

## GOOD WORK INSTITUTE

### Conflict Resilience Policy

The GWI approach to tension and conflict strives to continually raise up what is alive in each of us in an effort to bring harmony and beauty to our working relationships. We do this through both policy and practice. We collectively agree to a set of policies that provide guidance on when and how to practice this work, and we all commit to regular, vulnerable, and generous participation, as individuals and as a team. The goal of this policy is a regular practice of reflection and engagement around both tension and conflict that builds resilience throughout the team and encourages robust, open-hearted communication when we (inevitably) disagree.

#### **Shared Commitments**

Our conflict resilience policy is rooted in our shared Working Agreements, and any Worker either initiating or responding to a conflict or tension request should review the most recent year's working agreement as a starting point for this work. Additionally, our collective commitment to this policy means that we all hold ourselves accountable to showing up for this work when asked. However, we recognize that tension and conflict can be heavy, and we allow any Worker to request a delay until they have the bandwidth to show up with integrity and vulnerability.

#### **Frameworks**

GWI uses the [Conscious Communication](#) framework as a starting point for all tension and conflict engagement. Conscious Communication is an iteration of Non-Violent Communication (NVC) that: a) emphasizes the central importance of supportive listening and b) encourages the expression of impacts instead of solely focusing on needs.

Lastly, in an effort to continually strengthen and evolve our shared understanding of this work, all Workers will complete a list of required readings each year. Additionally, the Conflict Resilience Sub-circle will maintain a list of recommended readings for any worker that wants to deepen their engagement practice.

### 2020 READING LIST

Required:	Recommended:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">An Introduction to Needs-Based Communication (NVC)</a> by Gregg Kendrick</li><li>• <a href="#">Conscious Communication by Miles Sherts - practice summaries pg. 325-332</a></li><li>• <a href="#">The Magic of Facilitation by Sam Killermann and Meg Bolger - chapter on triggers pg. 93-110</a></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conscious Communication by Miles Sherts</li><li>• Say What You Mean: A Mindful Approach to Non-Violent Communication by Oren Jay Sofer</li><li>• <a href="#">Conflict styles</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Beliefs about feelings</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Useful communication phrases</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Informal assertions</a></li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Margaret Heffernan: Dare to Disagree TED Talk</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Examples of judgements vs. observations + 3 part assertion</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Helpful quotes</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">What is Needs-Based Communication?</a> 2 pager by Gregg Kendrick</li> <li>• adrienne maree brown chapter on resilience: how we recover and transform (ES: 123-150), including this section on <a href="#">transformative justice</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Four Agreements at work</a></li> </ul>
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### **Conflict Resilience Sub-circle**

Each year, the General Circle will designate a “Conflict Resilience Sub-circle” of two Worker Trustees who will provide support both to the ongoing organizational investment in conflict resilience and specific instances of conflict engagement.

The Conflict Resilience Sub-circle is responsible for maintaining and updating the annual reading list. In coordination with the Learning Circle, the Conflict Resilience Sub-circle will also convene all Workers to discuss the readings and the GWI conflict resilience policy at least once per year, and to consider if and when additional training may be needed. Lastly, the Conflict Resilience Sub-circle will serve as a resource in the practice of Conflict Engagement, as requested by any Worker.

Members of the Conflict Resilience Sub-circle are required to participate in additional training focused on how to support others in conflict. The team members can select their training resource based on their needs, and the cost of the training will not be deducted from their personal professional development budget.

### **Tension and Conflict Practices**

We invite all Workers to be proactive when it comes to tension and conflict relating to interpersonal dynamics and/or around circle accountabilities. The goal is to provide clarity and support so that we can minimize structural discomfort; we should all know how this process starts, what it looks like when we are in it, and how it should be wrapped up. Through our shared commitments and frameworks, we can limit our discomfort to the tension or conflict at hand, and hopefully position ourselves for generative communication. Less worry or uncertainty about the how will help us work better on the what.

We differentiate between tension and conflict practices, and each practice starts with reflection before moving into engagement. The two-tiered nature of our practices is intended to build resilience by encouraging all Workers to acknowledge and discuss small tensions in order to process misalignment before it becomes conflict. Through regular tension acknowledgement

and engagement, we will better understand our co-Workers and evolve stronger working relationships that are made more dynamic and productive through disagreement.

### **Tension Practice**

We define tension as small “c” conflicts, i.e., a conflict of opinion or conflicting approach to work. We are all different people, and those differences will create discomfort at some point. We believe that tension is unavoidable and if handled regularly, and with a light touch, can be generative.

#### Reflection

1. Prior to engaging the tension practice, we invite Workers to first reflect on whether it is possible to forgive and let go of the issue without lasting feelings of resentment or without fear that the issue will arise repeatedly. If done with integrity, a personal reflection practice is a key component of organizational conflict resilience.
2. As part of this reflection, the Worker is encouraged to seek two forms of support from another Worker or someone outside the organization. First around making a decision whether or not to pursue acknowledgement. Second, in order to get clear on how they want to show up, what their intentions are, how they want to approach sharing about the tension, and the reasons they believe it may be coming up for them.
3. The Worker requesting support states that they are asking the person approached to play the role of being an actively listening support person.
4. The Worker initiating a support conversation should remain mindful that the intention is to gain clarity, rather than seek confirmation of their own experience or gossip about co-Workers. Any Worker asked to provide support should remain mindful that their role is to hold space to help their co-Worker feel heard, get clear, and feel prepared, rather than to confirm or deny their experience.
5. When requesting support, we acknowledge that we are asking for someone else to take on a piece of the tension. Requests can be denied when a Worker doesn't have the capacity to provide support.
6. A Worker who requests support has a responsibility to follow up with supportive listeners on any resolution or progress.

#### Engagement

1. Name tensions as close to the incident as possible, and name a conversation as a tension engagement practice when requesting the conversation.
2. Acknowledge tensions directly, either in person or on a video call. Avoid using communication tools that delay response, i.e. email, Slack, text.
3. Tension can exist between two co-Workers, or within a circle, or even circle to circle. Workers engaging in tension engagement should strive to include relevant Workers without overly broadening the scope of the conversation. If the Workers desire to update other members of the team about a tension, they may do so if all Workers involved in the tension consent.

4. When entering into tension engagement, it is the responsibility of the initiator to propose [an approach](#) to the conversation. This could be a specific process for articulating the tension or a set of intentions around how each participant should show up in the conversation. Both participants need to agree upon the approach they will use. Tools will be available to support different approaches for these conversations.
5. For the person initiating engagement, accept the response; don't push past the limit of what the other person is able to discuss. When the other person shares their intention, acknowledge it and accept it.
6. For the person reciprocating the engagement, this is not an opportunity to pile on additional tensions. If this conversation brings up past tension that may be related in nature but is unrelated to the tension at hand, reflect on the impact of that prior tension and then acknowledge it in a separate conversation.
7. For both Workers, remember that approaching tension is tough and requires vulnerability on both sides. Reflect on the other person's vulnerability in this moment and seek to end on a positive, friendly note. All Workers are given permission to approach tension, so we should not resent it when we are approached about tension and we should not hold grudges.

### **Conflict Practice**

Conflict engagement is necessary when a significant disagreement or misalignment occurs, or when there is a systemic, ongoing source of tension within a working relationship. The goal is for the conflict practice to be a much rarer occurrence.

### Reflection

1. Workers should engage in the tension reflection and engagement practices before pursuing conflict engagement, but neither is expressly required.
2. If a Worker feels that a Conflict Practice is needed, the Worker initiating the request should request two forms of support from one or both members of the Conflict Resilience Sub-circle. First around making a decision whether or not to pursue engagement. Second, in order to get clear on how they want to show up, what their intentions are, and how they want to approach sharing about the tension and the reasons they believe it may be coming up for them.
  - a. This is different from the tension practice which encourages support from any Worker or someone outside of the organization.
3. It is possible that after discussing the conflict, a Worker might feel comfortable with a direct tension engagement conversation without support from the Conflict Resilience Sub-circle.

### Engagement

1. If the tension engagement conversation does not progress to the point of feeling complete for both parties, or a Worker does not want to pursue tension engagement first, a Worker can request a mediated conversation with the Conflict Resilience Sub-circle. In either case, all relevant Workers should be made aware of the conflict and related conversations at this point. Transparency is necessary in order to preserve trust.

2. Once it becomes clear that a conflict engagement conversation is necessary, the involved Workers should explain what level of support they desire. For example, the parties could ask one or both members of the Conflict Resilience Sub-circle to be present simply to be a calming influence and/or facilitate the discussion (stepping in when certain agreed ground rules, such as “no interrupting,” are violated). The Conflict Resilience Sub-circle member(s) do not provide judgments about who is “right” or what should be done. Rather, the Conflict Resilience Sub-circle member(s) assist the parties in progressing to a point where the parties feel complete.
3. Conflict engagement can take many forms, it could be one conversation or a series of conversations. The Workers should drive the design of this process with the Conflict Resilience Sub-circle serving as support for all involved. The directives that are part of the tension engagement practice apply equally to the conflict engagement practice.
4. Conflict engagement is intended to be only between the involved Workers and the Conflict Resilience Sub-circle. If the Workers party to a conflict want to make it public to the organization, they may do so if all involved consent. If the Conflict Resilience Sub-circle believes that the conflict has the potential to cause lasting harm to the organization, they can propose an Expectations Alignment Plan to the General Circle for any Worker involved.

## Possible approaches to conversation

**Name:** Sharing time / reflecting back

**Source:** Experience of Nicole facilitating dynamic reset diads

Aspects of approach:

1. Spend a few minutes at the outset in mindful grounding. Tune into space and body. Tune into feelings, name and honor them. Tune into capacity for compassion for self and others. Name any intentions that have already been shared. Set an intention for yourself. Set an intention for your conversation partner.
2. Share your intention for your conversation partner.
3. Take turns in sharing and listening/reflecting roles. It is recommended that the person for whom the tension is most alive, most likely the person who initiated the conversation, share first.

### a. LONGER TURN

- i. The sharer may consider starting with a few words of affirmation related to the listener/reflector and/or their relationship. The sharer should express their feelings, needs and thoughts in smallish chunks of about 40 words and then pause. The sharer strives for vulnerability in an effort to create a window into their perspective on the situation - how they experienced or were impacted by it - and strives to avoid analysis and/or judgements of the situation.
- ii. The listener/reflector should repeat back what they heard, in the sharer's and/or their own words. At this stage, the listener/reflector avoids offering their own reactions or perspective.
- iii. Repeat i) and ii) in the same roles until the sharer feels complete and/or is ready to switch roles.
- iv. Repeat i) and ii) in the new roles until the new sharer feels complete. To start off, the new sharer can express how it felt to hear what the first sharer offered and/or other feelings, needs and thoughts, pausing after each smallish chunk of about 40 words.

### b. SHORTER TURN

- i. Returning back to the original roles, repeat i) and ii) under LONGER TURN until the original sharer feels complete and/or is ready to switch roles. The original sharer focuses on how it felt to hear what the second sharer offered, pausing after each smallish chunk of about 40 words.
- ii. If needed, switch roles a final time and repeat i) and ii) under LONGER TURN until the sharer feels complete in expressing how it felt to hear the latest sharing.

### c. HARVESTING

- i. If there is energy and interest, the pair thinks about what they have learned and what course of individual or joint action the learning suggests

they might pursue. Recognizing that the conversation is likely to have impacted each person differently, consent at this stage is very important. If they decide to harvest action ideas, the pair may choose to:

1. Just list possible actions
2. List and consent to one or more actions
3. List, consent to, and identify a next step for one or more actions