

The  
**Third**  
Side

Why We Fight and  
How We Can Stop

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## Chapter 5

# PREVENT

## Provider, Teacher, Bridge-Builder

*Confront the difficult while it is still easy; accomplish  
the great task by a series of small acts.*

—Lao Tzu



**"**The greatest lesson my father taught me," the Bushman elder Korakoradue told me, "was, 'Never cause a problem, so that it won't have to be settled. Try to live in harmony.' "

Every day in such horizontal societies becomes an exercise in prevention.

We are learning in our modern societies that prevention is the best cure when it comes to fighting disease. The best way to deal with heart attacks, for example, better than the most sophisticated bypass operations, is to prevent them through good nutrition, regular exercise, and medication. As the Bushmen demonstrate, the priority of prevention holds in the arena of destructive conflict too.

Prevention in vertically organized societies generally entails suppression of conflict. In horizontally organized societies, however, suppression is neither feasible nor desirable. Prevention means addressing the root causes of conflict and laying the foundation for the cooperative management of differences.

## Needs, Skills, and Relationships

Conflict usually arises in the first place from frustrated *needs*. This helps explain why the Bushmen go to such lengths to share food and other resources. Anthropologist Lorna Marshall once studied what happens when Bushman hunters come back to camp with an eland, a large antelope. To her amazement, the eland was divided, in successive waves of gifts to kin and friends, at least sixty-three times *before* it was even cooked, after which the meat was distributed widely yet again. In a Bushman camp no one is allowed to go hungry. The idea of eating alone and not sharing shocks them. "Lions could do that," they say, "but not human beings!" Sharing helps everyone meet their basic needs, thus preventing conflict.

Tensions over conflicting needs can easily escalate when people lack the proper *skills* or attitudes to defuse them. The Bushmen, therefore, carefully teach their children to control their tempers and refrain from violence. Children learn to tolerate and respect others, and to avoid giving offense. They are also taught to share what they have. When two little girls were quarreling over a blanket, Purana, an elder I interviewed, explained how he told the one with the blanket that "she is very lucky that Bise [the good god] gave it to her and, to show her happiness, she should share the blanket with her friend." He was teaching them how to find ways in which both could "win."

Children learn mainly from watching what adults do. The adults place great value on talking as a way to handle problems; indeed, the Bushmen call themselves "the people who talk too much." Go into a Bushman camp and you will hear the steady stream of chatter and joking. The sounds of human voices seem to rise from the very desert, from the early hours of the morning to the late hours of the evening. The constant talk lets people know how everyone is feeling and whether any frictions need to be smoothed or problems hashed out. Listeners continually respond to people's stories, often echoing what they hear. In effect, they are practicing what modern psychologists call "active listening," a technique to defuse negative emotions. Humor

and fits of laughter punctuate the talk. People continually express and release their emotions, thus preventing tensions from building.

Good *relationships* are key to preventing conflict. A web of emotional and economic ties among the Bushmen fosters mutual understanding, trust, and clear communication. Through constant visits and the exchange of gifts, they nurture their relationships in other bands as well as in their own. As one !Kung Bushman described the gift-giving custom to anthropologist Richard Lee, "*Hxaro* is when I take a thing of value and give it to you. Later, much later, when you find some good thing, you give it back to me. When I find something good, I will give it to you, and so we will pass the years together." Marshall reported that the necklaces of cowrie shells she gave as parting gifts in 1951 had, by her return the following year, showed up as single shells on people's necklaces throughout a vast region. Such gift-giving cultivates and maintains amicable relationships and reduces envy and friction.

Our aim in modern societies should not be to copy the Bushmen; their circumstances differ greatly from ours and their efforts, in any case, often fall short of perfection. Our challenge rather is to learn to embed prevention in the fabric of normal life as they do. Taking a cue from them, we can enable others to meet their basic *needs*, give them the *skills* to handle disputes, and help them forge *relationships* across lines of conflict. These constitute the three main preventive roles of the third side: the Provider, the Teacher, and the Bridge-Builder.

| WHY CONFLICT ESCALATES |   | WAYS TO PREVENT CONFLICT |
|------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Frustrated needs       | → | 1. The Provider          |
| Poor skills            | → | 2. The Teacher           |
| Weak relationships     | → | 3. The Bridge-Builder    |



## 1. THE PROVIDER

ENABLING PEOPLE TO MEET THEIR NEEDS

"I've got to check in on America's worst nightmare," announced the Reverend Eugene Rivers. "Ten-year-old kid. His daddy was shot through the head. His mama's got 'chemical' issues. He's a ringleader. You can just see it. He's been getting into trouble—they already caught him with a knife. He'll be packing a Glock before long, unless someone gets to him."

"Hey, Money," Rivers told the boy in a meeting arranged in the school library. "You know what I'm doing here? I'm gonna keep you outta jail." The boy stared at him without expression. "What do you like to do?" Rivers asked. "You like the movies?" Kareem nodded. "What do you want to see?"

Kareem finally spoke. "*Anaconda*," he mumbled.

"Tell you what," Rivers said. "I'll take you to see *Anaconda* if you can stay out of trouble between now and Friday. You know what I'm saying? No more knives. I'm gonna wring your monkey butt, I catch you with a knife."

"I didn't have no knife," he said.

"Oh, yes, you did," Rivers said. "Now I'm gonna be checking up on you. I'm gonna come round your house, talk to your mother after school. Where are you gonna be?"

"Home."

"Home, what?"

"Home, sir."

"Give me five," Rivers said, and Kareem dutifully held out his palm for a slap. "All right! You're the *man!*" Rivers said, standing. Kareem also stood, and the Reverend hugged him close. "You know that I love you, right?" Kareem smiled nervously. "We're gonna keep you out of jail. Go on back to school now. All right? *Oh-kay.*"

Afterwards, Rivers said, "You see that smile? You see the way he lit up? See, he's doable. We can get him. But you got to do an intensive thing with him. He'll go for the love thing, 'cause he's never seen it from a black male before."

Whatever the surface issues in dispute, the underlying cause of conflict usually lies in the deprivation of basic human needs like love and respect. Frustration leads people to bully others, to use violence, and to grab someone else's things. If disputes resemble the matches that light the fire, the frustration of needs is like the flammable tinder.

The most basic human needs include food (and other necessities for living), safety, identity, and freedom. Each provides a form of security—economic, physical, cultural, and political. Put more simply, each person wants to feel well, safe, respected, and free. If we as thirdsiders can help address one or more of these four needs, as Rivers does with Kareem, we can avert much destructive conflict. The role of the Provider is thus fourfold: to share, to protect, to respect, and to free.

### Share Resources, Share Knowledge

“What happens if another group comes to hunt on your land?” I once asked a Semai tribesman.

“When other groups are hungry, we let them hunt on our land as if it were theirs,” he replied. “If someone in the other group goes hungry, the spirits of the forest will be unhappy and someone might fall sick and die, and we would then be responsible.”

The Semai perceive their world as an interdependent one in which the unmet needs of their neighbor will affect them personally. For them, enabling their neighbors to meet their basic needs is simple common sense.

When people feel that there is not enough to go around for everyone, fear and anxiety rise and fights may break out. Hungry people can scarcely be blamed for coveting the food of their well-fed neighbors. Not coincidentally, those societies that share their resources most equitably, such as the Semai or the Scandinavian nations, have relatively low rates of crime and violence. “*Lagom*” is a Swedish expression used when passing food or drink around the table, meaning “Take just enough so that there is enough for everyone.”

The Knowledge Revolution creates the possibility of sufficiency even in the poor parts of the world. If a hunter-gatherer group surviving in the wilderness will not let one member go hungry while others have food, surely a twenty-first-century world can do the same. Enough food exists for everyone and the cost of purchasing and distributing it would be a minuscule portion of what is spent on arms and armies. The same holds true when it comes to addressing any of the elementary material needs of human beings such as clean water, warm clothes, simple medical care, and shelter from the elements.

Just as important as sharing scarce resources is sharing knowledge, educating people so that they can meet their own needs. As the old adage goes, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Boston's success in reducing teenage violence stemmed in part from the community, business, and government working together to provide over ten thousand after-school jobs for teenagers at risk, along with educational programs and job training. Churches in Rio de Janeiro aim to do the same by educating poor young men for jobs other than selling drugs.

Jobs enable people to provide for their own needs. In one Fort Worth neighborhood, the crime rate fell by more than half after community activists helped local youth find employment at the airport and elsewhere. The community police officers assisted by distributing job applications. "This was a neighborhood where people wouldn't even talk to the police, and now they were flagging down patrol cars so that they could get a job application from them," reports community activist Deborah Hernandez.

Peace does not require great prosperity. Consider the little country of Costa Rica, not rich despite its name, but with a record of internal and external peace during the last half of the twentieth century that any of the rich nations might envy. The Costa Ricans achieved this record by eliminating their army and using their resources instead for health, education, and development. For many years, Costa Rica spent a larger percentage of its government budget on health than any other country in the world. It had the second highest education budget, proportionally, in the world. While expensive, these social



programs were credited with helping head off the immensely more costly social uprisings and revolutions that occurred in almost all of Costa Rica's neighbors in Central America.

### Protect

Medieval England had an estimated homicide rate of fifty per hundred thousand inhabitants. Today, England's rate is less than one twenty-fifth of that. One major reason is that people feel safe. Police are present. No one feels compelled, indeed no one is allowed, to carry a weapon. The community provides protection for everyone.

The same lesson is being learned at the international level. During the first half of the twentieth century, the nations of Europe engaged in arms buildups that inflamed fears, triggered arms races, and led to catastrophic wars. Nations sought to make themselves feel more secure by making others feel less secure—and it did not work. In the 1970s and 1980s, European nations began to learn to respect the security needs of others. To reduce fear and distrust, they agreed to exchange military observers and to notify neighbors before carrying out military exercises. No nation, they came to recognize, can feel truly secure unless its neighbors do too. True security lies in common security.

### Respect

The filmmaker Steven Spielberg tells the story of how, when he was thirteen, a fifteen-year-old bully at school made his life hell, beating him up and throwing stink bombs at him. So one day he approached the bully and said, "You know, I'm making a home movie about fighting the Nazis and I was wondering if you'd like to play the war hero." The bully laughed at him but a few days later came back and grudgingly agreed. Dressed up in fatigues with a helmet and backpack, he acted the role of hero in the movie. After that, Spiel-

berg says, the bully became his best friend. He had received the recognition and attention that had led him to bully in the first place.

Human beings have a host of emotional needs—for love and recognition, for belonging and identity, for purpose and meaning to their lives. If all these needs had to be subsumed in one word, it might be “respect.” People want to be recognized and respected for who they are.

The frustration of these needs creates conflict everywhere. In families, children competing for parental attention fight frequently. In the neighborhood, teenagers join gangs in order to feel a sense of belonging; they regularly kill each other because of a perceived lack of respect. In the workplace, the struggle for recognition and meaning can escalate, sometimes even into violent tragedy. “I enjoyed my job, I loved my job. That’s all I lived for, was to go to work,” Robert Earl Mack reflected mournfully after he, in a fit of uncontrolled anger, killed his former supervisor and a labor relations specialist for terminating his twenty-five years of service at General Dynamics.

Most of the wars in the world today revolve around identity and respect. As one Turkish Kurd exclaimed to me after describing the suppression of Kurdish language and culture in Turkey, “I want to be able to live like a Kurd, think like a Kurd, and act like a Kurd!” Disrespect for a group’s identity—and other basic needs—leads naturally enough to demands for a separate state that will address those needs, demands that in turn can trigger civil war.

By addressing young people’s needs for meaning and respect, we as parents, teachers, and community members can help avert violence. In over fifty American cities, midnight basketball leagues use the attraction of the game to draw youth off the dangerous streets to self-esteem workshops and job training for meaningful jobs. In Milwaukee, a midnight basketball program was credited with a thirty percent drop in teenage violence; young men preferred to shoot baskets rather than to shoot each other. Similarly, noting that the hours just after school are peak hours for youth crime, dozens of communities around the United States have organized “homework clubs” that offer young people the chance to engage in stimulating activities

after school. In one Florida town, for example, violent crime committed with guns dropped seventy percent in neighborhoods where homework programs operate.

In the workplace, too, the community can honor people's different identities. "We use the word 'inclusion' a lot," says Louis G. Lower, president of Allstate Insurance Company. "I just ask people to think back to times in their lives when they were excluded from something and to recall what emotions they felt. When I think back to those occasions in my own life, it's not something that creates a lot of energy. To us, diversity is bringing everyone into the house and making them feel that they belong and they're valued. It sounds basic and simplistic, but it's a big part of what diversity is for us." Without conscious efforts to respect people's differences, companies find it hard to attract and retain the best people. Respect pays off.

Providing respect also proves critical in reducing ethnic violence. In a world of more than six thousand intermixed ethnic groups, the solution cannot be a state for every ethnic group. Strong national cultures can survive without their own state—but only if the larger community respects their identity and their right to express it—as Catalans in Spain, Tamils in India, and Welsh in Great Britain can attest. When asked why his Bosnian city has enjoyed more ethnic tolerance than so many of its neighbors, Mayor Selim Beslagic explains, "In Tuzla, we have always given priority to respect for human dignity over belonging to a nation or an ethnic community."

The most striking image of mutual respect and appreciation comes from the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean with its rich mix of peoples, cultures, and religions—Africans, Indians, and Europeans, and Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. During the 1980s, in the kinds of economic hard times that have produced ethnic riots elsewhere, Mauritians succeeded in coexisting peacefully. The key, in the words of one leading citizen, was that "we consider each group, racial or religious, as a fruit—an apple, a pear, a mango. We don't want to make a marmalade where we mix up everything and have one marmalade with I don't know what taste. Instead we would like to have a fruit salad in which each one preserves its individual flavor and taste."

## Free

The need for autonomy, for exercising a measure of control over one's life, runs deep. Even small children want to be able to do things themselves without help from adults. Teenagers struggle to define their identity as separate from their parents. Indeed, many of the wars of the last two centuries have been fought to secure freedom—freedom from feudalism and absolute monarchy, freedom from the grip of colonial powers, freedom from right-wing or left-wing dictatorships, and freedom from the domination of other ethnic or religious groups.

Providing freedom can begin in the family when parents invite young children to make their own decisions whenever possible: "Would you like to wear this outfit or that one?" It can continue at work where companies are learning that getting the most out of their employees requires freeing them to make as many of their own decisions as possible. At Saturn Corporation, a General Motors subsidiary, the old assembly line gave way to self-managed teams that took responsibility for producing a quality car within a given budget. Employees participated in production decisions, pricing decisions, and even capital appropriation decisions. The destructive conflicts so characteristic of employer-employee relations in the car industry gave way to constructive collaboration, enabling the Saturn to become GM's only profitable small car at the time.

Providing freedom can prevent war too. In 1992, Tatarstan, a state in the middle of the Russian Federation, seemed like one of the most dangerous flashpoints in the world. After centuries of Russian domination, Tatars wanted their independence. Despite heavy-handed threats from Moscow, the Tatar leadership held a referendum on independence and sovereignty, which voters overwhelmingly approved. The conflict threatened to turn into a civil war; many feared it would trigger the disintegration of the nuclear-armed federation—with incalculable consequences. In the end, however, reason prevailed. "We were independent for a day," Tatarstan President Mintimer Shaimiev once explained to me. The day after the referendum, the

Tatar government went to work negotiating a treaty with the Russian Federation. Months of arduous and creative discussions produced an agreement granting substantial economic and political self-government to Tatarstan. Civil war was averted.

## Open Doors

As Providers, we may not necessarily be able to address others' needs directly. But we may be able to enable people to meet their own needs. Each of us can open doors to resources that others can use to help themselves.

Muhammad Yunus may not think of himself as engaged in prevention, but he is a champion Provider. In 1976, as a young economics professor in the famine-stricken nation of Bangladesh, he met a village woman making a bamboo chair. He asked her how much profit she earned and was astonished to learn that it was only two pennies a day. "Why?" he asked. She explained that she had no bamboo of her own and had to buy it from a trader, who required in return that she sell him the finished chair at the low price he set. Yunus asked how much she needed to be able to buy her own bamboo. "Thirty cents," she said. He loaned her the money and, several weeks later, returned to discover that she had become an entrepreneur with co-workers producing an entire line of chairs.

This experience led Yunus to found the Grameen Bank, which, since its founding in 1983, has provided credit, not aid, to more than two million poor people, mostly women, in tens of thousands of villages. The poor were not "creditworthy," skeptics argued; the loans would never be paid back. The borrowers of the Grameen Bank have proved the skeptics wrong; they have turned out to be far better credit risks than the rich, paying back on average ninety-seven percent of their loans. Now there are Grameen-like banks in over sixty countries, including the United States, enabling the poor to meet their needs with small loans.



## 2. THE TEACHER

### GIVING PEOPLE SKILLS TO HANDLE CONFLICT

“I don’t know how smart Heavy was,” says Michael Lewis, who taught him conflict resolution in a course given in a maximum-security prison. “He was just a moose of a guy who apparently had a very quick temper, and who in his earlier days had been very quick with his fists. Sometime after Heavy got the training, a fellow prisoner told us, ‘I can’t believe it. Yesterday Heavy got into an argument and I thought he was going to drop the sucker right in his tracks. Heavy just kept talking to him!’ The fellow prisoner was attributing it to the fact that Heavy had learned that he didn’t have to drop people in their tracks. He could talk to them and get something out of that.”

Sometimes people fight, like Heavy used to, simply because they know no other way to react when a need is frustrated and a serious difference arises. As a prospective husband in a relationship course put it, “The problem with most relationships is you don’t have a mechanism to solve the problem as you’re going. You know you want to resolve the problem but you don’t know how.” By helping people learn new values, perspectives, and skills, we as Teachers can show them a better way to deal with differences.

### Delegitimize Violence

The first step is to teach that violence solves nothing. The Bushmen, for instance, carefully teach their children about the enormous cost of violence, the pain it causes, and the risks it poses to the entire community. In the United States, by contrast, violence is all too commonly glorified as the manly response to a slight or dispute. The community can help change these attitudes, however:

Before he began his talk to a room full of teen-age boys, Michael Harrington asked three of them to hop about on one leg. He wanted the

boys to know what the last 25 years have been like for him. Harrington lost his right leg in the Vietnam war. When he returned home, Harrington told the hushed teen-agers, he would sometimes take his anger out on others. The only other sound in the room came from the clicking of Harrington's aluminum crutches. "Physical force has gotten me nowhere," he said. "Talking is the way. Negotiating is the way. Violence isn't."

The Veterans Education Project in Massachusetts deploys veterans of America's wars such as Harrington to schools around the state. By telling their stories about how violence has affected them personally, the veterans get teenagers to talk about the violence in their own lives. "We explain that once you learn to respond violently on the street, it's hard to go home and be a caring son, boyfriend, or father," says veteran Gordon Fletcher-Howell. "That really gets to them because these guys want to be good fathers. Most of them never had one."

In Houston, the Women's Center recruits young men from nearby Rice University and trains them to help high school boys think about the peer pressure that can lead to forced sex and gang rape. "What they teach is this kind of behavior is criminal—and real men don't put a seal of approval on it," explains Mitzi Vorachek, the center's director of community education.

The vital importance of such messages from the older to the younger is underscored by Tom Winstone, an Irish Protestant convicted of murdering two Catholics in 1974. After his release from prison, Winstone turned to helping Protestant youths stay away from violence: "When I was fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, I had no one to say, 'I went up a certain path; it didn't work; and it was wrong.'"

The power of delegitimizing violence should not be underestimated. Consider the history of dueling, for centuries an honorable, popular, and violent way of settling interpersonal disputes. Laws passed against dueling in many European countries failed to stop the entrenched practice. It required the force of community opinion, the third side, to bring dueling to an end. Dueling came to appear not heroic but slightly absurd and undignified. From something that

was “just done,” it became something that was “just not done.” If the practice of dueling fell victim to the ridicule of the third side, one wonders if the same fate could one day befall the institution of war.

### Teach Tolerance

The alternative to violence is tolerance. Tolerance does not mean agreeing with the other or remaining indifferent in the face of injustice, but rather showing respect for the essential humanity in every person.

In 1992, thousands of people died in Hindu-Muslim riots triggered by the destruction of a mosque at Ajodhya by a group of Hindu militants, yet in the state capital of Lucknow, only forty miles away from Ajodhya, there was not one casualty. The reason? In part, it was the influence on the local culture of the largest private school in the world, the City Montessori School. Founded in 1959, the school has over twenty thousand students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Influenced by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, it seeks to imbue its Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim students with the value of religious and cultural tolerance.

During daily reflection time, teams of students use stories and texts from the world’s religions to engage their fellow students in conversations about virtues like love and truthfulness. Students also visit India’s holy places—Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Baha’i, and Jain—in order to learn understanding and respect for other faiths. Classroom activities center around collaborative problem-solving, and teachers go out of their way to commend and reward students for consideration of others. The school actively encourages parents and grandparents to be involved in designing the school curriculum and to reinforce the principles of tolerance and cooperation at home.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, during the 1992 conflict, thousands of students and parents responded by marching through Lucknow, singing songs of unity and carrying posters with slogans



like "The name of God is both Hindu and Muslim" and "God is One, Mankind is One, All Religions are One." Meanwhile all the city's religious leaders met at the school and, addressing members of the community, spoke out for coexistence, surrounded by models of a Hindu temple, a Muslim mosque, and a Christian church. Such efforts helped Lucknow escape the violence.

Today, tolerance is beginning to be taught in schools around the world; age-old prejudices and stereotypes are being challenged. In Northern Ireland, most schoolchildren are exposed to a program called "Education for Mutual Understanding" to ensure that they learn about the traditions, history, and culture of both the Protestant and Catholic communities. The School for Peace at Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salaam, a Jewish-Arab community in Israel, has organized "encounter" workshops and summer camps for over sixteen thousand Arab and Jewish children. In the United States, more than fifty thousand schools use a program on "Teaching Tolerance." Children in Boston public schools learn perspective-taking and empathy by writing their personal stories and reading them aloud in class. If peace proves elusive for this generation of adults, these programs inspire hope for the next one.

On an even larger scale, television and radio have enormous potential as tools for teaching tolerance and respect. The children's television program *Sesame Street*, now shown in a hundred countries around the world, illustrates friendships across groups. The Canadian version shows English-speaking children playing with French-speakers; in the Dutch version, Dutch, Moroccan, Turkish, and Surinamese children interact. The young viewers, research suggests, are more likely to reach out on their own and form friendships across differences. In Burundi, torn by ethnic violence, radio soap operas feature Hutu and Tutsi people living alongside each other, carrying on friendships, and intermarrying.

## Teach Joint Problem-Solving

Tolerance is not enough; people need practical ways to deal with everyday tensions so that they do not escalate into harmful conflicts and violence.

When I was a child quarreling with my siblings, no one taught us to negotiate. If an adult intervened, it was to punish us for fighting or to lay down the law. Now I see changes among my contemporaries. In one family I know, when six-year-old Zander and four-year-old Aliza started arguing over who could play with a certain toy, the father took the children aside and asked them patiently, "What are three good ways to resolve this?"

"What if I go first and you go next?" said the little boy.

"We can play with it together," offered the little girl.

"Very good," said the father. "Any other ways?"

After a reflective pause, the little boy said, "We can flip a coin to decide who goes first."

And so it went. Pretty soon, the children learned to handle their conflicts by themselves.

In thousands of elementary and high schools all across the United States, programs have been established to teach children the vital skills of problem-solving, communication, empathy, anger management, and conflict resolution. To the three R's of Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic, a fourth "R" has been added: Resolution. "Why don't we try it this way?" children learn to ask. Through role-playing and discussion, they practice how to react in potentially volatile situations and to think twice about little things that could turn into nasty fights. As guidance counselor Cora Pearson explains, "We teach them to ask themselves, 'Did that person intentionally step on my foot?' 'Is this a reason to fight, to jeopardize my goals?'"

Children can also teach their peers. "For some little boys, who regularly see conflict and macho attitudes on television, peacemaking is a foreign language," says teacher Patricia Bloxham. "Their solution to problems is sock them, bop them, until they watch other children use the [conflict resolution] skills successfully." Four hundred youths

from Detroit, including gang members and affluent teenagers, went through intensive training in conflict resolution at the Martin Luther King Center in Atlanta, then returned to their schools and proceeded to teach twenty-eight thousand high schoolers.

The programs work. One long-term systematic study involving second- and third-grade students in Washington State, for instance, showed that those classes whose members had been trained in violence prevention exhibited significantly fewer acts of aggressive behavior and many more acts of positive social behavior than those classes whose students had not been trained. Anecdotal evidence abounds as well. In the words of one New York high school student:

As I went through the training I realized that nine out of ten times the most unlikely words could cause people to get very upset. I learned that the best way to avoid a fight is to talk out the problem. . . . I began getting better grades in my classes. I do not react in a violent way to people who are only out to bring everyone else down with them. At home I found that I did not argue with my family as much as before.

One day there may be universal education for children in joint problem-solving, anger management, and conflict resolution. Just as physical education has become a standard part of the curriculum, so too may social-emotional education.

Adults can learn problem-solving too. In the midst of a major reorganization of a hospital in St. Paul, Minnesota, conflicts among co-workers soared. Employees, labor leaders, and managers got together and organized a skills program called "Communication and Conflict in the Workplace" to teach employees how to handle conflict, stress, and interpersonal relationships with co-workers. Taught by fellow employees who volunteered their time, the program measurably improved productivity and quality of patient care as well as the workplace environment. Such courses on collaborative negotiation skills are multiplying in universities, in the workplace, and in community centers.

In the fall of 1995, on a little island off the coast of New Guinea, I happened by a bar where some inebriated locals spotted me and vociferously commanded me to come in.

“What are you doing here in New Guinea?” they asked.

“I’ve come to learn about clan war and how to stop it.”

“Oh,” exclaimed one man, “you mean ‘conflict resolution’!”

Sure enough, the speaker had just been to a weekend training at his church about negotiation and mediation so that he, in turn, could teach others.

Everyone, everywhere, as I realized that day, is a potential learner and Teacher of ways to deal with differences. The goal of teaching is to help create a culture of collaboration and constructive conflict, a genuine “co-culture.”



### 3. THE BRIDGE-BUILDER

FORGING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS LINES OF CONFLICT

It is not easy to build bridging relationships, particularly in conditions of actual conflict. That did not deter Sidney Frankel, a Johannesburg businessman who, in August 1991, invited Cyril Ramaphosa, a prominent young black leader in the African National Congress, and Roelf Meyer, a young white leader in the ruling Nationalist Party government, to his country cottage for the weekend. As Meyer and his family arrived by helicopter, they discovered that Frankel’s ten-year-old daughter had fallen and broken her arm; so Frankel, his wife, and his daughter took the helicopter to the hospital, leaving the Meyers and Ramaphosas awkwardly alone together. Meyer’s two young sons insisted on going fishing, as their father had promised, and Ramaphosa offered to show them how. Meyer, a novice, promptly got a fishhook painfully caught in his finger. Ramaphosa’s wife, a nurse, tried to get it out, but in vain. After an hour, with Meyer growing faint with pain, Ramaphosa intervened with a pair of pliers.

“Roelf, I’ve always wanted to hurt you Nats [National Party members],” he told Meyer as he yanked, “but never as much as this.”

“Well, Cyril,” muttered Meyer afterward, “don’t say I didn’t trust you.”

That weekend began a personal relationship of trust and respect that eventually played an essential role in the subsequent negotiations between the white government and the African National Congress. When official negotiations were broken off in the middle of 1992, the relationship between the two men helped prevent a total breakdown that might have escalated back into civil war. Both men continued to meet secretly and frequently, developing a confidence, as Meyer once explained to me, that no matter how intractable the issue, the two of them could find a way to work it out. Ultimately, they fashioned a formula that produced the breakthrough to a negotiated agreement.

### Create Cross-Cutting Ties

A cross-cutting tie is a relationship, like that between Ramaphosa and Meyer, that cuts across a line of potential or actual conflict. Such cross-cutting ties, as the South African example illustrates, can build trust and establish natural avenues for communication. The relationships operate like savings in the bank; whenever an issue arises, the parties can dip into their account of goodwill to help deal with it.

I found myself particularly struck by the power of cross-cutting ties to prevent the escalation of everyday tensions while making two mountain-climbing expeditions during successive summers in the early 1990s. Each expedition, a week in length, took place with a group of twenty people, divided into two teams of ten. The first year, as the two teams made the ascent in parallel, suspicions began to develop, starting in the form of petty jealousies and rivalries: “They got the better campsite” and “We’ll make it up the mountain before them.” After only a few days, to my amazement, the suspicions

turned serious. When food and fuel supplies ran low, the teams refused to share and there was talk of making a raid on the other team's supplies. So, the following year, we adopted a different approach. In the evenings, each team would send two ambassadors, on a rotating basis, bearing gifts of food, to have dinner with the other team. Interestingly, when a few individuals voiced suspicions of the other team this time, their distrust was defused by teammates who took a third-side perspective and vouched for the other team. Any emergent hostility was quelled from the start.

As I learned from the first expedition, nothing can escalate conflicts faster than the absence of communication, trust, and relationship. Ignorance creates and exacerbates fears. Misunderstandings accumulate and stereotypes build up. People attribute the worst intentions to others' behavior. On the second expedition, I saw how the process of sharing food and talk wove a web of cross-cutting ties that helped prevent harmful conflict. The ties created a host of insider third parties, belonging to one side but with links to the other, who had a stake in everyone getting along and who thus worked hard to protect the valuable web of relationships from being torn. Cross-cutting ties, I learned, can serve as a safety net to catch escalating tensions.

As I reflected on the experience, I came to see how anyone, no matter what their occupation, can help build bridging relationships across natural divides. The Bridge-Builder is the one who invites two estranged family members who have not talked in years to the same celebration or who invites two business rivals for a golf game. Often not a discrete activity, bridge-building takes place all around us, sometimes without us even perceiving it—at family meals, on school projects, in business transactions, and at neighborhood meetings.

The Knowledge Revolution facilitates the process of building bridges on a global scale. As more and more young people spend time living as exchange students in other countries, as more and more businesspeople make deals across borders and visit partners in their homes, as more and more tourists travel to foreign lands,

stereotypes are replaced by genuine understanding. The more bridges we build across the chasms of culture and distance, the harder it becomes to demonize others.

### Develop Joint Projects

One intentional way to forge cross-cutting ties is to create joint projects. A manager faced with two rivalrous sales representatives can put them to work as a team on the same important account. Similarly, as parents know, telling two children to get to know each other can be an awkward proposition; but assign them a common task like washing the dishes, and soon they will be grumbling together about adults and carrying on a lively conversation. In a classic 1950s experiment with two groups of boys at a summer camp, psychologist Muzafer Sherif demonstrated that a common task, such as jointly pushing a truck to get its engine started, helps reduce negative stereotypes and build friendships—far more effectively, in fact, than simply bringing the boys together to socialize.

In communities around the United States, a growing number of people are getting together across ethnic, class, and ideological divides to tackle concrete problems of mutual interest. In Memphis, Tennessee, the city where Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated, black and white churches have created a common agenda to reform the schools and won the community's support. In Sonoma, California, Hispanic farmworkers and middle-class whites have learned to work together by supporting each other's favorite causes—from education to affordable housing. In southern Oregon and northern California, environmentalists and loggers, longtime foes, have forged partnerships to plant trees, protect streams, and start new forest-product businesses. "This is not about preservation versus exploitation," declares Lynn Jungwirth, a member of a third-generation logging family. "This is about communities—forest communities and people communities."

Perhaps the most substantial exercise in bridge-building in the

world is the joint project of European integration spearheaded by Jean Monnet after the two bloodiest wars in world history. Monnet, who started off his career selling his family's cognac in North America, was a quintessential thirdsider who singlemindedly pursued his vision of a united Europe for fifty years. After World War II, he managed to persuade two bitter and ancient enemies, France and Germany, and a half dozen of their smaller neighbors, to pool their coal and steel resources. Monnet reasoned that joint control of the resources most essential to industrial development and modern war would make it difficult for the participating nations to go to war once again. And history has proven him right. From this first step has evolved the European Economic Community, the European Parliament, the European Court of Justice, the European Central Bank—the institutions of a confederated Europe. Disputes within the European Community continue to spring up, but it has become unthinkable to use force to resolve them. Europe, the epicenter of war in the twentieth century, is becoming an experiment in coexistence and cooperation.

### Foster Genuine Dialogue

"I'm really not that much of a dialogue person. As a trial lawyer, I prefer action," says attorney Andrew Puzder. "But I have seen this dialogue process have a profound effect on people. New groups keep popping up. . . . It's an idea that really works." Puzder is referring to dialogues that have taken place between people who strongly oppose abortion, like himself, and those who support a woman's right to choose.

Such dialogues aim not to convert others or to reach agreement on the issues, but rather to promote mutual understanding and build relationships that can prevent escalation into violence. They provide a safe atmosphere in which people can talk openly and deeply about their differences, and perhaps discover their underlying commonalities.



In the spring of 1996, I facilitated a private dialogue at a château outside of Paris between five Turkish and five Kurdish civic leaders whose peoples were trapped in a civil war that had taken twenty-five thousand lives and destroyed three thousand villages. The dialogue was confidential; people had been killed by their own side for talking to the other. Many of the participants had spent time in jail. One Turkish nationalist, Tarik, had been described to me by his friends as someone who would “just as soon shoot a Kurd as talk to one.” The tensions were so high the first day that, when one Kurdish nationalist, Ali, talked about “self-determination,” Tarik and a colleague rose to their feet, about to walk out. For them, the use of that phrase was treason because it implied the creation of a separate Kurdish state.

I stepped in to explain that this work of dialogue was the most difficult psychological work one could do: “It requires listening to points of view that you absolutely don’t want to hear and that make you angry.” Tarik and his colleague nodded in silent assent and sat down again. “Ali,” I continued, “is talking about the wounds of the past, the suffering of his people, and their frustrated need for respect and autonomy.”

“Yes,” Ali responded, “Kurds do have the right to self-determination, but I believe that they should exercise this right by choosing to remain as equals in Turkey. In fact, I personally would defend Turkey against external threat with my blood.”

The atmosphere in the room changed perceptibly.

At our next meeting, Tarik asked to speak. “If someone had told me a few months ago,” he declared, “that I would be sitting here with a group of Kurds using words like ‘Kurdistan,’ I would have thought I was living in my worst nightmare. Now”—Tarik paused and looked around the room—“I think I’m living in a dream.” And he went on to thank Ali for helping him understand the situation from a new perspective. While he remained a strong defender of Turkish national interests, Tarik acknowledged the Kurds’ right to express their identity as they saw fit.

Dialogue is demanding. It is much easier to remain at a distance casting stones at the other. It takes courage to face the pain of hu-

man differences and to talk in a vulnerable fashion about what really matters. Yet, as I have often witnessed in conflicts large and small, dialogue has the power to change attitudes. While it may seem obvious to outsiders, the parties often are amazed to discover that their enemies are human like themselves, and sometimes end up concluding, like Tarik, that, placed in the same position, they might feel and act the same way.

If dialogue can work among warring Kurds and Turks, it can work among ethnic groups whose conflicts are less violent. In Los Angeles, the city sponsored a series of interracial discussions in all parts of the city to try to ease tensions after the O. J. Simpson murder trial. Churches, unions, and businesses became involved. "It's amazing how little we really know about each other," commented one participant, the Reverend Pedro Villaroya. "I've seen two riots in my life," declared administrator Avis Ridley-Thomas. "This is riot prevention work. It has more potential than anything I've seen."

Bridge-Builders can foster dialogue even on the streets. In Omaha, Nebraska, a small group of African-American fathers came together under the name "Mad Dads" to walk the streets and reconnect with young people involved in drugs and violence. "We just started talking with them," explains cofounder Eddie Staton. "What would you like to see change around here?" We listen to them. We get them engaged expressing themselves. Then we get into feelings. 'How do you feel about so and so? What about your father?' " Mad Dads has spread to twelve states across America—with tangible results. As Bill Patten, coordinator of substance abuse prevention for Ocala-Marion County, Florida, explains, "In 1990, there were sixteen people killed in one single neighborhood. This year there has been only one killing. . . . Mad Dads taught us that ours was not a black or white problem but a community problem. The only way to help a community is for the community to help itself—one house, one block at a time."

I have seen dialogue work, too, among traditional political adversaries to whom it might naturally seem anathema. In the wake of the bitter feelings engendered by the impeachment hearings of President

Clinton, almost two hundred members of the U.S. House of Representatives came together for a weekend in March 1999. In small groups, each led jointly by a Democrat and a Republican, they discussed how the poisonous atmosphere had made it virtually impossible to pass constructive legislation, and they brainstormed ways to improve their working relationship. One highlight for me, as one of the facilitators, was one Democrat's moving description of an ongoing dialogue with a Republican. Despite their strong political disagreements, they had continued to meet once a week for twenty years just to talk about their families and their personal struggles. When the Democrat's son was killed, the first person to call was his political adversary. "If there were twenty such friendships across the aisle, the atmosphere would change," he exclaimed.

Just as joint projects can create openings for genuine dialogue, so dialogue can lead to joint projects. Some dialogue groups on abortion have taken the next step and begun to collaborate on joint projects of mutual interest. They work together to reduce teen pregnancies and domestic violence, make adoption more acceptable and available, provide affordable quality day care, and teach males to be more responsible sexually. "So much time, money and human resources have been wasted fighting each other for the last twenty years," says Jayne Flowers, a pro-choice activist. "If we had spent that time fighting unplanned and unwanted pregnancies, we would be so much better off."

Indeed, joint projects may work better if preceded by a process of dialogue. In the workplace, it is becoming common for business partners about to engage in a joint project to get together first with a third-party facilitator for a three- or four-day dialogue session. Sometimes called "partnering," the process is coming into increasing usage on large complicated construction or manufacturing projects; it can also improve relations between unions and their employers. Typically, the partners devise a mission statement together, talk through their common venture, establish goals and objectives, and learn how to resolve issues quickly at the lowest possible level of management. "The outcome is very positive, developing a feeling of

mutual understanding of the goals of various organizations,” says Peter Jobs, president of a construction company in Hawaii. “It helps us get better acquainted with each other—[and helps] especially [by] establishing procedures for the dispute resolution process.” Partnering makes projects run more smoothly, saves money, and avoids costly litigation. Dialogue need not be limited, then, to situations of existing enmity but can prove effective in preventing conflict between people who simply need to work with one another.

Genuine dialogue can take place every day between potential adversaries—husbands and wives, workplace rivals, or neighbors at odds. Acting as third parties, even if we say very little, we can foster dialogue by bringing the parties together in a comfortable and neutral place—a couples counselor’s office, a conference room, or a friend’s living room. If emotions threaten to explode, we can intervene to cool things down and keep the conversation going. We can serve, in short, as *containers for contention*.

## PREVENTION: THE BEST INTERVENTION

Prevention is the best intervention. When people are able to meet their basic needs, thanks to the Providers among us; when people have skills for handling their everyday tensions, thanks to the Teachers; and when people know, understand, and trust one another, thanks to the Bridge-Builders, destructive conflict diminishes in quantity and intensity. Latent conflict may not become overt and people may not even think of it as conflict. What does become overt the parties can often handle by themselves.

Containment may be more urgent, like building a good roof to protect against the elements; resolving may be more apparent, like erecting the house itself; but preventing, though less visible, is more fundamental, like pouring the foundation on which both the house and roof rest.