

Manage Conflicts by Magic



By Magic Wilson

“Now you get it, now you don’t!”

“Sorry, it is our policy! We can’t change that!” “If we did it this way, we would need to change our whole system!” When you deal with difficult people at work, do you find that you often hear replies like these? In other words, we find that the system does not hinder us but the person does.

When a magician performs his magic on stage, an audience suddenly challenges him and asks him to perform in another way. How would you handle this if you were that magician? Think about it.

If you choose to accommodate every single request from the audience, I assure you that your show will end up in a fiasco. The same result applies to your daily work – if you can’t find a way around an obstacle, your boss will be unhappy since you don’t meet his expectations. However, if you know the secret of “Magical 3” in negotiations, you can find your way around the obstacles presented by difficult people magically.

So what are the “Magical 3”?

- (1) **Ask** – We used to stand firm on our points and got angry when someone said “no” to us. Now avoid this; stay calm and ask more questions that allow us ample time to grasp a point for rebuttal later. Make sure we listen to the explanations given by the other party and try to understand his true meaning and difficulties right from the start.
- (2) **Acknowledge** – When faced with opposition, we used to defend ourselves against it, leading to non-stop arguments. Avoid this; be alert and identify the position of the other party. We should try to put ourselves in the other person’s shoes and respect their viewpoint to acknowledge that a conflict exists and propose a problem-solving approach resolve it.
- (3) **Advise** – Re-state our position firmly but politely. At the same time, suggest the disadvantages of insisting on the other person’s position tactfully (*e.g. damaging reputations, or creating additional problems when the issue is not finally resolved– no one wants to create further problems*). Affirm our points and propose an alternative solution to help resolve the issue objectively.



Now, let's go back to the magician's situation and see how we can use the "Magical 3" to get around the difficult request:

M: "Why do you want me to do the magic in that way?"

P: "I want to see greater magic that I believe is more wonderful..."

M: "That's great, thanks for your idea. You're a wonderful participant as you're really keen on a perfect magic show!"

P: "You're welcome!" (*a bit surprised and uneasy*)

M: "OK, as time is limited, let's do what you are asking for but in a slightly different way. I suppose other members of the audience will not object to this (*Actually, we're proposing to do the magic in our own alternative way*)" OR "Now, let's pass the baton and welcome our new magician on stage! (i.e. invite the participant to be the magician)" (*he never thinks of how to handle such challenges*)

- Of course, there are many other possible dialogues...

Remember, when we apply this "Magical 3" to our negotiations, we need to be alert and positive. See every challenge as an opportunity for our improvement. When you can manage such magic, you will find negotiation an interesting process. Now you get it!

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