

## Rule 4: Take the Initiative

*From Greg Giesen's Eight Simple Rules to Managing Conflict*

*...In the event of a loss of cabin pressure, an oxygen mask will drop from above. Tighten the mask by pulling on the straps like this. If you are traveling with a child, place your mask on first before assisting them...*



Whenever I hear that part of the flight attendant's pre-flight spiel, I always smile. I smile because my gut instinct would be to place the mask on a child first—had I not repetitively heard that directive. But I get the idea—save yourself so you can save others!

The same principle applies to Rule 4 of my **Eight Simple Rules to Managing Conflict** called, *Take the Initiative*. You see, too often we lose ourselves in the dynamics of a conflict and end up taking on much more of the burden than needed. We do this when we get frustrated with someone and end up cutting off communication...or we get angry with someone and retaliate...or we get caught up in being right and refuse to hear the other party's perspective...or we refuse to forgive someone who wronged us until we get a proper apology.

In each of the examples above, we are essentially giving away our power to the other person by reacting and responding to them instead of focusing on ourselves and what we need. In essence, we are putting the proverbial oxygen mask on them before us. See the difference?

Who, but our ego, really cares about who started the conflict or who should apologize first or who's right and who's wrong? When this happens, we've lost our focus and have gotten caught up in the insignificant nuances which, more times than not, lead to a stalemate of sorts.

Let me give you an example. A couple of months ago I was introduced to an insurance broker who agreed to help me obtain a new health insurance plan. He was a nice guy and initially very helpful...that is until I ended up getting rejected by the insurance company (reason: I was labeled a high risk because I actually used my previous insurance when I got my physical).

Suddenly our relationship seemed to change as he stopped using the “we” pronoun and suggested “I” appeal the decision on my own. I have not heard from him since. No help, no advice, no plan B, nothing. It felt like I was left for road kill.



Now as I saw it, I had two options. I could either be angry, hold a grudge, and retaliate by seeking out a new broker...or I could initiate contact with my current broker and focus on what I need (i.e., guidance, advice, and a commitment to help me now).

Granted I wanted to give him a piece of my mind about his client-relationship skills (or lack-there-of), but how was that going to help me get my needs met? If anything, it would create more unwanted tension, strife and distraction...the last thing I needed. As a result, I called him and we quickly got back on the same page with no damage to the relationship.

When we ***Take the Initiative*** to resolve a conflict:

- We get our own needs met
- We hold the other party accountable by bringing the conversation to them
- We release the burden of holding grudges, stress, or pent-up emotions
- We role model effective conflict resolution
- We effectively manage our relationship with the other person

When we don't take the initiative, the opposite is true as well. Our needs don't get met; there is no accountability with the other party; anger and frustration fester; we role model ineffective conflict resolution, and we've enabled a dysfunctional relationship. Not good.

The key is to know what you want (Rule 1), let go of judgments and assumptions that can get in the way (Rule 2), choose an approach that will get you to resolution (Rule 3) and initiate conversation (Rule 4) so you get what you need. And guess what? You'll improve the relationship with the other party in the process.

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