



3. Managing conflict



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Objectives

3.1 Recognize common constructive and destructive tendencies in interpersonal conflict

2. Be aware of how these tendencies show up in a conflict scenario

3. Analyze specific behaviours (hot buttons) that tend to result in destructive conflict



Lesson

1

Recognize common
constructive and destructive
tendencies in interpersonal
conflict



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Differentiating Conflict

Conflict occurs when people disagree or have differing views on topics. In the workplace, **destructive conflict hinders work performance**, because people **refuse to speak to each other** or they don't have civilized conversations.

The **destructive conflict** between two people can **bring down the morale** of an entire department, thereby reducing productivity and efficiency.

Constructive conflict embraces differing ideas and worldviews, in an effort to move the company toward its goals and mission. This type of conflict **increases productivity**, rather than hampers it. Conflict should be seen as positive when it results in clarification of issues, results in people learning about each other, or results in people considering new ideas.

Although conflict can stem from any conversation or action, there are common destructive conflict scenarios seen in the workplace resulting in constructive behaviour. Minor conflicts have to do with one person regularly taking another person's lunch or parking space. More significant issues could involve harassment or discrimination.

The conflict that's positive but includes constructive conflict in teams, like brainstorming sessions where people disagree. Another example is to challenge company protocol because someone sees a better way of doing things.

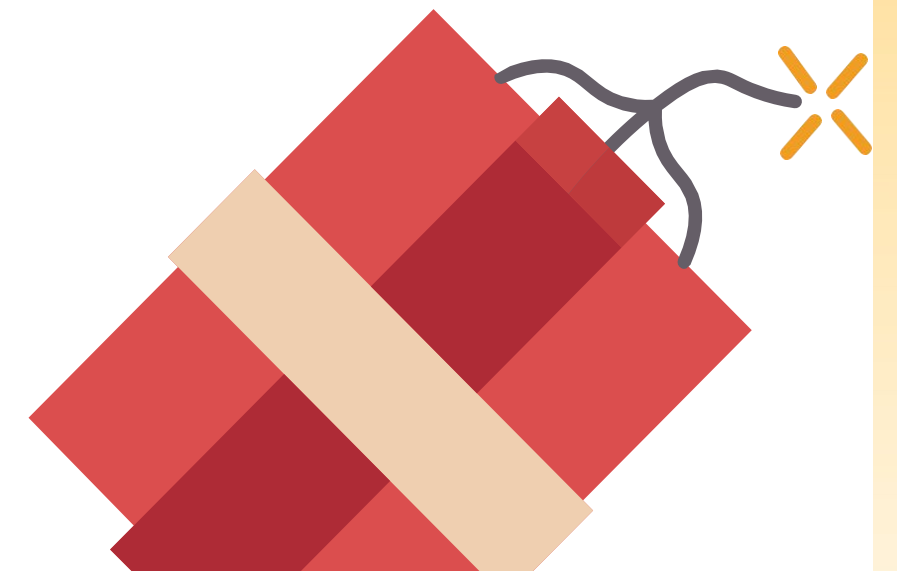


Stopping Destructive Conflict

Destructive conflict needs to be addressed as soon as it is identified or reported. Doing so prevents the situation from escalating, which would further bring down team morale and productivity. Stopping destructive conflict also prevents potential legal actions.

Stopping destructive conflict **starts with having a current employee handbook that's distributed to everyone.** The handbook should have a section that establishes the company **policies for conflict resolution** and for **reporting harassing or discriminatory actions.**

The protocol should state **how the company acts** in these situations and should state the potential disciplinary actions that can result. Train employees on their communication skills as well as company policies to help stop destructive conflict from escalating.



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Promoting Constructive Conflict

Promote constructive conflict to **help open the eyes of team members to new views, opinions and ways of doing things**. Conflict is often indicative of upcoming **personal or professional growth**, once it has been resolved.

Encourage people to offer opinions in team meetings and hold team-building exercises to help employees develop a real respect for each other.

Work on communication skills to help employees **learn to speak tactfully and listen to others' perspectives**. Hold diversity events and celebrate the cultural differences of the people on the team.

Managers have a special role in working with constructive conflict: employee reviews. These are often stressful for everyone. When approached as a means to help employees become better in every way, the conflict of the situation changes from negative criticism to constructive development.



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Comparison



CONSTRUCTIVE

- A : Excuse me, I think you cut in front of me.
- B : Oh sorry, I had not seen you were in line. I'll go after you. My apologies.

Conflict

DESTRUCTIVE

- A : How dare you cut in front of me? Go back to the end of the line and wait like everybody else.
- B : How dare you talk to me like that? I'm not moving. You can go elsewhere if it makes you unhappy.



Communication in the Workplace

Receiving Feedback

Everyone finds himself or herself on the receiving end of **criticism** from time to time. When this happens, the most important thing is to **remain calm** and fight the natural instinct to become paranoid or defensive. Here are five tips that can help you to handle criticism and turn it into a positive learning experience.

1

Listen. Keep an open mind. Everyone makes mistakes, and we can all use improvement in some areas. Resist the temptation to argue or make excuses.

2

Consider the source. Does the speaker have the authority, knowledge, and expertise to give you this feedback? Does he or she have an ulterior motive (Be careful not to invent one; though, just to make yourself feel better)?

3

Ask for specific examples. Don't accept generalities such as "poor," "disappointing," or "lousy." Politely ask the speaker to tell you exactly what is wrong. Questions like, "Exactly what was wrong with the presentation" or a request such as, "Help me to understand what you mean by 'poor'" should help you to get some useful information.

4

Evaluate the criticism. If it is valid, accept it gracefully and with a positive attitude. Tell the speaker you appreciate his or her comments and be enthusiastic about your willingness and ability to use the suggestions to improve your performance.

5

Keep the USEFUL information, but let go of the negative feelings. Don't dwell on the embarrassment of being criticized. Hold your head up high and move on.



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ONLINE QUIZZ material

You know you have understood the materials when... you answer below!

As a summary try to answer these two questions, write down your answers and compare them with the next slide.

What is the difference between constructive and destructive conflict?

Can you think of a scenario where you have received destructive feedback which leads to the conflict?

What are the 5 rules for better communication and less conflict at the workplace?



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Lesson 2

How do you handle destructive conflict?



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How do you handle destructive conflict?

A way to handle destructive conflict is to **acknowledge the problem** and make use of power and influence positively to resolve it. Persuasion will be an effective approach to let the other realize that both parties should gain ground. Having a professional mindset in facing a dispute or disagreement is also important.

Destructive conflict is characterised by **hostile and angry exchanges** and may include **physical and verbal aggression**. Take a moment to consider how you respond to your partner whilst arguing: do you recognise negative behaviours such as criticism, rejection and threats?

Collaborating Style: A combination of being assertive and cooperative, those who collaborate attempt to work with others to identify a solution that fully satisfies everyone's concerns. In this style, which is the opposite of avoiding, both sides can get what they want and negative feelings are minimized.

In a constructive conflict, even though, a disagreement between two parties emerges, this can be resolved in a positive manner so that it benefits both parties. In a destructive conflict, the disagreement leads to negative outcomes creating feelings of frustration and antagonism.

DEVAAD



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How do you handle destructive conflict?

Acknowledge the Problem

Generally speaking, it's impossible to resolve any workplace conflict without some **understanding of the other person's feelings**. An angry co-worker is more likely to use destructive communication in the workplace unless you can get him to calm down by allowing him to see you behaving rationally. **Letting the other person tell his side** of the story without interruption will help in **defusing the situation**.

Asking open-ended questions is also important in determining whether personal agendas or emotions are driving the conflict. For example, **instead of telling a person**, they are doing something wrong, **ask them** about their performance or behaviour and why they think it's the best way to work.

Choose Your Battles

Not every issue at work deserves prolonged debate, which is why it's important to choose your battles carefully. Helping co-workers achieve their objectives will head off many conflicts before they happen. In addition, the more times to complain to a boss or coworker, the more you increase your chances of being seen as a whiner or pouring fuel on a fire. However, an intervention is more likely to achieve decisive results when you consider the issue important enough to resolve in such a manner. Employees, in turn, will be more likely to close philosophical gaps and keep lines of communication open.



How do you handle destructive conflict?

Focus On Issues

All too often, managers allow themselves to get **sidetracked by the emotions** that the warring parties express. **Focusing on issues, instead of the people** involved, is a **more productive approach**, recommends [Business Know-How](#). An objective analysis is more likely to happen when it's not driven by preconceived notions about a particular employee. Only then will you know if an aggrieved worker has raised a legitimate issue. If you're still unsure, you can focus your analysis on the employee himself.

Set Some Guidelines

As a manager, colleague, or employee it's important to **set guidelines** for any meeting that requires your presence to resolve an issue. For best results, have **both parties commit to an unemotional style of expression**, with a promise to understand each others' points of view. Also, give both sides a **clear idea of the role that you'll play as a mediator** and your expectations for resolving the issue. Any violations can be grounds for terminating the meeting.

Other Issues to Consider

Conflict often arises from a weak management structure. The absence of a clear decision-making framework is more likely to promote dysfunctional actions, so it's critical for managers to **define acceptable behaviour**. A company's management can articulate those expectations through **clear chains of command, detailed job descriptions and talent development programs**. Employees who see themselves on a clearly-defined path to success are less likely to cut ethical corners in reaching their goals.



Tools for defusing conflict with public transportation passengers

"When dealing with triggered, erratic, aggressive or emotionally unstable people, we often naturally choose the least effective method of de-escalation."



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CAIRO Method™* for Conflict Management

The CAIRO Method has been created utilizing **evidence-based best practices in the fields of crisis management, behavioural health, hostage negotiation, law enforcement, corrections, riot control and group facilitation.** Some of the most common reasons for people acting out in violence are: feeling cornered, humiliated or ignored.

The reason this tool works is that **it was crafted to reduce the emotions and thought processes that lead to violence. While the tools in this method do not have to be used in order, the first two letters dictate the type of tone and attitude one should assume when utilizing the next steps.**

Like physical combat, you don't just throw a punch and stand there. You may **use combinations of these actions** in succession until you bring the person down to a manageable level. You aren't necessarily looking to make friends, you are **aiming to walk away, or drive away, without a violent confrontation.**

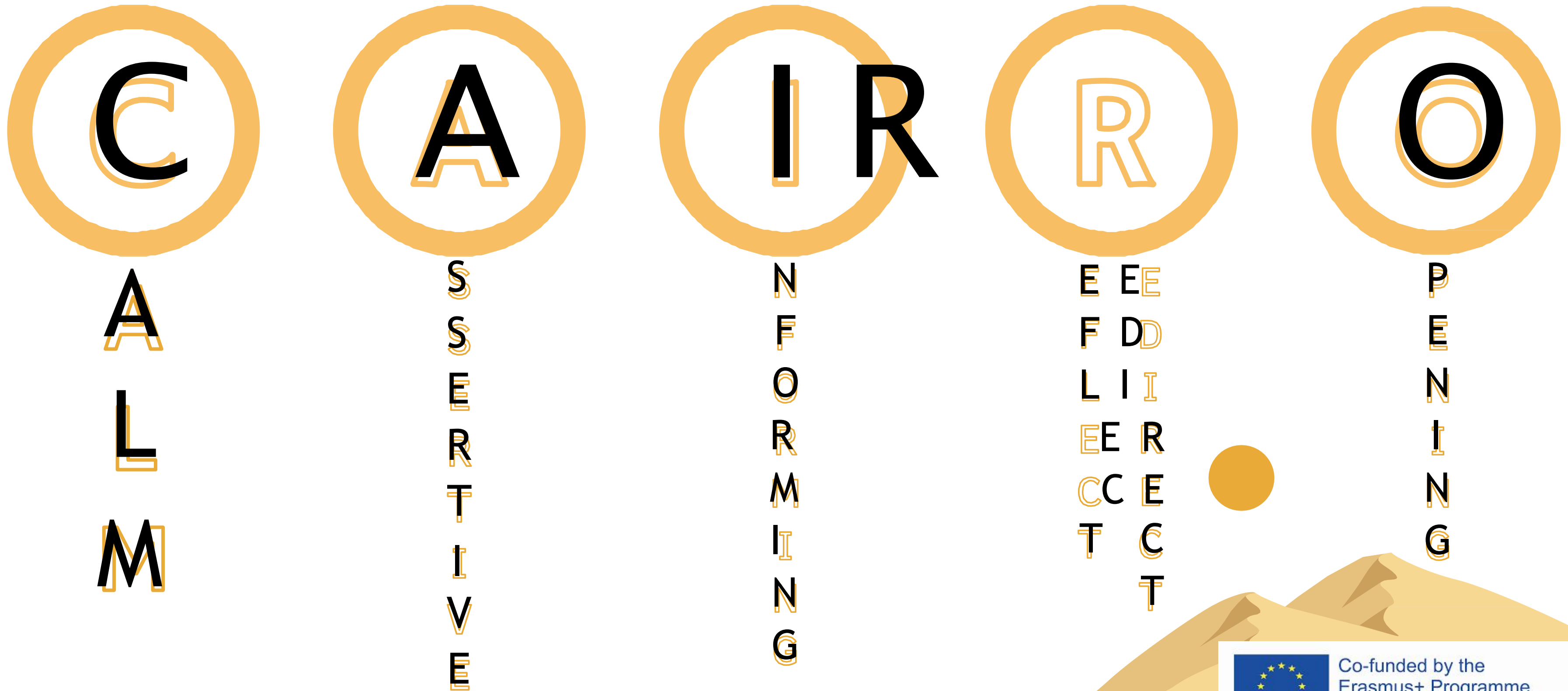
If all else fails, recognize that stopping and exiting the vehicle to avoid confrontation, calling the authorities or disengaging from a conflict is safer than engaging with someone if you don't have any combat training.

Even individuals who have professional weapons, or hand-to-hand combat training, regularly get hurt or fail to properly execute adequate skills to come out on top in an escalated conflict.

The best fight is the one you don't have to have.



CAIRO Method™* for Conflict Management



*<https://www.metro-magazine.com/10003020/tools-for-defusing-conflict-with-public-transportation-passengers>



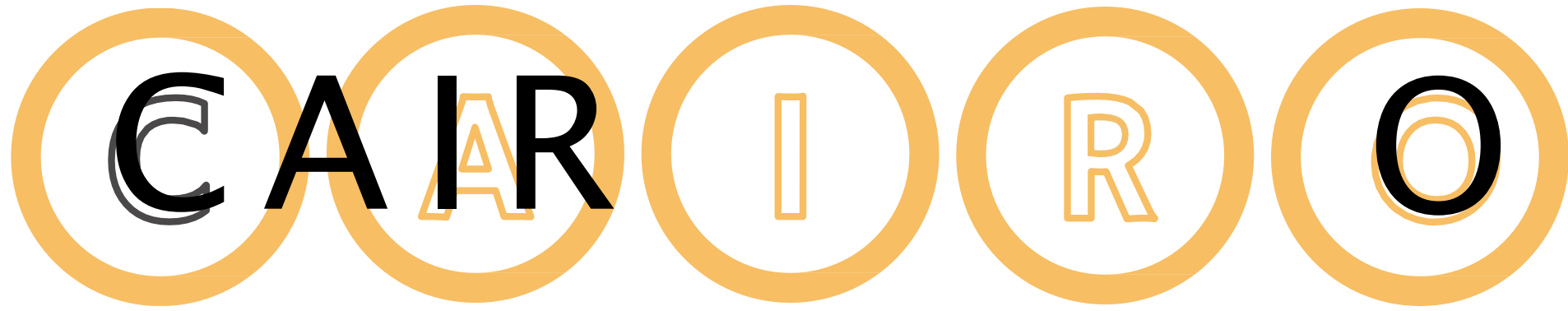
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<https://www.metro-magazine.com/100502/tools-for-dealing-with-conflict-in-public-transp>

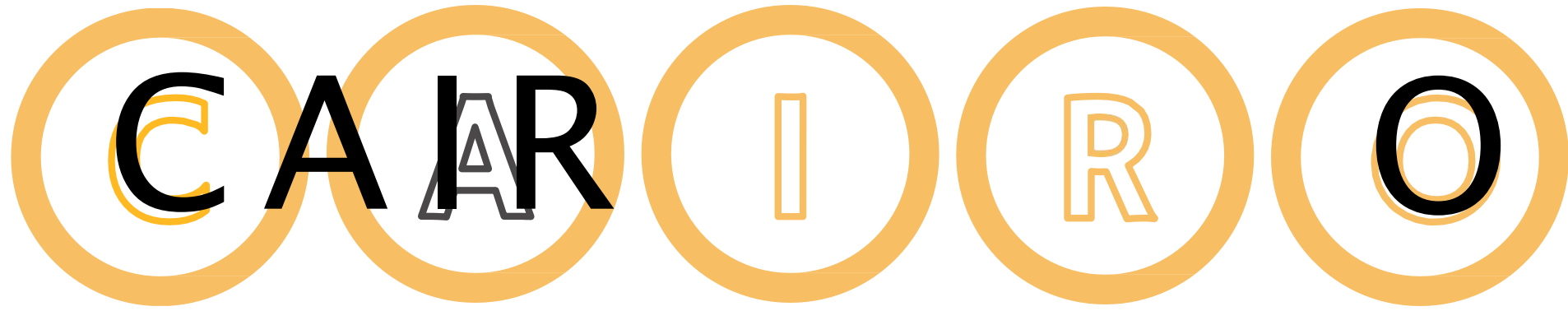


CALM:

When passengers (or transit professionals, as some are willing to admit) are challenged, they often **raise their voice** level. In response, we may be tempted to try to meet them where they are at, out of instinct. Human beings crave balance; physical and voice pattern mirroring is common and can lead to a serious escalation in arguments.

A neutral voice tone that remains consistent throughout the course of a heated or hostile encounter is very effective for establishing the tonal parameters (boundaries) of the conversation. It also helps you to more successfully survey the situation for other potential threats or escape routes.

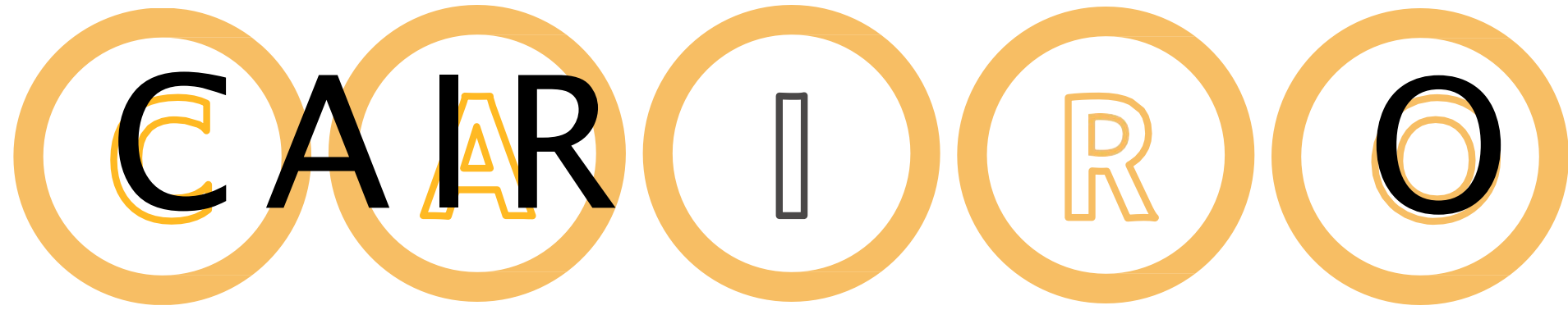
**For the adventurous: Attempt to raise your voice to a tone just a few levels below the person who is raising their voice. Once you catch their attention, you can then begin to descend with your voice tone, modeling a natural behavioral de-escalation process.*



ASSERTIVE:

When our voice tone and body language betray us, we often come across as controlling, parental, insecure or aggressive to the people we encounter.

- Having confidence in your ability to keep your personal environment a safe space sounds very different from annoyance over losing control.
- An empowered pitch that is coupled with a calm demeanour can be a very stabilizing force in an altercation if the balance has been tilted.
- Individuals mistakenly use only two speeds in conflict: passive or aggressive. Taking the middle road lets the other person know that you aren't afraid of them, but you aren't attacking them either.



INFORMING BEHAVIOR:

Making statements that let the other party know what's going on in neutral terms without using "You messages."

"We are moving on now." **"This conversation can be saved for another time."**

"You are backing up now." "This is not the place to have that discussion." "I am happy to talk with you, but not right now."

"I can't see out of my mirrors."

"I need you to stand behind the safety line."

"No this bus does not go to X stop, it goes to

Y." "Sir, the fare is X."

"Ma'am that is the company policy, not my personal rule."

"It would be a bad choice to do that."

"I need you to step back from

me." "You are invading my

space."

"There are a lot of people around, watching."

"We all want to get out of this alive."

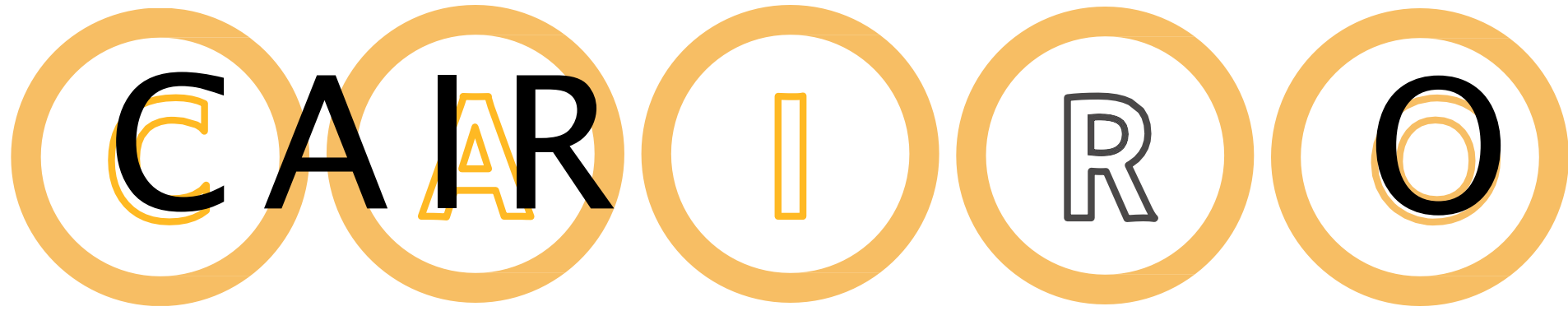
"I am asking you to step outside of the vehicle."

"It is not my intention to disrespect you, I am sorry."

Sometimes giving someone information is enough to de-escalate them.



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REFLECT/REDIRECT:

Reflective listening is a staple of any counsellor, facilitator or educator's toolbox. Often people just want to be acknowledged and feel like they were heard. Reflective listening allows you to show someone they were heard and move forward with your lesson plan or discussion.

- The three parts that make up reflective listening are

The Starter + The Feeling + The Content.

"That must be very frustrating for you because...."

"I get that you feeling really disrespected right now because..."

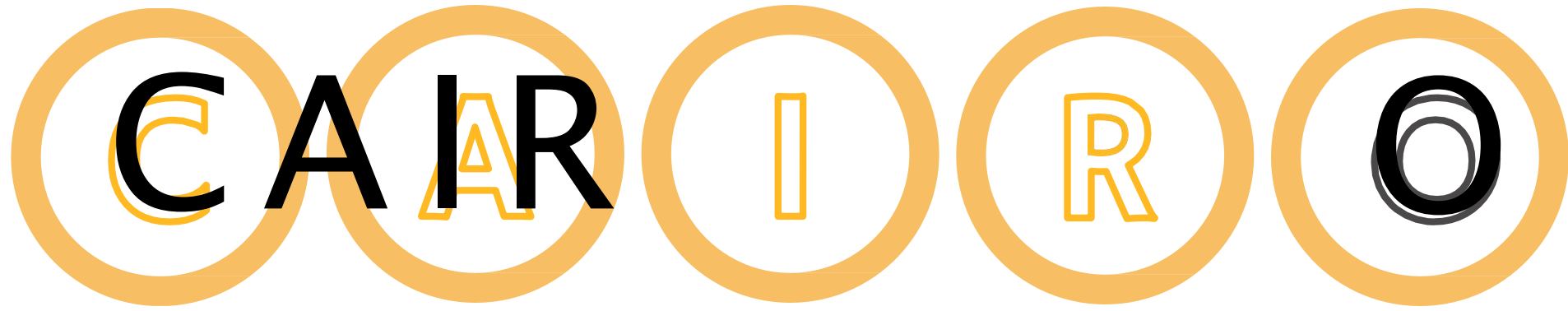
"That has been really upsetting for you..."

"That sounds really overwhelming when..."

- A reflective statement combined with an informing statement would be,

"I get that you're frustrated because you are late for work. I will do my best to get you there safely and on time."





OPENING BEHAVIOR:

Opening behaviour is asking questions that enable the escalated person to open up and express themselves. Human beings sometimes draw attention to themselves, even negative attention, to be seen. This is a great tool to not only make a person feel acknowledged and visible, but it interrupts violent thought patterns.

By asking opening questions you give them the platform to address their feelings and get back in control of themselves. "Is everything OK?" "Do you need something?" "Can I help you?" "What happened here?" "Were you hurt?" "Why were you attacking that person?" "What do you need?" "How are you doing today?" "What do you think about what I'm saying here?" "Where are you trying to get to?"

Open questions are more effective when the listener is authentic about asking the other party to open up. Open up your body language to appear more receptive. Unfold your arms, unscrew your face and lean in.

It's often important to explain to operators that safe vehicle operations is paramount, but excellent customer service and conflict management are very related and share many tools. To avoid excessive conversation, pay attention to the road, and manage conflict, is doable, but no easy feat.

ONLINE QUIZZ material

You know you have understood the materials when... you answer below!

As a summary try to answer these two questions, write down your answers and compare them with the next slide.

What are the 4 main parts of handling destructive

conflict? What is the CAIRO acronym for?

Can you describe in one sentence each of the parts of

CAIRO? Why should you use conflict resolution?



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Lesson 3

Analyze specific behaviours (hot buttons) that tend to result in destructive conflict



Hot Buttons

Conflict triggers are your “hot buttons,” the emotional responses set off by the words or actions of others during difficult conversations. While it’s a common expression to say, “He presses my buttons,” or “She’s baiting me,” your hot buttons say more about you than they do the other person.

You feel triggered during conflict **when you perceive the other person’s words or actions as threatening to your identity in some way.** Common triggers include real or perceived threats to your **competence, worth, independence, and desire to be included.**

Your hot buttons trip you up in conflict because they cause you to misinterpret, close down, lash out or take a side trip down the blame road. **They also trigger a set of emotional responses that can escalate the conflict.** When you’re triggered, your brain may experience what’s called a “neural hijacking.” The brain perceives a threat, proclaims an emergency and moves into action. This hijacking occurs so quickly that the conscious, thinking portion of the brain does not yet fully comprehend what’s happening.

Everyone’s bait is a little different, so what triggers me may not trigger you. This is why blaming others for angering you isn’t very effective: you waste energy expecting them to change what they’re doing when only you can change your own reactions.



Your buttons

Notice when you're getting triggered.

In the heat of the moment, take note of your physiological state, body language and tone of voice. A "hot face," sweating, loud voice, shaking, tears, and clenched teeth are physiological signals that you're feeling emotionally flooded and suggest that you've been triggered.

Find out if the threat you perceive is real

You'll discover that you're hyper-alert to certain kinds of slights and may be creating conflict where there wasn't any. To find out, name the threat you perceived and ask if that's their intention. For instance, When you took the rest of the staff to lunch on a day I was out, I experienced that as deliberately excluding me. Is that what you meant to do? (hint: the speaker is someone with an inclusion trigger...doesn't like to feel excluded).

Start journaling about your emotional triggers

Identifying your hot buttons is critical for two reasons: You'll have a stronger understanding to help you better prepare for and recognize future triggering situations before you react reproductively.

You'll be able to respond more effectively as you develop a toolkit to help you navigate these triggers – in the workplace and beyond. How can you get started? One of my favourite recommendations is to journal about your triggers.

You can use any method you want – a standard pen and paper works fine, or use your computer to jot down your thoughts. What's most important is that you capture:

What specifically happened that resulted in you feeling triggered?
As it happened, how did you feel? What were you thinking?
If you had to rate your emotions on a scale of -10 to +10, where would they fall?

What was your reaction?

What impact did your reaction have on you and others?



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How to Manage When Your Buttons Get Pushed

Breathe:

Yes, I know we all do that anyway, but I mean really breathe. Just stop and take a few of those yoga-style deep breaths. Long breaths in through the nose – hold it – out through the mouth.

This is a first step in calming yourself down...really it works...

I know, it's not always possible to just stop in the middle of a conversation or conflict and close your eyes and take deep breaths. If you need to wait until the interaction ends first, that's understandable. Just make sure before you react or respond and start stewing over what just transpired, that you take a moment to take calming breaths. And if you can go for a walk, even better.

Remove yourself from the situation.

If you can not, take 5 seconds to reply to the trigger and think about it.



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ONLINE QUIZZ material

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What is a conflict trigger?

What are the most common conflict

triggers? Know yourself and your triggers.



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Resource Page

■ [https://drkathyobear.com/navigating-triggers/identify-hot-buttons-
navigate-workplace-conflict/](https://drkathyobear.com/navigating-triggers/identify-hot-buttons-navigate-workplace-conflict/)

■ <https://tammylenski.com/managing-your-hot-buttons/>

■ [https://work.chron.com/deal-disrespectful-screaming-coworker-
25740.html](https://work.chron.com/deal-disrespectful-screaming-coworker-25740.html)

■ CAIRO: [https://www.metro-magazine.com/10003020/tools-for-
defusing-conflict-with-public-transportation-passengers](https://www.metro-magazine.com/10003020/tools-for-defusing-conflict-with-public-transportation-passengers)

■ Conflict Resolution Train the Trainer_CA_Virsabi

■ Effective Practices in Bus Transit Safety_ Emergency
Response_SM_Virsabi (Teamwork)

■ IO1_CustomerService_CA_ReusMobilitat (Teamwork)

■ Competition_CA_GER (Teamwork)

■ - Escalation and de-escalation -
[https://itmconflictmgmt.com/making-sense-of-conflict/escalation-
de-escalation/](https://itmconflictmgmt.com/making-sense-of-conflict/escalation-de-escalation/)