

Co-operantics

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN PROVERBS: What am I like?

The list of international proverbs and sayings below can be related to different strategies we might adopt to resolve conflicts. Read each statement carefully. How typical is that statement of your usual approach to resolving conflicts? Give each proverb a score using the following scale:

5 very typical 4 frequently 3 sometimes 2 seldom 1 never

1. ____ Let sleeping dogs lie
2. ____ If you cannot make a person think as you do, make him do as you think
3. ____ Soft words win hard hearts
4. ____ You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours
5. ____ It is better to ask some of the questions than to know all of the answers
6. ____ If you offend, ask for pardon, if offended, forgive
7. ____ Might is right
8. ____ If you do not step on the dog's tail, he will not bite you
9. ____ Better half a loaf than no bread
10. ____ Truth lies in knowledge, not in majority opinion
11. ____ Who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day
12. ____ He hath conquered well that hath made his enemies flee
13. ____ Kill with kindness
14. ____ Do as you would be done by
15. ____ No person has the final answer but everyone has something to contribute
16. ____ Stay away from people who disagree with you
17. ____ A snake at your feet, a stick at your hand!
18. ____ It is better to be loved than feared
19. ____ Tit for tat
20. ____ Only the person who is willing to give up his or her monopoly on the truth
can ever profit from the truths that others hold
21. ____ Make your enemy your friend
22. ____ A person who will not flee will make others flee
23. ____ Lower your head modestly while passing and you will harvest bananas
24. ____ When the bee comes to your house, let her have beer, you may want to
visit the bee's house one day

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25. _____ Bring your conflicts into the open and face them directly; only then will the best solution be discovered
26. _____ The best way of handling conflicts is to avoid them
27. _____ Put your foot down where you mean to stand
28. _____ A soft answer turneth away wrath
29. _____ Do not tell the man carrying you that he stinks
30. _____ Frankness, honesty and trust will move mountains
31. _____ There is nothing so important that you have to fight for it
32. _____ There are two kinds of people in the world, winners and losers
33. _____ Call the bear 'Uncle' until you are safely across the bridge
34. _____ A little subtlety is better than a lot of force
35. _____ Knowledge is power

Now turn to the score sheet and check your score against five different approaches to conflict resolution.

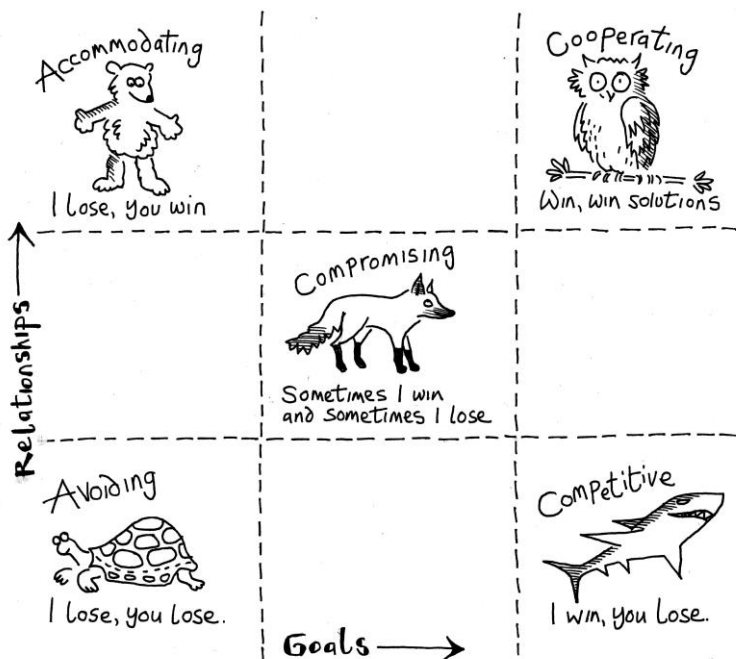
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Score Sheet: Which proverbs most closely reflect your conflict resolution strategies?

Avoiding	Competing	Accommodating	Compromising	Co-operating
1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35
Total	Total	Total	Total	Total

Each proverb is listed above underneath one of five conflict strategy headings. Write your score for each proverb against the proverb number in the columns above. Then add up your score under each heading. The higher the score for each conflict strategy, the more frequently you tend to use that strategy. The lower the score for each conflict strategy, the less frequently you tend to use that strategy.



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Conflict can be seen as the result of a dynamic relationship between **maintaining good relationships with others** and **achieving our own goals**. The diagram on the previous page illustrates five different styles arranged according to the extent to which we are either building good relationships – or pursuing our own goals.

- So we can see that by **avoiding conflict** we are neither building good relationships with others, nor are we achieving our own goals. Like a **tortoise** we stay within our shell, doing nothing.
- On the other hand, the **shark** represents a conflict resolution style that is **only interested in achieving its own goals**, and doesn't care about its relationships with others – it just eats them!
- The cuddly **teddy bear** is so **interested in other people's needs**, it has forgotten about its own goals -
- while the crafty **fox** works out ways in which it can **achieve its own goals without confrontation**.
- Meanwhile the wise **owl** sees that the most sustainable solution is one in which **both parties' needs can be satisfied** – thus achieving its own goals and building good relationships simultaneously.

This model helps us understand the difference between compromise and consensus – in a compromise, we are giving up something to reach agreement, whilst for consensus, we are working together to find a solution which is better for both of us. There are situations in which each of these styles is appropriate, and they all have their advantages and drawbacks. However we all have our habitual responses to conflict situations, so it's helpful to identify what they are, and to recognise that other styles may be more appropriate. What do you think might be the advantages and drawbacks of each of these approaches?

Accommodating (I lose, you win)

- unassertive, selfless
- powerless
- plays up responsibilities
- plays down rights

Avoiding (I lose, you lose)

- non-assertive, uncooperative
- does not address the issue
- sidestepping
- tactical withdrawal
- but survives!

Compromising (sometimes I win, sometimes you win)

- we both give up something
- expediency
- splitting the difference
- taking it in turns

Competitive (I win, you lose)

- aggressive and un-cooperative
- pursuing own concerns
- standing up for own rights
- trying to win

Co-operating (I win, you win)

- assertive and cooperative
- explore differences to find underlying concerns
- clear agreements