

## J. Michael Locke

### Musings

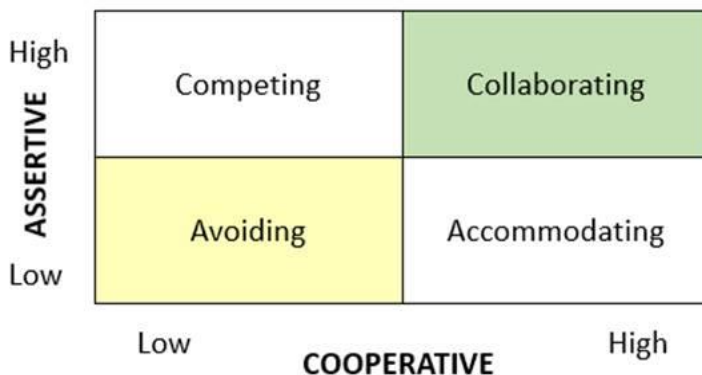
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#### #12: Positive Conflict April 3, 2020

Most human beings do not like conflict. We are innately friendly, social creatures. Look at how little kids interact in pre-school.

That said, there is going to be conflict within a business. Team members will have different points of view on a pricing strategy or where a new location should be opened. A diverse team with open robust exchanges will produce the best decisions, but how do you manage the conflicting views?

I believe in assessing individuals for how they handle conflict to make this easier. Dr. Richard (Dick) Olson taught me there are different ways people manage conflict. These are the categories according to the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI):



I am a fan of hiring collaborators (high assertive and high cooperative). These are people who are competitive and assertive but recognize that to win, they need the other person to cooperate. Do not hire avoiders. These individuals will not provide appropriate feedback to their team members and may let the organization go down the wrong path because they don't want to speak up. The whole family will end up in Abilene (The Road to Abilene is Dr. Jerry B. Harvey's parable about a family trip to Abilene where everyone goes because they think the other wants to go).

My experience is that certain cultures may trend more to certain places on the matrix. For years I worked with a polite English gentleman who had lots of value to add but you needed to "pull him into the fray" ...he was low on assertiveness and highly accommodating. As a leader, you have to manage the conversation amongst your team to ensure full participation. You may have to tell some individuals to be quiet while others will have to be pulled into the conversation Socratic method style.

Comfort with conflict is especially important to teach and grow your team. You have to give them negative feedback when warranted. As my mentor Bob King would say, "have you said it to them, just

like that?" as I lamented someone coming up short. You have to be candid and tell the person if they aren't getting the job done. You owe it to them --- like a leader's fiduciary duty. Everyone deserves to be in a place where they can perform and if it isn't happening on your team, tell them.

However, remember, always leave them on a good note. If you have a difficult conversation, don't just end it there. End it with something positive like "I am committed to your success and we will work on improving this."

Be Safe. Can't get to Abilene right now anyway.