



[The Coward's Guide to Conflict](#)

By Tim Ursiny

★★★★☆ (4-1/2 stars)

Buy this book if:

- *You want some excellent tools for helping your clients (or yourself!) deal with conflict*
- *You want to help people understand what is going on in their conflict and change their behavior*

Tim Ursiny, a Christian and well-known corporate coach, unlocks some of the secrets of facing conflict in a healthy way in this practical guidebook. It's fun to read a book on conflict by someone who readily admits that he hates conflict, and has the stories to back it up. Probably the strongest facet of the book is the wealth of scenarios, coaching dialogues and personal stories used to bring these principles to life. For instance, one chapter introduces the idea of how people avoid telling you the unpleasant truth by recounting the story of how Ursiny and his wife were sprayed by a skunk while asleep at home, didn't realize it, and went to church the next day without anyone telling them how they smelled!

The real-life stories help you feel the tension of conflict in your gut and put you in touch with what is going on inside you in those situations. Once a concept has been presented and illustrated, each of the 24 brief chapters ends with a set of reflection exercises (often in the form of coaching questions) for applying that concept to your life. These exercises are directly applicable in coaching situations—they are exactly the kind of thing you'd have a client do to get a handle on how to respond to their own conflicts.

If you are reading the book for your own edification, keep in mind that you actually have to actually do the exercises to get the benefits (as coaches we ought to know this, but somehow it is easy to not apply it in our own lives!). No book has magic words that will suddenly make you a new person with no effort on your part.

In terms of content, the book has a number of tools I found quite helpful. One example is simply a description of the common strategies we use to deal with conflict:

- **Avoidance:** Don't even try to face the situation
- **Giving in:** Let the other person have their way even though you're mad about it
- **Passive-aggressiveness:** Hinting that you are upset with non-verbals and hoping the other person "gets it"
- **Bullying:** Doing whatever it takes to get your way
- **Compromise:** Each person gives up something to come to a joint conclusion

- **Problem-solving:** Finding a way for both people get what they want without giving up anything significant
- **Honor:** Giving the other person what they want because it pleases you to please them

The book also examines how fears develop, and how we reinforce fear by avoiding the situation. The more we avoid it, the more afraid we become. But this also suggests the solution: start with the types of responses that scare you least, walk them out and master them, and then move on to something a little bit bigger. Another helpful tool was the discussion in Chapter 13 of five different styles of listening: appreciative, empathetic, comprehensive, discerning, and evaluative. It spotlights different things the client may want and different things you are tuning into—a great tool for any coach. Another excellent resource is an assertiveness continuum in chapter 20. It helps you evaluate a potential response to a person with six different criteria in order to develop one that is most effective and appropriate.

Ursiny offers a “Truth Talk” approach (from cognitive therapy) to dealing with fears that some readers may not get into theologically. The idea is that the interpretation you put on past events is what shapes your emotional responses, more than the event itself. Therefore, changing the interpretation by generating statements that are both more true and more helpful (in the sense of creating healthy responses) can ultimately alter your emotional reactions. This idea others have talked about as UGB’s (UnGodly Beliefs), strongholds, or in Theophostic counseling.

The process Tim outlines is a helpful one in getting beyond the pure emotional response (“I can’t face this”) to generating some positive steps, which makes it an excellent tool for coaching situations. The thing that gives me pause is that purely rational, repetitive, self-generated processes in my experience may only be part of the solution. There is a place for God-encounters in this—emotional healing is real, and Jesus can step in in the right framework and give us a whole new mindset about the experiences we’ve had. However, the book is targeted at the marketplace Ursiny coaches in, so I’m certainly not going to fault him for leaving out the God-language.

Summary

An excellent book and well worth reading for all Christian coaches. If you find yourself working with clients who are struggling with how to handle conflict, have them get the book and make use of the exercises he provides.

Reviewed by:

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