

Conflict is inevitable in most relationships. And as mentors, some conflict with mentees is normal. Conflict is the primary strategy the enemy will employ to disrupt the mentoring relationship.

Ken Sande, author of *The Peacemaker*, states, “Satan, whose name means ‘adversary,’ likes nothing better than to see us at odds with one another. Among other things, he fills our hearts with greed and dishonesty (Acts 5:3), deceives us about what will make us happy (2 Timothy 2:25-26), and takes advantage of our unresolved anger (Ephesians 4:25-27).”

Lest we blame everything on Satan, we must remember we all are born with a sin nature that is rebellious toward God and earthly authority (Romans 8:7-8). Mentors and mentees alike face ongoing battles between the “old man” that wants to indulge the flesh and the “new man” that wants to follow God (Galatians 5:16-25).

When mentoring prisoners and ex-prisoners, it is important to remember the many years they have participated in criminal thinking and were exposed to prison culture. Our mentees come to us with many mental and emotional strongholds, as well as low social skills and undesirable habits. In *The Peacemaker*, Sande cites four excellent principles for resolving conflict.

## 1. Glorify God in all things.

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Every conflict is an excellent opportunity to glorify God by the way we respond. A God-centered approach to conflict can:

- Help both the mentor and mentee avoid being caught up in emotions that lead to increased confusion and tension.
- Allow the mentor to walk through the conflict encouraged and comforted in knowing he or she has pleased God whether or not the mentee responds positively.

Most conflicts with mentees have more to do with a weakness or shortcoming in the mentee’s thinking or personality than with the specific mentor-mentee relationship. Therefore, conflicts should not be taken personally, but seen as an opportunity to teach and encourage the mentee.

Conflicts also provide an excellent opportunity for mentors to grow and become more like Christ. Author Chuck Swindoll says that problems can serve as “a God-appointed instructor ready to stretch you and challenge you and deepen your walk with Him. This process is sometimes referred to as the ‘ABC of spiritual growth’ – Adversity Builds Character.”

Mentors need to focus more on *growing* through a conflict and less on *going* through a conflict. Mentoring is a relational learning process that has multiple spiritual benefits for both mentors and mentees.

## **2. Get the log out of your own eye.**

“You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:5)

As mentors, we are not flawless. Humbly ask the Lord to examine your thoughts, words, and actions. Ensure your motives are pure before attempting to correct your mentee.

Sande cites Philippians 4:1-9 as an excellent biblical format for mentors and mentees to self-examine their attitudes during a conflict. In this passage, Paul doesn’t try to solve the issues, but to help the parties have a Christian mindset toward each other and the circumstances.

These are Paul’s instructions:

- Remember why God has placed you together in this relationship.
- Remember you both have God’s resources to work through the conflict.
- Set an example of kindness and courtesy even though you disagree with each other.
- Use prayer to reduce anxiety. Give the problem to God and trust Him for the outcome.
- Avoid a critical spirit. Focus on the good traits of the other person.
- Practice this God-centered approach and allow God to bring peace to your relationship.

## **3. Go and show your brother his fault.**

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’” (Matthew 18:15-16)

It is not wise to discourage mentees by constantly confronting them with their sins and shortcomings. Proverbs 19:11 says, “A person’s wisdom yields patience; it is to one’s glory to overlook an offense.” But if an offense or behavior is too serious to overlook, it is the mentor’s duty to confront the mentee.

If the mentee listens and accepts correction, you can rejoice that the conflict had been resolved. However, if the situation persists and the mentee still won’t listen, a mentor should seek help from another more experienced person such as a ministry team leader, pastor, chaplain, or Prison Fellowship field director. Often a third party brought into the situation can help bring clarity.

Subjecting your mentee to public humiliation by bringing the issue before the local body of Christ should be reserved for the most extreme situations – and only if your ministry team leader, pastor, chaplain, or PF field director agrees.

Always remember that the ultimate goal of confrontation is to help people grow stronger – not to isolate them from the body of Christ, but to draw them into closer fellowship with other believers.

## **4. Go and be reconciled.**

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24)

As mentors, we are obligated to humbly make our mentees aware of specific lifestyle issues and sins that are detrimental to their spiritual, mental, and physical well-being. How we approach them is of utmost importance.

Galatians 6:1-2 reminds us, "If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

When we assist another person with their "burden" (sin or shortcoming), we must be careful not to become "puffed up" with spiritual pride. We are not to be judgmental and compare the mentee with ourselves or others. We are not to allow ourselves to hold grudges.

Remember, your mentee may have been saved for a number of years, but he or she may still be a "babe" in Christ who needs the "milk" of the Word. As mentors, our job is to gently lead mentees into a more mature relationship with the Lord and to restore them to the community.

