

Confrontation: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly—Part 1

Much confusion surrounds the subject of confrontation: many people, perhaps most, view confrontation in a negative light, as if it were morally wrong, something to be avoided at all cost. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, confrontation is an ESSENTIAL SKILL for anyone seeking to be a great leader (btw, like it or not, we are ALL leaders in one role or another). To help make sense of confrontation's schizophrenic nature, it may help to think of the title song from the classic Clint Eastwood movie: there is a Good, a Bad and an Ugly side to confrontation.

The Bad—Avoidance:

Many people somehow have the mistaken notion that confrontation is a bad thing, even immoral. Just the thought of a confrontation affronts their perceived 'goodness,' invoking uncomfortable feelings including feelings of guilt. Others, for a variety of reasons, are simply too fearful to initiate confrontation. Regardless of why, any failure to confront that which needs confronting is a path to painful consequences, as the failure to confront

allows concerns to grow into problems and problems into crisis. In the lingo of the theme song, avoidance of confrontation is BAD.

The Ugly—Confronting the Person:

Other people readily confront but they go about it in the worst possible way; they confront the person. Those having this mindset seek to place blame, to establish 'my rightness' and 'your wrongness.' Is it any wonder that this approach to confrontation has a high chance of turning Ugly? It is rare in one's life when it is appropriate or necessary to confront another person. Protecting yourself or another from harm is an example when confronting a person might be appropriate.

The Good—Confronting the Problem:

Although the Bad and the Ugly are each in their different ways, destructive, the Good—confronting the PROBLEM—can be characterized as wisdom, kindness and courage combined. When a confrontation is

needed, I literally visualize myself and the other party sitting side by side on the same side of the negotiating table staring down the problem sitting opposite us. Sometimes the solution requires that I be the one who must bend and sometimes it is the other party, but the spirit is clear -- it is me and the other party attacking the problem, not each other.

It is true that some people are not capable of this type of problem-solving and will attempt to maneuver any situation into a personal confrontation, as that is their comfort zone. In part 2, I will elaborate on various defense mechanisms I have seen people use and give suggestions how to respond to them. ✖

Until then, make it a great month!
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