Quick Overview
The Four Essential Attitudes of Mindfulness

Mindfulness in conflict requires us to make an attitude adjustment, shifting our mood, intention, and energy from a negative to a positive engagement with conflict. The full description of these attitudes is on pages 40-44.

The Attitude of Nonjudgmental Reflection
Reflection is an essential practice if you want to find your way through conflict. You need to be able to reflect on complex situations, your role in them, and the feelings and sensations that arise in your body when you live through and recall them. The attitude of nonjudgmental reflection is listed first to highlight the importance of developing the ability—the attitude—to reflect without judgment on the people involved in your conflict.

Often, for most people, the most challenging nonjudgmental reflection isn’t refraining from criticizing others. It’s refraining from criticizing and judging themselves. Time and again, we have encountered educators who are quick to point out their own faults, always ready to apologize for and explain all that they’ve done wrong in any given situation. That’s why we think the attitude of nonjudgmental reflection is essential for everyone involved.

The Attitude of Humble Curiosity
Over and over, as our curiosity leads us down some new path, we have our deeply held assumptions overturned and our strong initial conclusions questioned. When we become arrogant, convinced of the accuracy of our positions, we try to pry loose that arrogance with humility. That’s a practice that comes with experience: the more we learn about conflict, the more we learn how little we know.

You will find your way through conflict more effectively if you can appreciate your cognitive blind spots. You will engage conflict more effectively if you can take a deep breath and courageously admit your errors.

The Attitude of Self-Effacing Humor
Finding our way through conflict can mean we lose our grip on being an assured professional. There we are, bumbling around at our worst—it doesn’t really seem like it would be fun or funny to look at! But if we cut ourselves some slack and realize that our bumbling is what makes us human, we gain a bit of cheerful yet mindful distance from those things.

When we approach our sticky conflicts with some mindfulness, we can admit that we are who we are in the moment, and that the moment is a result of a series of causes and conditions, decisions and choices. We’ll never untangle all of those factors, to be sure, and that means we’re likely to find ourselves in many of the same situations later no matter how hard we try. Given the absurdity of it all, why not poke a bit of fun at ourselves?

The Attitude of Accepting Imperfection
Practice will never make perfect. Instead, we know that practice gives us more and more opportunities to learn that our goal should be a more thoughtful engagement with the imperfection that is inherent in all conflicts. Thankfully, we have ourselves and others, a bunch of similarly imperfect humans getting into conflicts that lead to imperfect solutions. Now and then we gain a sliver of insight or a newly useful tactic, something that allows us to see that imperfection with a bit more clarity.

That’s why we adopt the attitude that practice makes imperfect. Become good at harnessing all the nonjudgmental reflection, humble curiosity, and self-effacing humor you can muster, and engage in each conflict with a commitment to learning from the practice.

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