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Necessary Knowledge

Why mediation works

## Conciliatory Gestures

- Apologizing
- Owning responsibility
- Conceding
- Self-disclosing
- Expressing positive feelings
- Initiating both-gain

**Voluntary statements of vulnerability**

The magic ingredient of the mediation process

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.  
~ Mahatma Gandhi

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The Retaliatory Cycle explains how we make “war”  
 The Conciliatory Cycle explains how we make “peace”

There are two naturally-occurring behaviors in conflict interactions:

- Conciliatory Gestures
- The Inhibitory Reflex

Conciliatory Gestures	Examples
Apologizing	<i>“I’m sorry that my comments in the staff meeting embarrassed you. It was thoughtless of me.”</i>
Owning responsibility	<i>“I see now that I have contributed to this problem. I didn’t see that before.”</i>
Conceding	<i>“I’m willing to meet with you, if you are willing to do it at a time that is convenient for me.”</i>
Self-disclosing	<i>“I’ve been worried about what you might do to get back at me, and so I’ve been avoiding you.”</i>
Expressing positive feelings for the Other	<i>“You are a competent and skilled professional.”</i>
Initiating both-gain	<i>“How do you suggest we solve this?”</i>

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## The Inhibitory Reflex

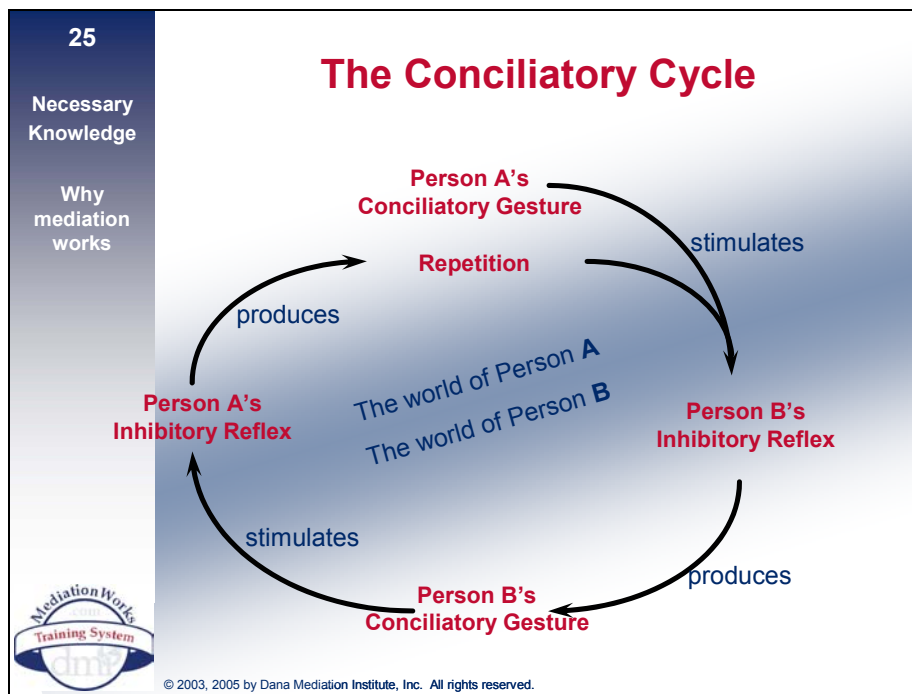
- Instinctive reaction to others' conciliatory gestures
- Reflex: "Inhibition of aggression"
- Appears in all species of social mammals, but less reliable in humans
- Evolved as a behavioral mechanism to reduce destructive aggression in territorial encounters

*All people have an instinct for conflict . . . at least, all healthy people.*  
~ Hilaire Belloc

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The Inhibitory Reflex may at first seem an abstract concept whose proper place is the ivory tower of academia. But it is a profoundly practical idea – part of the “necessary knowledge” contained in your personal mental map that guides your moment-to-moment choices while you are involved in conflict situations.

You will discover in *Module 2: Successful Conflict Conversations* and *Module 3: Third Party Resolutions* how relying upon the Inhibitory Reflex allows you as the mediator to relax in the knowledge that performing only the remarkably simple primary tasks is sufficient to resolve most interpersonal conflicts. It relieves you of the responsibility of analyzing the complex issues that are in dispute and conjuring up the elusive “right” solution to what often seems an intractable conflict.

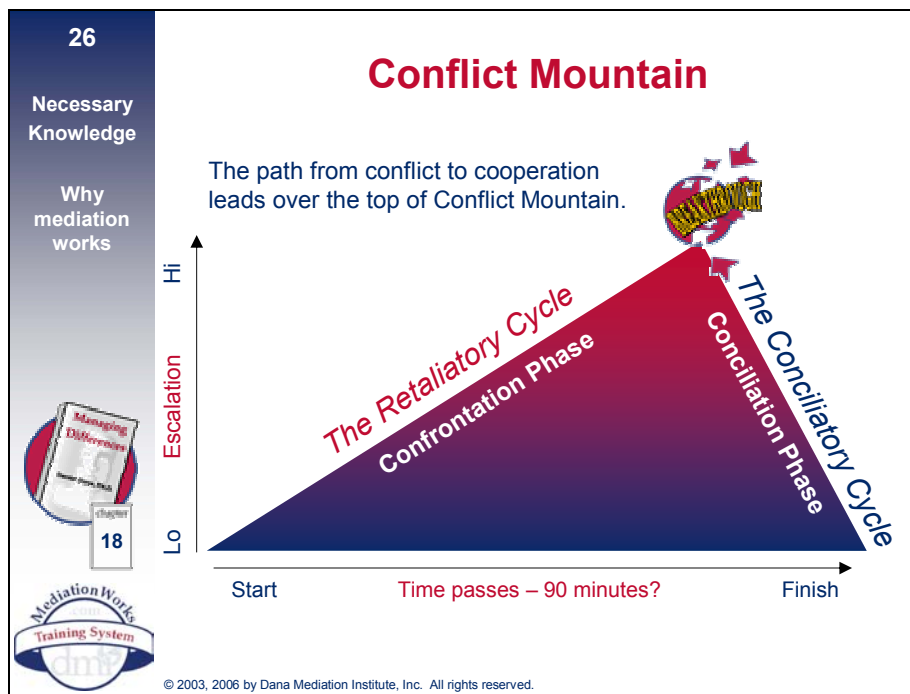


The engine that drives the Retaliatory Cycle is anger – the emotional energy mobilized by the perception of danger that prepares the person to take vigorous action in self defense.

The engine that drives the Conciliatory Cycle is the Inhibitory Reflex – the instinctive response to perception of the other’s vulnerability (the Conciliatory Gesture) that allows the person to safely withdraw from an aggressive encounter.

In both cycles, the process is essentially biological, natural, automatic, and outside the conscious awareness of the individuals involved.

In mediation, we harness the energy available in both cycles to move from conflict to cooperation, from interpersonal war to interpersonal peace.



The dialogue that forms the core of both Self Mediation (Module 2) and Managerial Mediation (Module 3) may be compared to traversing a mountain ridge. The mountain has two sides, and the dialogue has two phases. The first phase, Confrontation, is the most difficult, challenging, discouraging, and perhaps frightening. The Confrontation Phase is characterized by ongoing repetition of the Retaliatory Cycle. This phase may be experienced as an escalation of the conflict. Participants may become alarmed that the meeting appears to be doing more harm than good.

In time (the amount of time required will be discussed in later modules), something remarkable happens – the Breakthrough. The Breakthrough signals the end of the Confrontation Phase and the beginning of the Conciliation Phase, which is characterized by the Conciliatory Cycle.

Although the point of transition from confrontation to conciliation is seldom as sharply defined as the Conflict Mountain image on this page suggests, it happens nevertheless. The knowledgeable mediator (self and managerial) is able to recognize it, and to shift tactics. This will be elaborated in the next modules.

A certain amount of faith in the process may be required to persist in the climb, maintaining confidence that the mountain indeed has a peak (i.e., the Breakthrough) after which the journey is far easier. We must not abandon hope and give up prematurely.

But it's reasonable to wonder, "Why does the mountain have a peak? Why doesn't the trend toward higher escalation just continue?"

➔ Transitional slides follow that are not contained in your workbook.



**Breakthrough:**

*A mutual attitude shift from  
"me against you" to "us against the problem"*

The Breakthrough occurs because of four Forces toward Harmony that accrue during an uninterrupted dialogue:

**Fatigue** is simply the weariness that builds up during a long and frustrating meeting.

**Desire for peace** is the wish for a more harmonious relationship, which may become more urgent and desperate as it evades our grasp.

**Catharsis** is the relaxation that follows a period of expression, verbal or nonverbal

**The Inhibitory Reflex** is the instinctive lessening of aggression that occurs in response to a display of vulnerability by the other.

Being mostly biological, these forces are "hard wired" into human nature. They are deeply genetic and therefore present in all emotionally normal, reasonably well-adjusted people — all of us who are able to maintain friendships, have positive family relationships, and otherwise function socially.