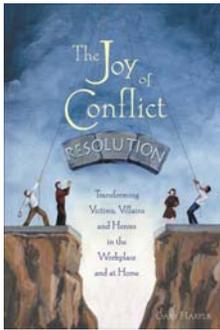


## An Excerpt from The Joy of Conflict Resolution...

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### **A metaphor is worth a thousand words**

Conflict stirs many feelings and thoughts. We often find it a challenge to identify and express all that might be going on for us. Sometimes we cannot find words to capture complex emotional experiences. Metaphors can help. Because they are not literal, they connect us with our listener at an emotional level, planting the seeds of empathy.

Metaphors weave their way through most conversations. (“I’m between a rock and a hard place here.”) The images associated with a metaphor move a conversation to a deeper level and provide clues to both feelings and underlying needs. People who are reluctant to reveal how hurt or overwhelmed they feel may be more comfortable expressing their situation as “a slap in the face” or being “a fish out of water” in a new job. These images provide clues to the other person’s unmet needs and can guide us to a deeper understanding of their story.

As listeners, we can introduce metaphors to check out how accurately we have understood a speaker. (“So your department knows where it’s supposed to go but doesn’t have a road map.”) Even if we don’t have it quite right, the other person often will build on the metaphor to clarify their point. (“It’s not that we don’t have a road map; we don’t have any gas for our car.”) A colleague once described how frustrated she felt working under a new boss whose style and vision differed from her own. “Sounds like you’re really not on the same page,” I reflected. She smiled. “We’re not even in the same library.” The imagery spoke “volumes” and left no doubt about how disconnected she felt. By providing everyday imagery, metaphors allow us to — if you’ll excuse another one — begin to weave the threads of our separate stories into the fabric of collaboration.

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