

Know Thyself  
By: R. Lynette Mancuso

Socrates is considered the first moral philosopher and one of the founders of Western philosophy. Rather than following the theological doctrine of his time, Socrates sought to establish an ethical system based on human reason. He believed the greatest leaders are the ones who possess knowledge, virtue and a complete understanding of themselves.

Socrates believed an individual's choice is motivated by the desire for happiness, and the right choices to achieve happiness can only be made when one truly knows themselves.

We collaborative professionals benefit from knowing as much as possible about ourselves, and those with whom we collaborate. One important area of inquiry for a collaborative professional is knowing how you manage conflict.

In *Elemental Truths*, Reginald Adkins, Ph.D., suggests there are five different conflict management styles: (1) accommodating (2) avoiding (3) collaborating (4) competing and (5) compromising or harmonizing. Dr. Adkins notes: "None of these styles is superior in and of itself. How effective they are depends on the context in which they are used."

Here's a brief description of each style:

(1) Accommodating: Accommodators typically value relationships over their own goals. They generally want to be liked by others and prefer to avoid conflict because they believe addressing it will damage relationships. They try to smooth over conflict to prevent damage to the relationship. This person will ignore their own goals and give in to maintain relationships.

(2) Avoiding: This is the non-confrontational approach, where the person tends to avoid or withdraw from conflict. Avoiders tend to value avoiding confrontation even more than their goals or relationships. They often find it easier to withdraw from conflict than to face it, and may even give up goals or relationships associated with the conflict.

(3) Collaborating: Collaborators highly value their goals and their relationships. They view conflict as a problem to be solved and seek a solution that achieves both their goals and the goals of the other person. They see conflicts as a means to improve relationships by reducing tension between two people. They try to begin a discussion by identifying the conflict and committing to resolve tensions and maintain the relationship by seeking solutions that satisfy both themselves and the other. Problems are solved in ways in which an optimum result is provided for all; both "sides" get what they want; negative feelings are minimized.

(4) Competing: This is the authoritarian approach, where the person may try to win the conflict at the other's expense. Competitors may use "hard" influence tactics, particularly assertiveness, to get one's own way. Competitors typically value their goals over relationships, meaning that if forced to choose they would seek to achieve their goals, even at the cost of the relationship involved. They are typically more concerned with accomplishing their goals than being liked by others. They might try to force opponents to accept their solution by overpowering them.

(5) Compromising: This is known as the middle ground approach. The concern is for goals and relationships. If you are a compromiser, you may be willing to sacrifice some of your goals while persuading others to give up part of theirs. They typically seek a conflict solution in which both sides gain something. They are willing to sacrifice part of their goals in order to find agreement for the common good. This compromiser is the consummate “team player”.

Dr. Adkins developed a Conflict Management Styles Quiz that can be accessed online. The quiz is often used by Fortune 500 companies and has been found to be quite reliable. With only 15 questions and a few minutes of self-scoring, you can quickly identify your conflict management style. I encourage you to take the quiz and consider having other members of your collaborative team do the same at the beginning of the collaborative process. After all, knowledge is power.

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