



## *21 Common Mistakes to Avoid When Responding to Conflict*

Dealing with family farm problems is a challenging business and a daily test of anyone's people skills. When conflict comes - and it always comes in some form - emotions flow, the volume gets turned up, stress builds, and relationships wither.

The following is a list of common mistakes that we all make at sometime when responding to conflict. If we can just take back our responsibility and become more aware of how negative some of our actions are, then we can learn to become better peacemakers. Our war-making effort lets conflict control our lives or even ruin them. Peacemaking is not an option for farm family success, it's a requirement. Please think of only yourself when reading this list. Discovering your errors is a much more effective stimulant to change than pointing out other people's faults.

**1 *Becoming great actors*** We should all be in the movies because most of us somehow kid ourselves by thinking that we are totally blameless for the causes of most conflicts.

Push the pause button and wait a minute before you respond to any conflict. Carefully think back about all your previous actions, and take a deep honest look at your hidden contributions to the problem. Then muster up the courage to go talk matters over by stating the parts that you may have caused.

**2 *Playing the blame game*** Blaming is a way of removing responsibility. Avoid using the "you" or "I" statements, instead use the "we," "us," or "let's" statements. We must learn that we do not control what other people say or do, but take back the complete responsibility for all our actions, even the ones we want to forget about.

**3 *Backing people into a corner and responding with loud answers*** When you push hard in conflict, look out. Just like in the cartoons, for every action there is going to be a reaction. Pressure can cause explosions of deep hidden resentments and the war is on. Gentle words can lead you toward solutions Harsh words stir up anger and a desire for revenge.

**4 *Assuming that we know the facts and understand the "whole" problem*** Take the time to clarify problems first with facts. Don't respond to stories but seek real causes. As author Steven Covey says, seek first to understand, ask questions, then respond to be understood. Carefully prepare our words, then respond with long-range creative solutions.

**5 Thinking only in self terms - worrying too much about our rebuttal** During conflict we tend to worry about our rebuttal and not paying attention to what the other person is saying and that only gets us into deeper trouble. Stop and make yourself focus on what the other person is saying and meaning. Restate what you think they said and then respond. Seeing everything in our needs is not being responsible. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

**6 Not understanding where conflict starts** Conflict usually starts by someone not getting something that they deeply desire. Try and find that hidden thing there missing. It's probably something that they think they should have, but cannot have. This will help clarify what the problem is all about.

**7 Repeating what someone said to someone else** This always turns the story a bit and starts to distort the facts. Good advice here is to simply avoid any words that could not be said about the situation, if the other person was standing beside you. In other words DO NOT GOSSIP or repeat a story about someone else.

**8 Letting emotions control responses** During conflicts, emotions flow freely. Stop often and bite your tongue before you respond. Think about the other person's "whole life journey." Perhaps now is the time you could help them by saying something nice instead of pointing out all their faults. In other words try to focus on why they are so upset. Don't let emotions control reactions. Practicing self-control helps avoid regrets.

**9 Not understanding other people's value systems** Each person is wired differently and responds to conflict differently. Some folks are lions, they take charge and give orders, others are like beavers, they love lots of details. Others act like otters, making jokes about serious matters or some respond like golden retrievers, they rollover becoming very submissive. Let's celebrate that we are all different. Diversity makes teams more productive.

**10 Letting the situation control the response by not considering the long-term effect** Do not let the present moment take control of your response. It is better to take adequate time and carefully come up with a good plan that will bring the problem to complete closure than respond "half-cocked."

**11 Placing OUR standards on others** Everybody has standards (limits that we measure things by). Your standards may be either too high or too low (or just too different) to impose on another person. So seek a balance, the middle of the road action that benefits all parties.

**12 Not sharing openly and honestly** Not sharing meaningful information with each other is at the heart of most issues. Speak with your heart, not your head. Be open and honest with yourself - hopefully wanting to find long-term workable solutions. Hidden agendas bite back.

**13 I win, you lose - I lose, you win - or we both lose is not seeking WIN - WIN** It's hard work but worth the effort to seek creative solutions, so that everyone wins.

**14 Communicating words and assuming that you both have the same definition** We error by using jargon words which can have completely different meanings to other people. We should ask for clarification and use common key words to help explain what we are really trying to communicate. Try giving an example or word picture of what you are communicating. Conversation is a two-way street.

**15 Not understanding what happens when we shoot someone in the foot** We don't understand that if we shoot someone in the foot (give a negative response to conflict) - their reaction is to shoot back. If you give evil - you get evil. So give something good unconditionally and you will find a better solution.

**16 Not working toward a common goal** See and work toward one common and shared GOAL, the "End in Mind." Connect to a bigger purpose, something that you both want to see happen - this will keep more people motivated. Then say, "Let's do this together" and not, "You do this".

**17 Avoiding face to face discussions** Prepare words ahead of time and seek the right time, the right place and get help if needed (use an accountability partner). Then go and talk it out with the other person.

**18 Being close-minded and only following our own rules** (Not being open to other's solutions or any type of compromise) Do you ever make the error -- "there is only one way, my way"? Try saying, "I think I'm right, but I could be wrong" the next time you take a stand on some pressing issue. This will help you deal with, "I'm always right" approach to problem solving.

**19 Having a "get even" attitude** (Wanting to give them what YOU think they deserve attitude) Often when we think we're really going to put someone in their place, usually using slam-dunk methods, the conflict just returns, later to haunt us. Instead, seek peacemaking wisdom and do what is right for both of you.

**20 Being double minded** We tend to say one thing and then our actions lead us toward something else. We have just established confusion, distrust, doubt, and loss of trust with the other person. Do what you say you're going to do. Let your yes be yes and your no be no.

**21 Dealing only with the symptoms of problems** We can easily debate the symptoms of the conflict. Instead we should spend quality time searching for the root causes of problems. We must be able to place our fingers on the causes of problems or as close as we can to determine if we really want to help the situation. Now take the needed actions to fix things long-term. Peacemaking is obviously a learned art and it seems to be the missing ingredient in today's fast-pace, quick fix society. Peacemaking calls for a change in the way most folks respond to conflict. Consider studying this list of mistakes to avoid conflict and try working toward the closure of problems instead of our typical defensive "word slinging" ways that get us all into deeper trouble.

**By Wayne Burleson**