

## THE MOBIUS MODEL©

Some conversations are creative; others bog down in cycles of conflict that never seem to get resolved. The MOBIUS MODEL is an effective coaching tool for transforming conflict into opportunity, and for tapping the creative individuals, groups, and organizations.

The Mobius Model was named after the Mobius strip – a geometric form that has a continuous surface which moves from inside to outside, and back inside without interruption. Likewise, creative conversations require compatibility between each participant's inner, creative thoughts and outer, more rational dialogue. This aspect of the model is crucial. If a participant in a conversation is speaking in contrary to his or her inner conversation, creative possibilities dwindle.

A creative conversation flows *clockwise* around the conversation wheel in the following manner:

- Clarify each other's state of **WELL-BEING** to determine whether all parties are able to engage in the conversation. Identify what is *present* that contributes to well being, and what is *missing* that, if present would contribute. Sometimes referred to as the assessment stage, the goal of this step is basically to come to a common understanding of the situation.
- Discuss the subject at hand until the parties see a **POSSIBILITY** (or possibilities) that serves their mutual interests. Identify specific *conditions of satisfaction*, or each person's vision of success for that possibility.
- **COMMIT** to produce the conditions outlined above. A commitment can be a "yes" or "no" or a promise to commit by some specific time in the future.
- Develop an *action plan* that will result in the **ABILITY** to achieve the conditions of satisfaction.
- Assign **RESPONSIBILITY** for carrying out each part of the plan – including *who is going to do what by when*. All parties commit to follow through on their assignments!
- **RECOGNIZE** progress made toward the possibility by celebrating accomplishments (Ask, *What is present?*), troubleshooting difficulties (*What is missing?*) and deciding what to do next. This is also referred to as the "evaluation" stage.

### *What hinders creative conversations?*

#### THE BLAME CYCLE

Conversations break down when emotions interfere with participants' ability to engage with each other. A blame conversation goes *backwards (counter-clockwise)* around the wheel and is often disguised as complaint or frustration. This type of conversation is usually about the past and can sound something like:

- Recognition – “there’s something wrong”
- Responsibility – “So and so is to blame”
- Ability – “here’s what they did wrong”
- Commitment – “they should confess their mistake”
- Possibility – “this will never happen again”
- Well Being – “I don’t trust them”

## SHORT CUTS

Traditional problem solving, as we are taught in most schools and rewarded for in most businesses, appears to “expedite” the communication process by defining action steps quickly. These situations may appear positive, because an assessment may be done and what’s missing identified, but the participants immediately jump to action planning without exploring all the possibilities and the definitions of success for each individual (here’s what’s missing, and here’s how we fix it). As a result this process tends to be iterative, repeating itself over and over until the right combination of results occurs that addresses all needs. In this situation, it can literally take years to solve problems that could be done much more efficiently if more possibilities and needs were explored up front. The old adage, “measure twice, cut once” certainly applies here.

## FEAR CYCLE

Another way a conversation breaks down occurs when one or both participants are caught up in fear. Although this conversation appears to be the “correct” way around the Mobius Wheel, it starts out from a place of disconnection between parties. Fear conversations are always about the future, and can be disguised as concern or worry. They can sound something like:

- Well Being – “I feel separated from you”
- Possibility – “There’s some danger here, some threat”
- Commitment – “I am committed to avoiding this at all costs”
- Ability – “I have to cover myself though, I’ll scramble”
- Responsibility – “I feel I have to do this all by myself, there’s no help”
- Recognition – “there’s even more danger than I thought”

Unless either of these “spins” is shifted, these types of conversations can perpetuate themselves for years. There is a simple tool for interrupting anger or fear spin, and transforming it into a creative conversation. It is this question: “*What is missing, that if present, you wouldn’t be (angry, scared, frustrated, concerned) any more?*” This question immediately invites the other person to consider new possibilities, make new commitments, and continue the conversation in a positive direction.