

# THE CONFLICT EXTINGUISHER

Fixing Interpersonal Conflict at Work

**911 for Hot  
Solutions for  
Workplace  
Discord**

**Volume 4, Issue 2**



**Chris Sheesley, MA  
The Conflict Resolver**

## Why Active Listening Stinks

"What I hear you saying is ... stop parroting what I'm saying!"

Anyone motivated to read this article already knows active listening skills through exposure to them in training and books. Yet, if you're like most people, you find it strangely distasteful to be either the giver or receiver of active listening techniques. Nine out of 12 times it registers as insincere, patronizing or like the person using it is an insufferable undergraduate at Active Listening University.

What's worse is the preceding clumsiness only emerges if you can remember your lessons from Active Listening 101. When the conversation becomes fiery, your brain tends to bypasses the synapses capable of constructing flawless "I statements" and arrives instead at an ancient, reptilian place where self-preservation and blamelessness reign. No wonder active listening smells funny.

So, what's a well-meaning communicator like you supposed to do when you find yourself in the fray? As a conflict facilitator who's witnessed thousands of tense, face-to-face conflict conversations, my advice revolves around one insight: Just be curious. At some point in the conversation—preferably earlier than later—ask yourself why your opponent sees the situation as he or she does.

What does this disagreement look like from his or her foothold in the universe? To clarify, I'm not talking about the "Why the heck does she think that?!" brand of curiosity, but the "Wouldn't it be fascinating to know why she sees it so differently" type. Happily, this mindset is both plausible and actionable because you're actually already curious; you're just clever at masking it.

Once you tap into curiosity, step two is to demonstrate and quench your curiosity any way you choose. Technique becomes subordinate to real inquisitiveness. If your interest inspires you to summarize, clarify and validate emotions, then those formerly stilted techniques are transformed into meaningful queries and genuine dialogue. My clients who find it in themselves to ask real questions and strive to ensure they actually understand the other person, always have an easier time navigating out of discord. In the end, it's not active listening that stinks but our collective failure, while in the cauldron of conflict, to infuse it with real wonderment.


**Have an upcoming small group meeting where there might be some heat in the room? Call In-Accord to turn dysfunction into collaboration.**



**IN ACCORD**  
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A photograph of two firefighters in full protective gear, including helmets and reflective suits, fighting a large fire. One firefighter is holding a hose and spraying water on the flames. The background is filled with intense orange and yellow fire.

# Tired of conflict scorching important relationships, wasting time, and torching productivity?

## Chris Sheesley, MA

Chris puts derailed workplace relationships back on track. Senior managers and HR professionals hire Chris when they recognize the need for an experienced, objective facilitator to transform high-stakes or seemingly impossible internal disputes into cooperation and employee efficiency.

With 22 years of full time experience, a client roster of hundreds of notable organizations, and a track record of over 1,500 cases, Chris is among the most seasoned conflict management professionals in the Northwest. He has also amassed over 5,000 hours of experience teaching dispute resolution and related skills grounded in his real-world experience.

Chris lives in a 1908 farmhouse on seven Clackamas County acres with his wife, two elementary aged sons, dogs, horses, chickens and other critters. When not fussing around on the property, he's sailing *Zeitgeist* on the Columbia River, cycling, gawking at Oregon's fascinating birds or gazing through a telescope at the vastness of space.

## Perspective

The star Betelgeuse, in the upper left corner of Orion, is massive. If you tried to fill its volume by pouring 100 earths per second into it you'd pour for 30,000 years.