Conflict and the Six-C Process

> *It is the start of a new workday. You are in your classroom, office, clinic, or other setting wondering what the day will be like. In particular, you are thinking about a specific student, colleague, client, parent, or other person who has become difficult for you to work with. As you think about it, you start to dread the appearance of this person. Today, you will be interacting with this person. You reflect on the conflict at hand and search within yourself for the best way to handle the situation.*

Does this scenario have a familiar ring for you? To handle difficult situations such as this, many people depend on what has worked for them in the past. Others rely on luck, habit, or the ability to muddle through. This opening chapter provides a theory of practice for a specific approach to handling conflict that we call the Six-C Process. Without this theoretical foundation, the "how to" value of the Six-C Process would be misunderstood and severely limited.

INTRODUCTION

Disagreements are like fast cars. They can go from 0 to 100 mph in seconds. The same is true of human encounters. A minor difference can explode into a major conflict. These explosive encounters

take place among families, communities, and nations. The purpose of this book is to offer a straightforward, ethical, measured, and effective way to understand and defuse difficult situations before explosions occur. And if they do occur, this book describes how to repair the damage and heal the wounds.

The Six-C Process focuses on six distinct and progressively more assertive levels for handling challenging situations. The Six Cs of the process represent six levels of functioning:

Concern (identifying latent and actionable concerns)

Confer (using nonthreatening signal systems to express a concern)

Consult (reviewing the situation collaboratively)

Confront (considering and giving clear warning of sanctions)

Combat (taking sustained action with logical consequences)

Conciliation (mending the wounds of combat)

Each of the Six C concepts has its own body of research and literature. The contribution of this book is that it combines and extends these concepts into a unique structure for handling challenging situations.

Your strategy in using the Six-C Process is to conserve your energy and time at the lowest level of action—*concern.* If that level fails to address the initial issue, you move upward through the higher levels (subsequent Cs) only as necessary until you reach the fifth C, *combat.* After you have concluded with combat, the final C, conciliate, is a highly valued level, one that is also valuable at the five previous levels.

As you move from simple processes to complex ones in seeking solutions, you do not abandon the less complex ones. Just because you have an algebra problem, you do not abandon basic arithmetic. All mathematical systems maintain their value and usefulness. In using the Six Cs, as you ratchet up from concern to confer, to consult, to confront, to combat, you continue to use all related processes as you become ever more direct and assertive in addressing your concern.

The Six-C Process offers a way to navigate through difficult situations in a democratic and respectful manner while conserving time and energy. By applying the philosophy and strategies of the Six-C Process, you will be in better position to act caringly and

effectively in handling conflicts within your family, friendships, work, and the larger community.

While every concern has its own unique quality and flavor, the Six-C Process aims to find a desirable end for every potential conflict one might imagine, large and small, personal and professional. This includes potentially dangerous situations, which we will address in Chapters 5 and 6. Of course, many concerns and difficult situations cannot be defused, altered, solved, or molded into a satisfactory conclusion. This book is limited to troublesome human concerns where it is possible that you can obtain a desirable outcome.

RESEARCH AND ANECDOTAL SUPPORT

The Six-C Process is a relatively new model for handling conflict. Several disciplines have published research that underpins this model. For example, support comes from studies regarding the effectiveness of helping and communication skills (Egan, 2002), appropriate confrontation (Burgess & Burgess, 1996, 1997), educational leadership (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991; Fisher, 2005; Ury, 2008), and difficult school environments (Purkey & Powell, 2005).

In addition, there is a growing body of anecdotal support for its usefulness, including responding to school violence (Ratledge, 2008), school discipline (Tom Carr, personal communication, July 8, 2009), and community reconciliation in Northern Ireland (William Tate, personal communication, July 20, 2009). Carr's study is instructive. His application of the Six-C Process involved teaching all students in grades three through five in an elementary school how to use the approach. The teaching included giving each child a quality plastic card listing and describing the six levels of functioning. Teachers, principal, and students reported a significant positive improvement in school relationships. Significantly, fewer students visited the counseling office with peer problems.

Other authorities have endorsed approaches that encourage systematic and measured responses to conflict situations. For example, Gladwell (2008) provided a graphic example of the importance of graduated levels of action in addressing troublesome situations. He pointed out the advantages and disadvantages of mitigated speech, which is downplaying or sugarcoating the meaning of what you are trying to communicate. You mitigate when you are overly mindful of feelings. In many situations, mitigation is entirely appropriate. In others, it can be deadly.

According to Gladwell, every airline throughout the world has a special program to teach junior crewmembers how to communicate clearly and assertively. For example, a copilot might begin with an expressed concern. "Captain, I'm concerned about . . ." If nothing happens, the copilot might move up a level and state, "Captain, I'm uncomfortable with . . ." If the captain still does not respond, the copilot confronts the pilot with, "Captain, I believe this situation is unsafe." If the confrontation does not work, the copilot is required to take command of the aircraft. As Gladwell emphasized, being deferential and polite are appropriate in most situations, but mitigation has no place in a cockpit on a stormy night, in a classroom when a disruptive student is endangering self or others, or in a mental-health clinic where a client is threatening harm.

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THIS BOOK?

Our approach differs significantly from others described in books on conflict management and conflict resolution in four significant ways.

1. The approach is anchored in democratic values.

2. It follows the perceptual tradition of understanding behavior from another individual's point of view.

3. It provides a straightforward, easy-to-follow formula for handling challenges, large and small, personal and professional.

4. It goes beyond managing or resolving conflicts by introducing the vital quality of conciliation.

Simply managing or resolving conflicts is insufficient. Moving to restore and enrich relationships is a significant action to take after a conflict has been resolved.

At the beginning, we want to emphasize that no method, skills, or process can guarantee a desirable outcome. Conflicts come in myriad forms, large and small, personal and professional. Many may be nearly impossible to ameliorate. Nevertheless, if you have a plan of action you have a decided advantage over the one who does not. Even if the ultimate result is unsuccessful, at least you know what went wrong. Without a plan, such as the Six-C Process, you are left with the guesswork of trial and error.
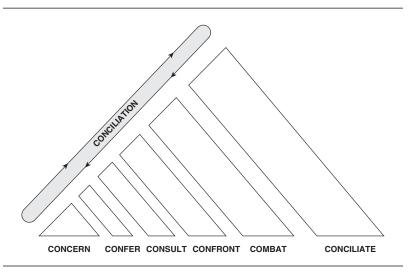
THE SIX-C PROCESS

The Six-C Process offers both a principled philosophy and a practical strategy for addressing challenging situations in all areas and all levels of human behavior. It offers both an overarching strategy and specific tactics for addressing challenging situations in myriad areas of human endeavor. We base this process on proper concern and respect for the dignity and worth of everyone involved.

THE CONCILIATION CAPSTONE

Conciliation is a condition infused in each of the preceding levels of the approach. As such, conciliation is a necessary ingredient at each level of the process. Diagram 1.1 illustrates the Six-C Process.

Diagram 1.1   Six-C Process

CONCILIATION

CONCERN   CONFER   CONSULT CONFRONT   COMBAT   CONCILIATE

Key Point 1.1

Simply managing or resolving conflicts is insufficient. The Six-C
Process is a way of relating to oneself, others, and
the world in trusting and caring ways.

As you can see in Diagram 1.1, conciliation is the capstone of the Six-C Process. It is the sixth and essential level of the process because simply resolving a conflict is unlikely to be sufficient or satisfactory. The process assumes that it is vital to bring opposing ideas and antagonistic forces together. By working through *conciliation,* therefore, you seek to restore relationships possibly damaged by earlier efforts to resolve a concern. If not properly addressed using conciliatory processes, particular situations can extend far beyond their original conflicts. It is common to hear of unending family arguments, regional and national antagonisms, and deadly feuds, where hostilities continue long after people forget the original source of the conflict. Through conciliatory action, you rely on good will to minimize the risk of forgetfulness and reduce the residue of hatred and anger. An illustration of how hatred and anger can fester after a situation is resolved is provided by the actions of one factory owner.

> *The owner was involved in an ongoing conflict with his 300 employees. It finally reached the point where the employees took the owner to court. The legal system ruled against the owner and closed the case. However, before the company mailed the December salary checks to its 300 employees, the owner took a pen and angrily scratched out the message, "Happy Holidays & Best Wishes," embossed on each of the checks.*

The Six-C Process may appear too simple when compared with the myriad complexities of human conflict. However, simplicity involves cutting through complexities to uncover fundamental dynamics. The Six-C Process provides a valuable mnemonic device for understanding and addressing very complex circumstances. You can mentally process each of the Six Cs when handling specific conflicts. By doing so, you evaluate and reflect on each level to determine its effectiveness in reaching a solution. Your goal is to capture the simplicity of the process, which often exists on the other side of complexity.

SAVING TIME AND ENERGY

In moving from concern through conciliation, you want to be as *economical* as possible. In other words, avoid multiplying a potential

problem unnecessarily. This does not mean that a simple explanation is always the best. It means the simplest course of action is often the most useful in addressing given circumstances and moving toward conciliation. For example, if your television set is not working, check to see if you have plugged it in before hauling it to a technician for repairs. Applying this maxim to conflict means, everything else being equal, you choose the level in working through conflict that carries the least baggage and seeks to move on amicably. In other words, don't try to kill a fly with a sledgehammer.

In any situation of possible concern, major or minor, personal or professional, where there is the possibility of conflict, the first thing to ask yourself is, "How can I successfully address this situation at the lowest possible level using the least amount of time and energy?" Take for example, the following exchange.

> *Science teacher says to the chemistry class, "Some students are not cleaning up their lab stations."*
>
> *Student replies, "Why don't you tell those students who are messy instead of blaming all of us?"*

If you were the teacher in this instance, how would you perceive the challenge from the student? What would be your response to handle the situation at the lowest possible level with the least amount of energy? Consider these two responses.

> *Science teacher says, "Thank you, (student's name). You make a good point, and I will take the action you suggest. At the same time, it may be useful for all students to hear my concern about keeping the lab clean."*
>
> *Or, the science teacher says, "Listen, I said 'some students.' Just make sure you clean up after yourself."*

Anyone can escalate a minor concern into a major conflict. A prime example of how easy it is to go from concern to combat is provided in the following scenario.

> *A spouse of one of the authors had a concern about a new rug she purchased because it had a toxic odor after the installation. She asked the company representative to visit her home and see what could be done about the smell. The spouse's daughter was visiting when the company representative arrived. He sniffed the rug and said that the odor was normal and nothing could be done. The daughter declared, "Well, we will stop payment on the carpet!" To which the representative responded, "In that case, we'll see you in court!" In a heartbeat, the rug situation had escalated from concern to combat.*

It takes special effort and desire to navigate a potential conflict effectively, efficiently, and democratically.

CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE

Conflict is inevitable because people have different wants, strategies, interests, styles, and viewpoints. It is difficult to imagine that any type of social or behavioral change could occur without some degree of conflict. According to Fullan (2001), the absence of conflict can be a sign of death. He maintains that an appreciation of the values of resistance is a remarkable discovery in a culture of constant change. Accepting this notion—that conflict is bound to happen—you will be better able to stay ahead of the conflicts in your personal life and at work.

Conflict can be beneficial. It often serves as an opportunity to enhance relationships, learn useful information, alter perceptions, and create new personal and professional directions. Handled within a particular framework, conflict can provide relatively limitless opportunities for growth. According to Forni (2008), this is particularly true if you measure success in terms of how you want things to be rather than the degree to which you defeat other people and their ideas.

Teachers, administrators, counselors, and allied professionals face the need to resolve vexing conflicts, handle difficult situations, and maintain order the same as anyone else in society, particularly in light of the tumultuous and complex nature of today's schools. We also find similar complexity and challenges in other social agencies—medical facilities, mental health clinics, and social welfare services, to name a few.

In your role as an educator or helping professional, there is no way to avoid taxing, frustrating, and even dangerous situations. You can expect to encounter stubborn students, angry parents, reluctant clients, difficult colleagues, and indifferent strangers. Regardless of the challenges, society and your profession hold you to a high standard and expect you to be a beneficial presence in the lives of students, clients, and others.

Education, if it lives up to its name, is about appreciating, understanding, and improving the human condition. Educators, if they live up to their name, model an educative approach to life. Therefore, educational modeling is especially important in situations in which perceived conflict is often difficult, disruptive, and dreaded. Such modeling applies to all of the helping professions.

Key Point 1.2

Conflict often serves as an opportunity to enhance relationships, learn useful information, alter perceptions, and create new personal and professional directions. Handled within a particular framework, conflict can provide relatively limitless opportunities for conciliation.

THE USE AND MISUSE OF POWER

Power is usually defined as the possession of control, authority, or influence over others. We use the term to suggest the ability to significantly change a situation. Power comes in myriad forms. A teacher has the power to pass or fail a student. A school superintendent has the power to hire and fire teachers. A staff member has the power to file a grievance. A parent has the power to discipline a child. A school board has the power to appoint a new principal. The public has the power to vote school board members in or out of office. A student has the power to report a teacher's misbehavior. The list is endless. However, the use of power is a double-edged sword, meaning that its use can have both favorable and unfavorable consequences.

Sometimes, you might be tempted to resolve a concern by using some form of power (physical, economic, position, dependence, withholding information and knowledge, etc.), but the use

of indiscriminant power is seldom as effective or efficient as you would think. The energy you expend to exert power often does not equal the results you hope to achieve. When applying the Six-C Process, consider and recognize the types of power you have in your personal and professional life as they relate to expressing and handling your concerns.

No one is without power. Some people, such as students, may not have as much power as you, but it is dangerous to assume that they are powerless. Often, they can exert a great counterpower. Even the most timid and insecure person has power, which he or she can often use in subtly belligerent ways to impede or diminish the power you attempt to exercise. For example, silence from an insolent student can be frustrating to a teacher who is demanding a response. Some dictatorial and aggressive teachers have gotten into serious trouble when they forgot that students have infinite ways of making their lives miserable. Some of these ways are described in the book, *Teaching Class Clowns (and What They Can Teach Us)* (Purkey, 2006).

An illustration of how the use of power can backfire is the story of a school principal who wanted to dismiss the school custodian.

> *The principal knew that without proper cause and due process, he could not fire the custodian. One morning, the principal looked out his office window and spotted the custodian, sound asleep on a bench. The principal quickly filed the necessary charges to fire the apparently lazy custodian. When the school board reviewed the charge of sleeping on the job, it discovered that the custodian was sleeping because he had volunteered to work the night before to clean up after a broken water pipe had flooded the basement of a neighboring school. Although the school board did not condone the custodian's behavior of sleeping on the job, it understood the situation and did not fire him. In fact, they commended the custodian's willingness to go beyond the call of duty in helping a neighboring school. The Board also expressed displeasure with the principal's hasty action in trying to fire the custodian without an investigation of the entire situation.*

If you only use power when addressing conflicts, you can never be certain how much to assert in a given situation. More importantly, using sheer force is contrary to the democratic ideals and strategies that guide the Six-C Process. These ideals and strategies follow a conviction that all people are valuable, able, and responsible, and they

should be active participants regarding issues that affect their lives (Novak, 2002; Purkey & Novak, 1996). The use of indiscriminant power increases the risk of damaging any relationship. It also has the sinister quality of not knowing where the use of force might lead, particularly when dealing with strangers.

Bowen (in press), Bowen and Mohr (2009), and others investigated the use of coercion in psychiatric settings. They concluded that coercion is an unacceptable part of the health care milieu insofar as it diminishes the dignity of the person being coerced, elicits retaliation, and when initially effective in gaining expected power, results in further coercion on the part of the caregiver. With the above caveat, we now present two theoretical foundations of the Six-C Process—the democratic ideal and the perceptual tradition.

Key Point 1.3

Using sheer force conflicts with democratic ideals and strategies. The use of power increases the risk of damaging any relationship.

THE DEMOCRATIC IDEAL

As with any behavioral strategy, some people might use the Six-C Process to manipulate situations solely for their own benefit. Of course, that is not the intention. The Six-C Process works best when applied within a democratic system that respects and values all people involved in the relationship.

In moving from conflict through conciliation, the Six-C Process adheres to a democratic ideal. An ideal represents something of value that is worthy of pursuit. As active forces, democratic ideals encourage you to move along an ethical path from *what is* to *what might be* to *what should be* to *what will be* (see Diagram 1.2). There is a built-in advantage in pursuing a principled and democratic concern rather than an undemocratic and unprincipled one. Without democratic ideals, people merely maintain the status quo, pushed by external stimuli and pulled by inner impulses, wondering at times, "Is this all that there is?"

Diagram 1.2

What is
↓
What might be
↓
What should be
↓
What will be

Acting without democratic ideals and instead favoring auto-cratic tactics, people may attempt to resolve conflicts without regard for the dignity of the people involved and the fairness of the situation. Democratic ideals serve as personal and professional guides that give a sense of beneficial purpose and respectful direction to day-to-day living. They also exclaim that everyone in the process has worth—everyone matters.

Key Point 1.4

As active forces, democratic ideals encourage you to move along an ethical path from *what is* to *what might be* to *what should be* to *what will be.*

WHY EVERYONE MATTERS

A democratic philosophy includes an ethical commitment to the proposition that all people matter and can participate meaning-fully in the rules and institutions that direct their lives. In schools, for example, this means that students, teachers, and others have a significant voice in determining the policies that govern their behavior. Sometimes, teachers and principals give lectures to students on "our" rules when students have not had any input on the formation of these policies. We might say the same about teachers who have had little or no say in developing their school's faculty manual.

To say that everyone matters is to include those who society traditionally ignores—the poor, the powerless, the unsuccessful, and those different from the majority. This means that students, clients, adult caregivers, and others who dress differently, speak differently, and act differently all matter.

Acting consistently with the democratic ideal in mind is eas-ier said than done. Nevertheless, acting intentionally to put this ideal into practice summons others to embrace it. This ideal is particularly important in celebrating diversity. We all like to know there are patterns we can rely on, and we all may experi-ence discomfort with the unfamiliar. As a friend noted, "One

sign of maturity is the ability to be comfortable with people who are different."

To the degree that you embrace and apply democratic principles, you will be consistent in how you use the Six-C Process. The democratic ideal says that the Six-C Process is more than simply a tactic, an efficacious way of responding to conflict. Rather, it is an educationally defensible way of working with a broad range of people to resolve countless issues.

Key Point 1.5

A democratic philosophy includes an ethical commitment to the proposition that all people matter and can participate meaningfully in the rules and institutions that direct their lives.

Equally important for educators and related professionals is the insight that democracy is the preferred ideal because, as John Dewey (1916) noted, it is the most *educative* form of governance. Learning how to deal with conflict through education and without violence provides opportunities for personal growth and social stability. In contrast, attempting to teach democratic values in a dictatorial and totalitarian environment is counterintuitive and counterproductive. An ironic example might be the few uninformed school systems that continue to allow corporal punishment despite volumes of educational research that declare its ineffectiveness. Such irony is illustrated by a misguided principal who paddles an erring student while proclaiming, "This will teach you not to go around hitting other people."

Accepting democracy as a guiding ideal and an educative course is essential to intentionally applying the Six-C Process and resolving conflict in respectful, trustworthy, and optimistic ways. An important step in accepting the democratic ideal is your understanding and appreciation of the significance that people's perspective and point of view bring to any given situation. How people see the same event is often quite different, and the degree to which you accept these varying viewpoints will help determine your ability to deal with conflict.

THE PERCEPTUAL TRADITION

The Six-C Process is based on the perceptual tradition. This tradition seeks to understand humans from an internal frame of reference. In other words, what do things look like from the person's point of view? The tradition was developed in the 20th century by perceptually oriented researchers such as Jourard (1964) with self-disclosure, Maslow (1968) with self-actualization, Rogers (1951, 1980) with person-centered therapy, and Combs and Snygg (1959) with a perceptual approach to understanding behavior.

Human behavior is a function of how, at a given moment, people view themselves, others, and situations—in the past, present, and future. An illustration of this phenomenon is the highly talented student artist who refuses to enter her paintings in an art competition. Her self-image of "not being talented enough" prevents her from taking the chance of losing the competition. By not entering, she cannot lose, and more important, others will not view her art as unworthy.

The Six-C Process encourages understanding of human motivation from an internal viewpoint. Put simply, behavior is a result of each person's unique perceptions. This understanding of human behavior is different from the more commonly held point of view that it is more accurate to interpret behavior from an external perspective. Examine the following exchanges and determine which seem to take an external view or internal view of behavior. See if you agree with our responses in parentheses.

Parent to parent: "Children from homes like that don't try very hard in school." (external)

Teacher to class: "If you get all this work done, you will get a special treat." (external)

Student to teacher: "I would do better work if you were not so mean to me." (external)

Client to counselor: "All my problems are rooted in my father's indifference." (external)

Teacher to counselor: "What might she have been feeling to do something like that?" (internal)

Parent to teacher: "Our family is faced with many difficulties, yet we can help our children do better in school." (internal)

Teacher to principal: "What might our curriculum look like to that student?" (internal)

An internal view of human motivation says that motivation is a given. There is only one kind of motivation—an internal and continuous incentive that every person has all the time, in all places, during all activities (Combs, Avila, & Purkey, 1978). For example, students may not do what parents and teachers would like them to do, but this does not mean that students are unmotivated. They are simply doing, from their point of view at a moment of action, the best and safest thing they can do. Consider the following illustration.

> A teacher who hides behind an air of indifference about rigorous lesson planning, even to the point of failing to prepare adequate lessons, is doing the best and safest thing to maintain self-worth from that teacher's point of view—"It is better not to prepare than it is to be prepared and still be an ineffective teacher." From an internal perspective, the teacher is behaving in ways that are the best and safest at this particular time.

This theory of behavioral development is important when applying the Six-C Process.

When moving through the Six Cs, you want to resolve conflicts in ways that allow people to protect their self-worth. If you accept this assumption, you can shift your energy away from a "doing to" process of trying to motivate students, clients, or others toward a "doing with" process of summoning students and others to monitor and alter their internal dialogue and choose beneficial actions (Purkey, 2000; Purkey & Schmidt, 1996; Schmidt, 2002).

Explore the following exchanges and identify the "doing to" versus "doing with" relationships. See if you agree with our analyses in parentheses.

Counselor to client: "These are the strategies I have chosen that will work best to cure your inappropriate behavior." (doing to)

Parent to child:	"I'll carry your glass to the table, because you will spill the milk." (doing to)
Teacher to student:	"If we put our heads together, we will come up with ideas to help make math less of a drag and more fun." (doing with)
Administrator to faculty:	"What we need are creative ideas to address this conflict. Let's be open to innovative suggestions—even the most unusual notions might have merit!" (doing with)

Most relationships are successful when people work to share and understand each other's perceptions. Shared perceptions alone do not necessarily lead to conciliation of a conflict. However, by sharing and understanding different perspectives, you place yourself in a stronger position to bridge differences that invariably exist. Considering the perceptual world of the other person is more than courtesy and respect, it is necessary for meaningful communication—a key component of the Six-C Process.

Key Point 1.6

From an internal perspective, you and others behave in ways that are the best and safest at the particular moment.

WHEN VIEWPOINTS COLLIDE

During a conflict, people frequently fail to understand the various viewpoints involved. Consequently, what begins as a minor disagreement escalates into something more. Emotional investment, material loss or gain, self-preservation, or other human conditions might seem to explain this lack of understanding, but at the core, it is the inability or unwillingness to accept and understand how others view the situation that prevents positive movement and growth. For example, a student wears his baseball cap in the classroom. The teacher views the cap as a sign of disrespect. The

student sees the cap as simply a part of his clothing—it *completes* his outfit. In a rapidly changing pluralistic world, culturally responsible education is essential. Deciding how to act on such issues requires your respectful thought and action, including an understanding of the other person's perspective.

The Six-C Process proposes that to move from conflict to conciliation it is essential for you to understand the meaningfulness of various viewpoints. With such understanding, you place yourself in a stronger position to *accept* the perceptions of those you intend to teach, assist, or lead. It also helps you distinguish between acceptance and agreement.
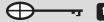
ACCEPTANCE VERSUS AGREEMENT

Acceptance of another's perspective does not mean agreement with that point of view. It does mean, however, that you recognize and acknowledge a person's viewpoint. Maintaining your own belief system while acknowledging and accepting the existence of another point of view takes thoughtful reflection. Such reflection allows different perspectives to coexist in harmony to achieve a greater goal.

Sometimes in the heat of a battle, we interpret conflicting behaviors and perceptions of others as "illogical," "irrational," "selfish," "wrong-headed," "disrespectful," or "insulting." Such interpretations do little to demonstrate understanding of the power of human perception. Within the internal view of human motivation, illogical behavior does not exist. This is because people always behave in ways that make the most sense to them in a given situation at the moment of their acting. Their inner logic helps preserve the belief system they hold about themselves and the world around them. Therefore, an external assessment of another person's "irresponsible," "self-defeating," or "destructive" behavior during a conflict, in and of itself, is unlikely to facilitate your resolution of the situation and movement toward conciliation. Such assessments also elicit unnecessary and unproductive arguments.

Arguing is often counterproductive. "You are wrong" can be perceived as "You are wrong, you dumb jackass." As Forni (2008) pointed out, arguing is not a smart use of time and energy. Arguments tend to escalate conflicts, encourage defensiveness, reduce flexibility, and can harm relationships.

> ### Key Point 1.7
>
> To move from conflict to conciliation, it is essential to understand the
> meaningfulness of various viewpoints. With such understanding,
> you place yourself in a stronger position to *accept* the
> perceptions of those you intend to teach, assist, or lead.

In conflicts, it is especially important for you to maintain a high level of interest in and respect for each person in the process. This can be challenging, particularly in the most difficult situations. By being an active listener, you demonstrate genuine interest for the other person. Consider the following examples.

- *A colleague struggling to manage his class says, "These students are so unruly; it doesn't seem worth my energy to prepare lesson plans." You might respond, "Managing class behavior is challenging. Are you saying that the lesson plans you develop are not helping to keep your students engaged and attentive?"*
- *A client trying to overcome a particular anxiety reports to the counselor, "If I try not to think about spiders in my house as you suggested, I'll probably become anxious about something else." The counselor might reply, "Yes, there are many things in life to worry about. Together, we can address your arachnophobia, or we can focus on other worries. What do you think?"*
- *The school principal says, "The teachers most worthy of my assistance have the desire to improve. Whereas it seems like I am running up against a brick wall with teachers that don't care." A supervisor might answer, "I agree that teachers offer a range of ability and desire. That is what challenges you as their principal. What might be the outcome if you worked only with those who have the most potential for change?"*

These examples offer a brief opportunity to consider how the use of active listening might remedy conflicts. You can see that implicit in each example are perceptions that color the situation. Perhaps you can think of better responses than those in the examples. How you respond to words spoken as well as the implied perceptions behind them will determine your success in handling difficult situations.

You can see from the examples above that moving from conflict to conciliation is facilitated by some knowledge of basic helping skills. Listening and other helpful behaviors that communicate acceptance, empathy, and commitment by all involved in conflict situations are great assets to the process. Because the focus of this book prevents a detailed explanation of helping skills, we encourage you to explore books on professional counseling. Texts by Egan (2002), Gross and Capuzzi (2007), Kottler (2008), Meier and Davis (1993), Purkey and Schmidt (1996), and Schmidt (2002) are examples that provide detailed explanations of helping skills.

Before moving to the next chapters that describe each of the Six Cs, a cautionary note is appropriate. We intend the Six-C Process for people who are essentially healthy functioning individuals, free of psychopathology and other serious, incapacitating dysfunction. Therefore, the Six-C Process is an optimistic approach balanced by a realistic perspective. It does not replace appropriate psychological, medical, or other interventions designed to handle serious cases of dysfunctional human relationships.

Key Point 1.8

It is especially important to maintain a high level of interest and respect for each person in the process. This can be challenging, particularly in the most difficult situations.

SUMMARY

This opening chapter presented an introduction to the Six-C Process and its foundations, the democratic ideal, and the perceptual tradition. The democratic ideal described democracy as a function of education and collaboration. In a democracy, everyone matters.

The perceptual tradition maintains that what a person believes to be true about self and others is as important as how he or she behaves. Of particular importance is the relationship between perceptions and conflict. In applying the Six-C Process, you increase your chances of success to the extent that you understand this relationship.

Each of the following chapters addresses and explores one of the six powerful Cs in turn (concern, confer, consult, confront, combat, and conciliate). Effective actions involved with each level are presented, beginning with the first level, *concern.*

Major Themes

- Conflict is an inevitable and inescapable part of life. How you perceive the personal and professional conflicts that you encounter, and the skills with which you deal with these situations, will enhance your chances to achieve a desirable outcome.
- The Six-C Process is a practical structure for moving from concern through conciliation. A principal belief of the Six-C Process is that you will be most successful in dealing with conflict when you begin at the lowest level of intervention and move upward only as necessary.
- A disposition for genuine and effective communication that conveys interest in and respect for other people helps you deal with conflict. How you listen, empathize, and respond to others is fundamental in using the Six-C Process.