

Chapter 2

The Workshop That Changed My Approach to Conflict

What could I do or stop doing that would make it easier to work with me?

Kim Scott, *Radical Candor*

In *Radical Candor*¹ I was once again reminded to pause and notice how my behavior shaped the tone of every interaction. Where I struggled most wasn't with awareness itself but with managing my emotions when I felt frustrated or threatened in my job.

As a teenager, I was quick to react, convinced that expressing myself immediately was the honest thing to do. It was a messy version of my "deal with it now." As an adult, I developed an aversion to conflict. When a conversation turned confrontational, I withdrew. That became my "deal with it later" response. Neither version reflected my best self, and

neither approach solved anything. One erupted, the other avoided, and both left problems unresolved.

Over the years, I kept thinking, *how do I combine the composure of a Later with the boldness of a Now?*

What do I need to stop doing to build healthier communication at work? And what do I need to start doing to share frustration in a way that shows care and respect? The more I examined my relationship with conflict, the more curious I became about how others managed theirs.

In 2004, I decided to launch *Deal With It Now or Deal With It Later*, a workshop about how people choose to resolve conflict. This book draws from the wisdom I've gained from mental health experts, my personal journey, and conversations with other professionals. It also reflects twenty years of qualitative research from these workshops.

The sessions revealed a consistent dynamic.

One person leaned into conflict right away, while another preferred to mull it over. Those tendencies became the basis for the Nows and the Laters.

For example, in an unfair performance review, one employee spoke to their supervisor and voiced their disappointment immediately, while another needed to sleep on it before requesting a meeting. Both felt frustrated. How they dealt with the problem was different.

With the Now and Later method, both have their strengths and weaknesses, and both have healthy and unhealthy re-

sponses. Although different in their approach, what they have in common is that both try to manage their emotions.

Having led this workshop across multiple countries and industries, with thousands of participants over the years, I've consistently noticed a fairly even distribution. Nows and Laters appeared in near equal numbers, with neither group ever strongly outnumbering the other.

This observation matters because there tends to be a natural mix of Nows and Laters. Roughly half the people you work with may respond to frustration differently from you, which helps explain why some conversations feel easier than others.

Recognizing this split offers insights that can strengthen communication across the team.

I also noticed something else. Successful conflict resolution required both a Now and a Later.

As you continue through this book and we provide more context on what it means to be a Now and a Later, you'll naturally favor one over the other.

Many of you have been professionally trained in managing workplace tensions and have learned excellent communication techniques. What I'm most interested in is what your tendency is when conflict triggers your emotions.