list of your top three with proposed resolutions. Once I receive that, we can schedule a follow up.”*)



5: FACILITATION

- Some conflicts must be managed with both parties in the room.
- After you have the trust of both parties, you must bring them together so that you can facilitate a discussion of the conflict.
- Your job is to keep the conversation positive (or at least neutral) and focused on resolution.
- Using the previous communication strategies within a facilitated meeting can be very helpful.

5: Facilitation



- **Do not be afraid to continue difficult discussions.**
- End on a high note. If you have a good stopping place, do so with a comment such as *“we have learned a lot today and this is a good place to pause our conversation.”*
- Out of time? Schedule another meeting.
- Summarize important points and assign a tasks to all participants as follow up. *“I feel like this has been very productive. As a next step, I need each of you to email me three resolutions that you see as acceptable.”*