

**I agree, we disagree!**  
Comment: SpiritLinks

*Jim Tamm and Ron Luyet encourage us not to fear conflict. "If your relationship doesn't bump up against conflict every once in a while, you're either in complete denial or overly-medicated."*

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There is an oft told tale in the Marin community about two brothers who owned the Horizons Restaurant in the quaint, touristy San Francisco bay city of Sausalito. As years passed, brotherly love turned contentious. I've forgotten the focus of their disagreement, but the object of dissension is often a token of misplaced dissent. For instance, couples argue most about money, when the real problem is how they feel in the relationship -- but I digress. One stormy night, customers fled early into wicked wind and pouring rain. Okay, maybe there was only a storm in their hearts but it made candles flicker ominously and waves crash against Horizon's sea wall. The brothers argued. Finally, brother one stomped out into the wretched night and returned with a chainsaw. As brother two looked on in horror, brother one cut into an exquisite burl wood table, screaming, "All right, here's your half of the restaurant, do with it what you want."

Now, I know that the restaurant was built in 1898 by the San Francisco Yacht Club and the building was purchased by a local family in 1959. It now houses two acclaimed restaurants, Ondine upstairs and Horizons downstairs. Perhaps the brothers resolved their dispute by splitting the building and each follows his dream with his own enterprise – perhaps.

Whether talking about a relationship with a sibling, spouse, friend, peer or colleague(s), we will eventually disagree. The friction may be minor, dismissed easily or resolved over dinner. Along the other end of the continuum, dissent may lead to severe encounters that leave both parties with ill-feelings that re-surface again and again in miscommunication, sarcasm or even threats.

How we treat each other and how we take care of ourselves in disagreements are ethical and moral issues. Our behavior in conflict demonstrates our true spiritual practice. Will we take the high road and treat our antagonist with respect, compassion and empathy? Or, will we descend into malice, vindictiveness or even hatred? Will we, or the other party, resort to what Harvard Medical School calls Intermittent Explosive Disorder with recurrent episodes of angry and potentially violent outbursts? Or, will we act upon Jesus' example of calm, rational-thinking and forgiveness?

Hopefully, in the end we will resolve disputes with an outcome that respectfully satisfies the needs of each individual. James W. Tamm and Ronald J. Luyet are confident that this is possible even in the most provocative situations. They have worked with individuals, employees, corporate teams and the military. Jim and Ron have taught collaborative skills

to clients including the State of California; Hewlett Foundation; Catholic Healthcare West; Boeing; U.S. & Canadian Departments of Defense; International Management Program in Stockholm; NASA; Pfizer; Sony Ericson; Swedish Work Environment Authority; and United Nations Office of Oversight Services.

Their approach of Radical Collaboration has proved significant. One follow up research study tracked participants from nine countries over a six year period. Monterrey Tech University in Cuernavaca, Mexico determined the following gains in effectiveness in conflict environments:

- ◆ 49.5 percent increase in reducing participants' own defensiveness
- ◆ 44.8 percent increase in getting their interests met
- ◆ 31.5 percent increase in successful problem-solving
- ◆ 26.4 percent increase in building and maintaining long term climates of trust

Radical Collaboration teaches skills quickly and easily. The State of California Public Employment Relations Board, where Jim Tamm was a senior administrative law judge and San Francisco regional director, showed almost one hundred organizations reduced their conflict by 67 percent. The ten most troubled organizations at the start of the project reduced their conflict by 85 percent over 3 years. Participants also reported significant gains in their ability to build and maintain climates of trust.

Tamm and Luyet's book "Radical Collaboration: Five Essential Skills to Overcome Defensiveness and Build Successful Relationships" provides a practical approach to traversing challenging, distrustful confrontations to problem-solving that meets the interests of all parties with awareness, insight, forgiveness and respect.

The authors encourage us not to fear conflict. "If your relationship doesn't bump up against conflict every once in a while, you're either in complete denial or overly-medicated." In fact they advise us to explore our feelings wherein our defensiveness lies. "Do not avoid or deny fears, but rather move toward them, bringing them fully into your consciousness and acknowledging them. While this is counterintuitive, it is the most effective way known to cope with fears and to reduce defensiveness."

Jim and Ron explain further: "When people feel insignificant, incompetent, or unlikable, they may act in ways to avoid those uncomfortable feelings." Some defense mechanisms we may witness in ourselves or others: sleepiness; intellectualizing issues; overeating (bring on the chocolate); flooding others with information; talking too fast; trivializing issues with humor (see above); abuse of alcohol or drugs. In addition, defensiveness may drop our IQ 20 points.

"Remaining non-defensive is the single, most important thing you can do to turn conflict into collaboration," Jim said in the 3-day workshop. When we feel safe, secure and trusting we are likely to enter into and stay in the "Green Zone." Creativity flourishes and

people, unfettered by fear and mistrust, are energized and inspired to contribute their best work. This is where relationships are built.

In the Green Zone, people:

- ◆ Seek to understand
- ◆ Value Differences
- ◆ Connect with others
- ◆ Strive for mutual success
- ◆ Look for solutions
- ◆ Are self-accountable

In contrast, in the Red Zone, trust and collaboration are destroyed. When we perceive a threat to our well-being we respond in what we believe is self-protection. The Red Zone is not a place that fosters collaboration, innovation or creative problem-solving.

In the Red Zone, people:

- ◆ Feel threatened
- ◆ Use shame and humiliation
- ◆ Try to defeat others
- ◆ Seek to win for self only
- ◆ Need to be right
- ◆ Look for blame.

Both zones require exploring skillfully and deeply to learn more about underlying unresolved feelings. Though it sometimes takes "emotional dentistry" to pull us out of denial, only then can we take action to reduce inhibitors. Creating an atmosphere that diminishes others' overreactions as well as our own helps build collaboration.

Jim and Ron have determined that solutions require Five Essential Skills:

- ◆ Collaborative Intention: which requires staying in the Green Zone and unhooking from buttons that trigger defensiveness
- ◆ Truthfulness: the grand simplifier, paired with listening – the most often taught, yet unused skill
- ◆ Self-Accountability: which requires taking responsibility for choices we make
- ◆ Self-Awareness and Awareness of Others: understanding our behavior in relationships and gaining empathy for our opponent. Rigidity is the enemy; breaking free of past survival mechanisms, one feeling at a time is key.
- ◆ Problem-Solving and Negotiating: resulting in strategies for collaborative success

Jim and Ron have integrated the use of a relationship profile into their program: the heavily researched Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO) theory. FIRO was created by Dr. Will Schutz for the U.S. Navy. Questions relate to our desires about interactions with others in contrast to one's actual behavior in relationships. They

inspire us to explore how we feel about including others in our lives; to what extent we include others; how we are included by others; our desires and feelings about influence and control compared to feeling influenced or controlled by others; our openness; feelings of competence and significance; and our comfort levels with closeness and social interaction.

Answers are meant to provide just a snapshot in time and circumstance. Scores provide clues to preferences versus rigidity of feelings and behavior. They show neither good nor bad. Community needs generals and privates, leaders and followers – we cannot all be in charge, first, or greatest in every realm. The way I see it, musicians and artists need an audience of appreciators.

Comments from admirers of the book and the optional workshop in which Ron or Jim teaches Radical Collaboration are plentiful and telling. For example:

"How do organizations mired in contentious and destructive debate come around to productive relationships? It requires Radical Collaboration," says Soledad O'Brien, CNN American Morning.

William Hobgood, former Assistant Secretary of Labor comments, "Effective relationships aren't created by magic, they take skill and effort... The ideas and tools [of Radical Collaboration] can make a powerful difference in any relationship."

Michael Rossiter, Vice President of Chubb, PLC, says, "Tamm and Luyet are experienced guides and have provided us with the tools and roadmap to skillfully navigate our interior landscapes and create successful collaborative outcomes."

In summary, Jim and Ron caution Radical Collaboration provides tools, but it is ultimately our job to change our lives. We are the CEO of our own redevelopment project. Jim and Ron advocate 15 actions to take today to improve your ability to be in successful relationships:

- ◆ Tell the truth
- ◆ Realize that you choose
- ◆ Seek deeper self awareness
- ◆ Respond emotionally
- ◆ Give up blame and postpone judgment
- ◆ Seek not to consciously hurt others
- ◆ Take time to envision yourself as you want to be
- ◆ Consciously change your limiting beliefs
- ◆ Assert yourself
- ◆ Be as sincere and as vulnerable as possible
- ◆ Be in touch with your body and its wisdom

- ◆ Seek a higher meaning or purpose in your life
- ◆ Treat your personal growth with respect, excitement, and patience
- ◆ Give to give
- ◆ Laugh a little: Some things are much too important to be taken seriously.

Their last recommendation: Bring to mind the person with whom you have conflict. As you visualize him or her, coordinate the following with the inhale and exhale of your breath. "May you be free from suffering. May you be at peace."

I would add the additional recommendation that you repeat the blessings, replacing "you" with "I." "May I be free from suffering. May I be at peace." Namaste!

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