

# Style Matters

## The Kraybill Conflict Response Inventory

- ✓ Adapts to users from **diverse cultural backgrounds**
- ✓ Describes the “**stress shift**” and scores you for both “calm” and “storm”
- ✓ Shows how your style differs in **group settings** from **interpersonal settings**
- ✓ Shows **benefits and costs of each style**, and how to choose the style that fits the moment.
- ✓ “**Hot tips**” section teaches how to work with people with styles different from your own and how to communicate the needs of your style to others.
- ✓ **Ideas for group discussion** of conflict styles with colleagues and teams



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# Style Matters

## The Kraybill Conflict Response Inventory

By Ron Kraybill

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# Getting Started

How do you respond to conflict? Most people have a hard time answering this question. It is often easier to describe how others respond than how we ourselves respond.

This Conflict Response Inventory will give you a snapshot of your response to conflict. With that picture in hand, you can make conscious choices in responding to others. You can build on your strengths and improve your weaknesses. You can also clearly assess the responses of other people and deal more constructively with them.

The reflection this inventory can create is more important than the numbers the tally sheet yields. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. The score you will get is only a snapshot of you based on your responses to this inventory today. Chances are the numbers describe patterns of many years. But no test is perfect and nobody is ‘set in stone’. Use the results to help you think about what really matters:

## **How you will respond to conflict tomorrow?**

That is the important question it will help you to think about.

Now, go to Page 2, and let’s get started.

# First Things First

## Self-Identify **Your Cultural Group**

- If you are from an **individualistic** culture (i.e., dominant cultures in Europe and North America), use **Instruction Set A** to complete your assignment.
- If you are from a **collectivist** culture (i.e., Asian, Native American, African), use **Instruction Set B** to complete your assignment.

Instruction Set A: Complete the following questionnaire twice.

First, think about a situation in which your wishes differ from those of another person with whom you have a personal relationship. For example, visualize a situation in your family, your marriage, or among your closest friends. Complete the form with this scenario in mind.

Then, using a different color pen or pencil, complete the form a second time while thinking about a situation in which your wishes differ from those of another person in a more public, less personal setting. For example, visualize yourself in your workplace or your community. Note that statements A-J deal with your initial response to disagreement, while statements K-T deal with your response after the disagreement has gotten stronger.

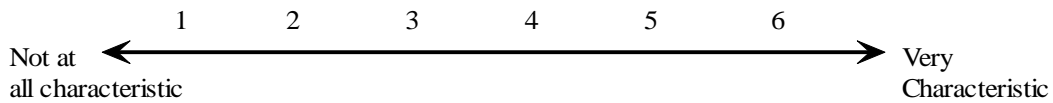
Instruction Set B: Complete the following questionnaire twice.

First, think about a situation in which your wishes differ from those of another person who is a member of your own age set or similar to you in “rank” within your community. Complete the form with this scenario in mind.

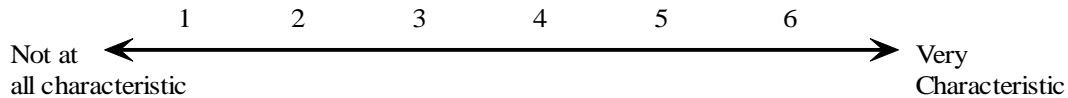
Then, using a different color pen or pencil, complete the form a second time while thinking about a situation in which your wishes differ from those of a person who is older than you or more senior in rank than you within your cultural group. For example, visualize a situation in your family with your parents or individuals from your parents’ age set or with a community leader or elder. Note that statements A-J deal with your initial response to disagreement, while statements K-T deal with your response after the disagreement has gotten stronger.

When I first discover that differences exist . . .

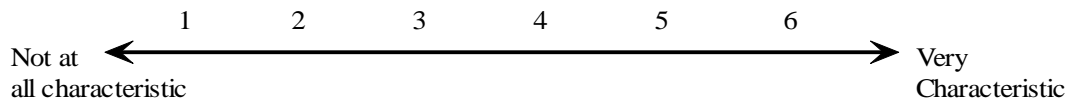
A. I make sure that all views are out in the open and treated with equal consideration, even if this means quite a bit of disagreement.



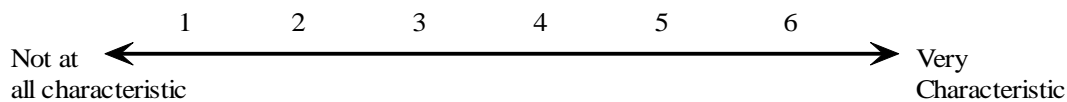
B. I devote more attention to making sure others understand the logic and benefits of my position than I do to pleasing them.



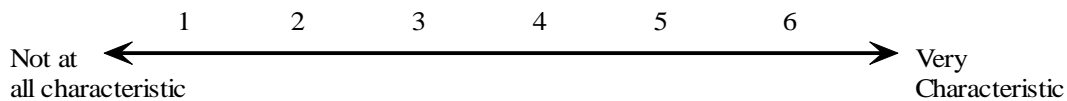
C. I make my needs known, but I tone them down and look for solutions somewhere in the middle.



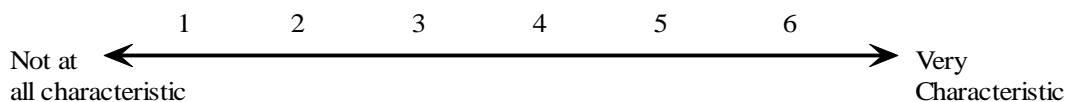
D. I pull back from discussion to avoid tension.



E. I devote more attention to the feelings of others than to my personal goals.



F. I worry that my preferences, if clearly stated, may get in the way of our relationship.



# Style Inventory Tally Sheet

When you are finished, write the number from each item on the tally sheet.

For example, on question A, if you circled 1, write "1" on the line designated for A on the chart below.

When you have transferred all the numbers, add them in each column, A+G, K + S, etc., and enter the total for each column in the empty box just below the double line. Fill in both charts: the one on this page for intimate situations and the one on the following page for public situations.

## *Intimate Settings*

A ___	K ___	B ___	L ___	C ___	M ___	D ___	N ___	E ___	O ___
G ___	S ___	H ___	Q ___	J ___	T ___	I ___	P ___	F ___	R ___
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Calm	Storm	Calm	Storm	Calm	Storm	Calm	Storm	Calm	Storm
<b>Problem-Solving</b>		<b>Directing</b>		<b>Compromising</b>		<b>Avoiding</b>		<b>Harmonizing</b>	

Now list your scores and the style names in order from highest score to lowest in both the calm and storm columns below.

### **Calm**

Response when issues/conflicts first arise

\_\_\_\_\_  
Score    Style

\_\_\_\_\_  
Score    Style

\_\_\_\_\_  
Score    Style

\_\_\_\_\_  
Score    Style

\_\_\_\_\_  
Score    Style

### **Storm**

Response after the issues/conflicts have been unresolved and may have grown in intensity

\_\_\_\_\_  
Score    Style

\_\_\_\_\_  
Score    Style

\_\_\_\_\_  
Score    Style

\_\_\_\_\_  
Score    Style

\_\_\_\_\_  
Score    Style

## *Public Settings*

A ___	K ___	B ___	L ___	C ___	M ___	D ___	N ___	E ___	O ___
G ___	S ___	H ___	Q ___	J ___	T ___	I ___	P ___	F ___	R ___
Calm	Storm	Calm	Storm	Calm	Storm	Calm	Storm	Calm	Storm
<b>Problem-Solving</b>		<b>Directing</b>		<b>Compromising</b>		<b>Avoiding</b>		<b>Harmonizing</b>	

### **Calm**

Response when issues/conflicts first arise

---

Score    Style

---

Score    Style

---

Score    Style

---

Score    Style

---

Score    Style

### **Storm**

Response after the issues/conflicts have been unresolved and grown in intensity despite effort to resolve them or escape the conflict.

---

Score    Style

---

Score    Style

---

Score    Style

---

Score    Style

---

Score    Style

Notes and Questions:

# Interpreting the Scores

This exercise gives you two sets of scores for each of the five approaches to conflict.

**Calm** scores apply to your response when disagreement first arises.

**Storm** scores apply to your response when things are very tense or if things are not easily resolved and emotions get stronger.

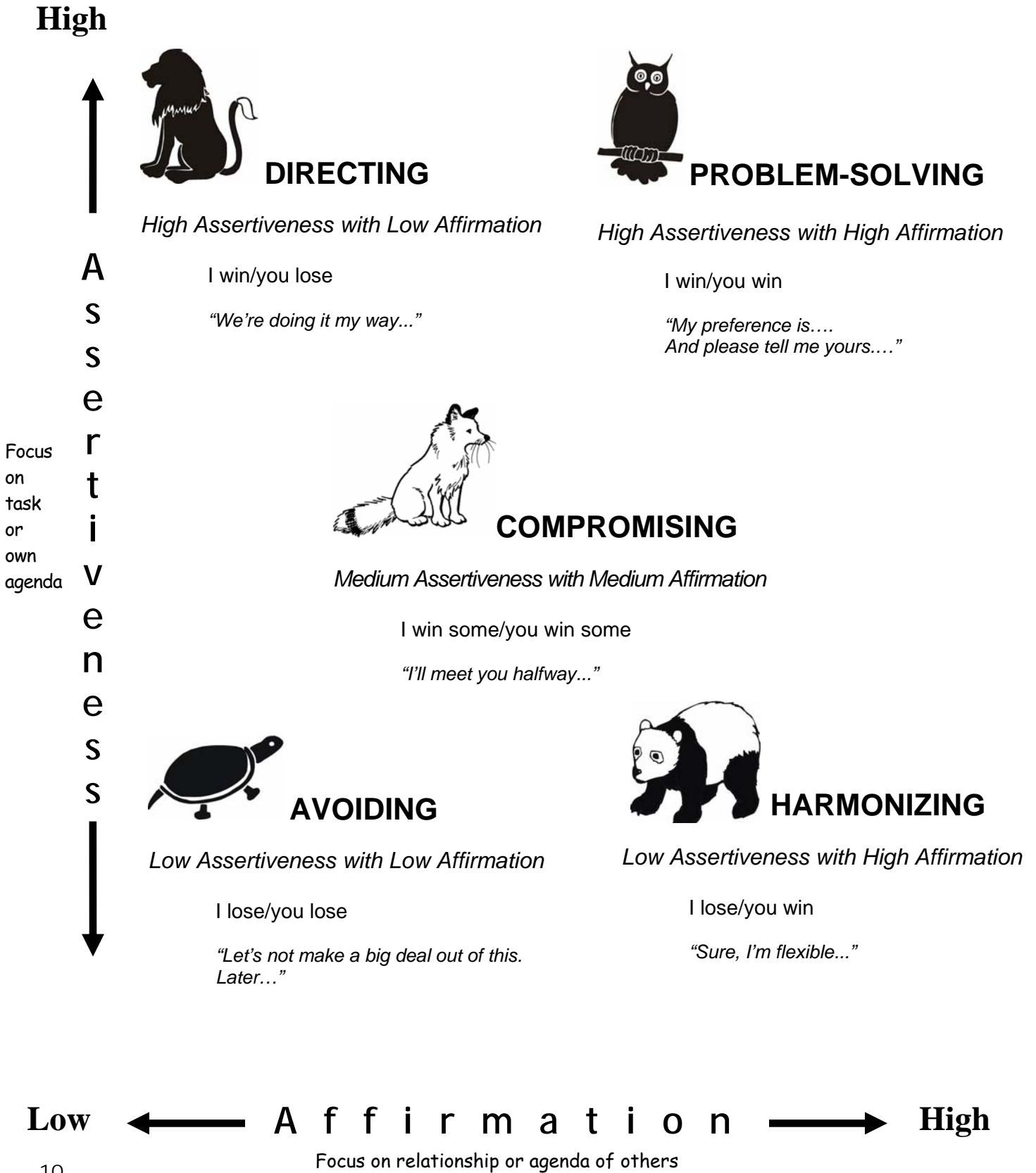
Many people – though not all – experience a marked shift between *calm* and *storm*. Such people may, for example, respond initially in a *harmonizing* way to disagreement. But if the conflict continues and they become quite upset, they may switch abruptly to their *storm* response, which could be very *directing* in nature. Another person might go the opposite direction, from *directing* to *harmonizing*.

The higher your score in a given style, the more likely you are to use this style in responding to conflict. The highest score in each of the columns indicates a “preferred” or primary style. If two or more styles have the same score, they are equally “preferred.” The second highest score indicates one’s “backup” style if the number is relatively close to the highest score.

A fairly even score across all of the styles indicates a “flat profile.” Persons with a flat profile are flexible in their responses and tend to be able to choose easily among the various responses to conflict. This is desirable, the one disadvantage being that others may experience such persons as unpredictable at times.

Now turn the page to learn more about the styles and  
to find out how to refine your response to conflict.

# Five Styles of Responding to Conflict



# Understanding Conflict Styles



## DIRECTING

*High assertiveness with Low affirmation*

*"We're doing it my way..."*

I win and you lose.

**Strategies:** Discourage disagreement, persuade, be firm, set limits and consequences, cite policy, insist, repeat, control, be inaccessible.

**Source of power:** From position, role, control of resources.

**Benefits:** Speed, decisiveness, preservation of important values, stability, essential in times of crisis (no time to negotiate duties when the ship is sinking)

**Costs when over-used:** Destruction of relationships, hierarchical relationships, loss of cooperation from others, atrophy of gifts in others; anger, depression, and diminished self-respect in others, stagnation due to resentment in others; reduced emotional and spiritual growth in the one using this style since others are not capable of challenging them.



## PROBLEM-SOLVING

*High assertiveness with High affirmation*

*"My preference is... I am also interested in your views."*

I win and you win.

**Strategies:** Asserts self while also inviting other views; welcomes differences; jointly lists strengths and weaknesses of all views; cooperates in seeking additional information.

**Source of power:** From trust, skill, ability, goodwill, creativity.

**Benefits:** Trust and mutuality in relationships, high cooperation, high potential for creativity and growth, others blossom and develop new gifts, energy and joy. This style has immense rewards when successfully used on meaningful issues.

**Costs when over-used:** Fatigue and time loss, distraction from more important tasks, analysis paralysis. Applied to too many trivial issues, it seems like a waste of time and causes people to feel burned out from too much talking.

# Choosing Responses to Conflict

Our responses to conflict depend on many factors including our stake in the outcome and our determination to have it realized; our physical and emotional state; the personality and response of the person who opposes us; the dynamics of power in the relationship, etc. We are most successful in conflict when we are flexible in our abilities and can use each of the five styles skillfully in the appropriate circumstance. However, most people rely on one or two preferred styles and use them unthinkingly in *all* conflicts, regardless of the circumstance. The following section will help you make conscious choices about which style to use in a given situation.

## Directing

### Often appropriate when:

- an emergency looms
- there is no time for give and take discussion
- you are sure you're right, and being right matters more than preserving relationships
- the issue is trivial and others don't really care what happens
- weaker parties need to be protected from stronger ones
- principles are at stake which must not be compromised, regardless of cost

### Often inappropriate when:

- *Problem-Solving* has not yet been attempted
- support and cooperation of others is important
- used routinely for most issues
- self-respect of others is diminished needlessly

# Avoiding

## Often appropriate when:

- the issue is trivial
- the relationship is insignificant
- time is short and a decision is not necessary
- you have little power to openly resist the other but you also believe it is important not to actively go along with their wishes.

## Often inappropriate when:

- you care about both the issues involved and the relationship
- on-going relationships are important and the issue at stake matters to you
- used habitually for most issues (leads to “explosions” or “freeze-out”)
- a residue of negative feelings is likely to linger
- others would benefit from constructive confrontation

# Harmonizing

## Often appropriate when:

- expressing your wishes may bring retaliation from others and you have no means to defend yourself against those persons
- you really don't care about the issue
- you are powerless and have no wish to block the other person

## Often inappropriate when:

- you are likely to harbor resentment
- used habitually in order to win acceptance by others (outcome: lack of self-respect and depression in you)
- others wish to *Problem-Solve* and will feel like *Directors* if you *Harmonize*

# Hot Tips for Working with Styles of Others

You can do a lot to help people with styles different from your own to feel more comfortable in addressing conflicts with you. Read and discuss the information below with people who live or work with you. If you communicate about your styles, you can bring out the best in each other! As you get familiar with the styles, you will soon find you can sense style preferences in complete strangers, and know how to respond in situations that previously confounded you.

## How to bring out the best in someone who scores high in Directing

- People who use the **Directing** style a lot are task oriented. They are usually highly productive and concerned to get the job done. Engage them and let them know you are committed to getting the job done or resolving the issue satisfactorily. If you need time to think things through or cool down, they are usually fine if you ask for this, so long as you indicate clearly a commitment to returning to resolve things. You will get a more positive response if you state specifically when you will come back (e.g., in an hour, or tomorrow at nine o'clock, etc).
- Though their task focus makes it easy to forget the feelings and needs of others, many **Directors** feel deeply responsible for those around them and may be quite devastated when they realize they have wounded them. Remind them about the needs of others – but preferably not in the middle of a big job!
- Don't go silent or passive. Don't withdraw without giving some clue about where you stand. Lack of information about this will increase their anxiety and anger.
- A **Directing** person who is angry can be very intimidating, for this style is the most active, and "in your face" when anger is high. If this person has a history of abusing others emotionally or otherwise and holds more power than you, look for a path to safety or shelter. If the person is basically healthy emotionally, simply asking for a chance to cool off and think often helps, so long as you state clearly your intention to return and work on things.

## How to bring out the best in someone who scores high in **Compromising**

- Compromisers have a strong sense of reciprocity. More than other styles, they are likely to respond in kind if you back off somewhat from your initial position. Leave room to negotiate when you make your opening request.
- Compromisers value fairness and moderation. Use language like “being fair”, “fair play”, “reasonable”, “you give some, I give some”, “give and take”, etc.
- Compromisers tend to value efficiency of time and energy and are eager to find a way through to a practical solution that ends the difficulty. A sense that a fair and moderate deal was achieved probably matters more than talking through all options.
- As the Compromiser does not enjoy prolonged debate, a determined partner in Directing style may with strong logic be able to persuade her she is wrong, creating an appearance the more forceful person has “won”. However the victory may be hollow. The Compromiser’s deep inner sense that conclusions should be reciprocal and balanced will be disturbed. Trust, openness and cooperativeness will suffer on the long-term. Find concessions for the Compromiser, even if you are sure your argument is stronger.

## How to bring out the best in someone who scores high in **Harmonizing**

- **Harmonizers** want to please and be pleased. Pay attention to small social niceties. More than any other style, **Harmonizers** will be positively affected by gestures of thoughtfulness – a kind note, an appreciative comment, flowers, a chocolate bar, a card, etc.
- You will get more cooperativeness in doing serious work with **Harmonizers** if you use a two-step approach. First, connect with them at a human level (ask how they are doing, inquire about a family member, tease a little, thank them for something, etc.), Then, and only then, settle down to business. The human connection always comes before work for **Harmonizers** (an insight that is especially difficult for task-oriented **Directors** to remember).
- Stay light, light, light. Seriousness or heaviness in others quickly stirs anxiety in **Harmonizers** and makes it hard for them function well. Use humor. Appreciate their good qualities out loud.
- Assure them repeatedly that you really want to know their preferences and views. Thank them sincerely if they do level with you. If they bring criticism, thank them generously – it requires great effort for Harmonizers to be direct about anything negative.
- In meetings or extended conversations with **Harmonizers**, take breaks and lighten up on a regular basis. Long, heavy discussion unsettles **Harmonizers** and pushes them to unhelpful places more quickly than other styles.

4. Have someone who knows you well take the test “for” you based on their observation of you. Then compare your own score for yourself and the one they give you. Where do the scores agree? Where do they differ? What are the gifts of your preferred style(s)? What style(s) do you want to work on for improvement?
5. People in teams and organizations will be rewarded by discussing the impact of styles in times of negotiation or decision-making. Each style has different preferences for how to go about things (e.g., how direct and open to be in stating preferences, how much relationship-building time to include in decision-making, how rapidly to make decisions, etc.) Discuss: What insights do we get about our collective decision-making processes from looking at these scores? About difficulties we’ve encountered? About how to improve decision-making in the future?
6. In teams and organizations it can be useful to identify particular pairings of styles that most commonly cause difficulties (e.g., the **Directing** and **Avoiding** styles easily get into misunderstandings with each other). Discuss what is going on in the mind of each person in such a situation, and what could be done by each to help bring out the best in the other.
7. Here is a discussion that inspires hope in others in group settings:  
Select two people who work together and have different styles, but know and trust each other well. Have them talk in the presence of the whole group about their style differences, how they see each other, how they have learned to work with and respect each others’ style differences, etc.

## Notes and Acknowledgements

1. The concept of mapping response to conflict as the interplay of task vs. relationship or assertiveness vs. cooperativeness is used by others, including Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann in their *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument* (Tuxedo NY: Xicom, 1974) Also, Jay Hall in his *Conflict Management Survey* (Teleometrics International, Inc., The Woodlands, TX, 1973), as well as Robert Blake and Jane Mouton, *The Managerial Grid* (Gulf Publishing, Houston, TX, 1964) Of these, the most widely used is the Thomas-Kilmann Instrument, which names the styles competing (equivalent to Directing in the KCRI), collaborating (equivalent to Problem-Solving), compromising, accommodating (equivalent to Harmonizing) and avoiding.
2. The use of animals to illustrate conflict styles is admittedly problematic. For example, in North American culture, the owl illustrates wisdom and prudence whereas some places in the world it symbolizes evil or witchcraft. Similarly, some people may consider the lion a symbol of cruelty or intimidation, and the turtle a symbol of hopeless immobility, neither of which are fair generalizations of the styles they are associated with in this inventory. But in learning, retention improves when concepts are accompanied by visuals. So, with reservation, the pictures remain. Users are invited to contemplate the meaning of the animals to them personally and freely substitute more appropriate symbols if desired. Trainers could in fact use discussion about animal symbols as an empowering way to give groups an opportunity to “take charge” of the KCRI as a learning tool. In revising and renaming useful ideas and tools to suit our own context (and better yet, in creating and naming anew), human beings practice the transformational discipline of taking ownership of – and responsibility for – the healing of our lives and the communities we live in.
3. Jayne Docherty, my colleague in the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, devised the strategy of having people take the inventory twice and giving different sets of instructions for people in individualistic and collectivist cultures. For those who want to keep the inventory as uncomplicated as possible, it can be taken only once. This will yield one general set of scores rather than two.
4. The awareness that many people experience a stress shift from calm to storm comes from Susan Gilmore and Patrick Fraleigh, authors of *The Gilmore-Fraleigh Style Profile* (Eugene, OR: Friendly Press).
5. I learned a great deal about the needs and dynamics of different personality styles from Barbara Date, who was taught by Susan Gilmore and has used the Gilmore-Fraleigh instrument for many years.

## About *Style Matters*

The Kraybill Conflict Response Inventory is an **easy-to-use** self-assessment tool that gives users a snapshot of their response to conflict situations. It describes and scores **five different styles of conflict response** to help you understand yourself and others. It also has features not found in other conflict style inventories:

- Special instructions for **diverse cultural backgrounds**
- Recognition of differences in **individual and group settings**
- **“Hot tips”** for dealing with differing styles
- **Discussion questions** for individual and group discussion

Useful in many settings:

- **Individuals** can use it alone to improve their response to conflicts.
- **Teams** who want to work together better can take it as individuals and then discuss the results as a group
- **Managers and project leaders** will learn how to bring the best out of each team member.
- **Human resources professionals** can help individuals, departments and teams develop better conflict resolution skills and create a better working atmosphere.
- **Mediators and negotiators** can improve their effectiveness in working with others, or use it to train people entering talks.
- **Trainers** in conflict resolution or leadership skills can structure a session ranging from one hour to half a day around it.
- **Consultants** can give clients specific feedback to improve handling of conflict.
- **Religious leaders** can strengthen their skills in congregational conflicts.
- **Teacher and professors** can lead students in a quick, easy, and practical introduction to conflict resolution skills and concepts.

"I have found The Kraybill Conflict Response Inventory a wonderful tool in both mediation and counseling settings in the United States and internationally. It has been especially helpful in my leadership training courses taught in the US, Philippines, and Congo-DRC."

Tony Redfern, Executive Director, New Path Center, Inc., Kingsburg, California

An excellent tool! A thorough presentation that can be used by people from all cultures. Asks the right questions, deals with the important reality that people react differently to conflicts in the beginning than later when they intensify. The reflections and discussion section is really well done. The suggestions are practical, and allow participants to go deeper into the analysis. I look forward to using this Inventory in my training workshops.

Brian Bloch, Director, ISKCONResolve, Mumbai, India

"A very useful instrument. Concise, well organized, with easy to follow instructions. Interpretation is clear, simple, and specific. The helpful "Hot Tips for Working with Styles of Others" reflect the competence and experience of the author. This is an instrument I am eager to use in my work as a consultant and teacher."

Marcus G Smucker, PhD, Emeritus Professor, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, and congregational consultant, Lancaster, Pennsylvania



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