

Office of the Ombudsperson

Conflict Coaching: A Narrative-Based Model

PROMOTE CURIOSITY & CARE

In 2008 I had the opportunity to attend my first International Ombuds Association annual conference and to complete a pre-conference course on conflict coaching. Delivered in accordance with ombuds' principles and standards of practice, the coaching framework used was courtesy of Tricia Jones and Ross Brinkert's *Conflict Coaching: Conflict Management Strategies and Skills for the Individual* (2008). The authors called it a Comprehensive Coaching Model.

I have adapted the model with fidelity to the four stages but given Jones and Brinkert's centering of *the story* I refer to it as a narrative-based model. The overview serves as a guide for the conflict coaching curious – essentially – what to expect from coaching.

HUMANIZE THROUGH NARRATIVE

1. DISCOVERING THE STORY: Ombuds' objectives.

- Introduction and rapport-building.
- Discuss concepts such as confidentiality and its exceptions.
- Formulate goals for the session(s).
- Learn about the concern or conflict.
- Discern visitor's/coachee's conflict style.
- **Expect questions from the Ombuds such as:** what brings you to conflict coaching, who is involved in this matter, what is the history, what is at stake now, and is there additional information or assurances you need to help work through the conflict.

2. EXPLORING THE STORY: Expect questions related to each of the three following perspectives.

- **Identity** – how do you see yourself, how do you wish to see yourself, how do you believe others see you, has this conflict damaged your identity (how so), has it damaged the other party's identity (how so).
- **Impact** – what emotions and potential consequences are associated with this conflict for you and for the other party.
- **Power** – are you and the other party equally or differently situated on the power spectrum, what unique power(s) does each of you have to potentially resolve this matter, do dynamics need to shift to do so.

3. AUTHORIZING THE BEST STORY:

- Explore possibilities compatible with the visitor's conflict style.
- Generate alternatives based upon the visitor's perceptions of disputant's style.
- Identify desired outcome(s).
- **Expect questions from the Ombuds such as:** what would an ideal resolution look like, what stands in the way of it coming to fruition, what one action could you take to move the conflict toward resolution.

4. ENACTING THE BEST STORY:

- How might the visitor achieve their best story.
- Explore coaching options, e.g., role play and communication skills; continued clarification of visitor concerns.
- Explore possibility of visitor engaging in other resolution options: shuttle diplomacy, facilitated dialogue, mediation, negotiation, etc.
- **Expect questions from the Ombuds such as:** what strategy or approach might work best, do you need additional skills or practice to implement it/them, how does this pertain elsewhere in your work/life.

To discuss conflict coaching services with the Ombuds, please phone for an appointment. The Ombuds is available by arrangement for workshops on conflict capacity-building for your team.