Volunteer Leader Training Guide

How to Get Our Hearts Right

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Materials Needed

• Copies of the publication *Getting Our Hearts Right: Three Keys to Better Relationships* (FCS735) for each participant.
• Pens or pencils available for participants to write in the publication.
• Study both the *Getting Our Hearts Right* publication and the Volunteer Leader Training Guide prior to teaching.

Conflict Is a Universal Human Problem

We all hope to have good relationships – thriving marriages and families, close friendships and well-functioning teams at work. And yet, along the way, we all encounter conflict and disagreements. Despite our best efforts and intentions, we bump into conflict regularly.

Do we all experience conflict even in our most cherished relationships?

[Allow for some discussion here as participants provide answers to this question.]

Dealing with conflict requires more than just knowledge and skills

We all know kind, generous and helpful things we should do to be better family members, friends, co-workers and neighbors. Many of us have learned new relationship skills from articles, books or watching TV programs. Yet even when we understand what we need to do to improve our relationships, we don’t always use those skills.

Although gaining new knowledge and practicing new skills are important parts of managing our conflicts, they are not enough. We need to have the motivation to use that knowledge and skill appropriately. We need to get our hearts right.

Personal biases make it difficult to evaluate conflicts fairly

Most of us believe we are pretty good at assessing the people and events in our life. We weave our perceptions about people and events into stories that make sense to us. We think we are able to objectively interpret truth. We are confident that we can trust our conclusions about life and our opinions of people. But research has repeatedly found that all humans are biased. We rarely – if ever – see the whole picture. We form opinions based only on partial truths.
One of the biggest problems is that we rarely see our own bias. For example, I find that I often fail to think how my actions will impact other people. [Give a personal example if possible.]

Let’s turn to page 3 of the *Getting Our Hearts Right* (GOHR) workbook. Let’s take a few minutes to read about some of the most common biases we experience. Take a few minutes to think about how you have seen each of these biases at work in your own thinking. Write down your examples in the space provided.

[Be prepared to share an example or two of how these biases have worked in your own life. Invite participants to share some examples of how these biases have worked in their lives.]

Ask – What sort of trouble have these biases caused in relationships?

**The Solution to Our Bias Is to Get Our Hearts Right**

The *Getting Our Hearts Right* program is focused on three keys for getting past bias and strengthening relationships. When combined with our knowledge and skills, these keys can turn our differences and conflicts into harmony and growth.

**Key 1 – Humility opens our hearts**

Some people think of humility as passivity or a lack of self-respect. But humility is neither of those. Humility is:

- The recognition that, while our needs matter, so do the needs of other people.
- The willingness to admit that we do not have a complete understanding of truth. It is being open to other people’s opinions.
- A willingness to admit that we make mistakes. It allows us to continue learning and growing.

Humility is the foundation of healthy relationships. Those who are humble are ready to learn from people and experiences.

**How to cultivate humility**

How can you look past your own needs and preconceptions and try to be open to other people and their stories? There are two important steps.

1. **Consider your biases**
   We all have a unique set of biases. In order to deal with yours, we encourage you to complete the boxes on page 5 of *Getting Our Hearts Right*. [Have participants do this later at home unless you have enough time in the program for them to complete the boxes while you are together.]

2. **Consider the weakness in your position**
   When we recognize the weakness in our own position, it opens the door to humility. It opens us up to other people’s points of view.
Have you ever had the experience of reflecting on your own position and seeing that it was flawed? [Encourage participants to identify a time when they did this. Have them read and complete the Reflection box on the top of page 6 of the GOHR workbook if you have extended time for your workshop. This box says: “Think about the possible mistakes and limitations of the position you have taken. See if you can discover where you might be missing important truths.”]

**Applying humility to your own situation**

When we are humble enough to be open to other people, we can make exciting new discoveries. Instead of being focused on our view, our opinions and our preferences, we open ourselves to their world.

[If you have the time, invite participants to take a few minutes to answer the question at the bottom of page 6 of the GOHR workbook. It asks, “How could you use the principles of humility to help you successfully open your heart regarding the conflict you described?”]

**Key 2 – Compassion connects our hearts**

Compassion is being sensitive to the struggling and suffering of others. It means experiencing others’ sense of struggle and suffering along with them. But if we limit our compassion to only those who “deserve it,” pretty soon we shut out a large portion of the world. People often feel compassion for their own kind but are glad to see their enemies suffer.

Full-fledged compassion involves feelings of tenderness for the struggles and hopes of all people, even those who are different from us or with whom we disagree.

**How to cultivate compassion**

Sometimes we are very selective in our offering of compassion. We think people must deserve it before we can offer it. Yet compassion should be given because it is needed, not just because we deem someone worthy of it.

[On pages 7 and 8 of the GOHR workbook, let’s review three simple steps that will help you activate compassion when you encounter situations in which you are upset by the words or actions of others.]

1. **Stay peaceful.** We are more likely to find good solutions to problems when we are calm and peaceful. When we feel irritated, tired or angry is not the best time to discuss a disagreement.

   [Ask: Can you think of a time when you have stayed peaceful? Discuss. If you have the time, invite participants to take a few minutes to read and answer the questions in the top Reflection box on page 7 that ask: “What are some ways you react badly when you are in conflict? How can you avoid that behavior and stay peaceful?”]
2. **Recognize that your perceptions are not the whole story.** Other people have motives and logic that make sense to them. People do what they do and believe what they believe for reasons that are just as sensible to them as your motives and logic are to you. Be open to the other side of the story.

   [If you have the time, invite participants to take a few minutes to read and answer the questions in the bottom Reflection box on page 7 that ask: “Can you see vital parts of the story that you may be missing? What is the other person’s story? How is that different from the way you have seen things?”]

3. **Listen to and understand the feelings of others.** When we humbly respect the people we disagree with, we can then move on to gaining an understanding of why they are taking their position. This is more than understanding their thoughts. It is appreciating their motives and feelings.

   [Ask: Can you think of a time when you have effectively understood someone else’s point of view? Discuss. If you have the time, invite participants to take a few minutes to read and answer the question in the top Reflection box on page 8 that asks, “How can you open your heart to the other person’s view?”]

**Applying compassion to your own situation**

When we are humble enough to listen to someone else’s view and compassionate enough to want to understand and help, we become healers. Compassion helps us forgive each other and forgiveness frees our hearts.

   [If you have the time, invite participants to take a few minutes to answer the question at the bottom of page 8 of the GOHR workbook. It asks, “How could you use the principles of compassion to help you successfully connect your heart to the other person’s heart?”]

**Key 3 – Positivity inspires our hearts**

Positivity is the practice of seeing the good in people. It is the basis of kindness and kindness sustains relationships. People who look for the good in relationships are far more likely to have strong relationships.

**How to cultivate positivity**

We tend to think that our circumstances determine our thoughts and feelings. But we can choose how we process our thoughts and feelings about those circumstances. We can decide to focus on what is irritating and disappointing in our relationships. Or we can choose to appreciate and focus on the good, even during times of conflict.

   [On pages 9 and 10 of the GOHR workbook, let’s review five simple steps that will help you cultivate positivity.]
1. **We can remember the good times in a relationship.** We can choose to remember and honor all that has been positive and meaningful about the relationship.

   [If you have the time, invite participants to think of the person in the conflict they described earlier and take a few minutes to read and answer the question in the Reflection box on the bottom of page 9 that asks, “What are your best memories of this person?”]

2. **We can focus on the good qualities in people and appreciate how they enrich our lives.** We can strengthen relationships with people we care about by choosing to make more positive and encouraging statements to them, and about them, rather than negative or critical ones.

   [If you have the time, invite participants to take a few minutes to read and answer the question in the Reflection box on the top left side of page 10 that asks, “What good qualities does this person have?”]

3. **When relationships don’t go well, we can assume that problems are temporary or minimal.** Conflict is often the result of a rough day, a bad mood or a temporary misunderstanding.

   [If you have the time, invite participants to take a few minutes to read and answer the questions in the Reflection box on the bottom left side of page 10 that ask: “What temporary circumstances may be contributing to the conflict? How are you ‘re-scripting’ your memories of the relationship through the eyes of your current problems and frustrations?”]

4. **We can see the good things in our relationship as enduring and typical.** We can choose to celebrate the good. We can dwell on it and create ways of remembering it.

   [If you have the time, invite participants to take a few minutes to read and answer the questions in the Reflection box on the top right side of page 10 that ask: “What are the good things that helped the relationship flourish during times when it was at its best? As you think about the best times, were there things you were doing then that you could be doing now to help the relationship thrive again – were you acting differently, thinking differently or investing in the relationship more?”]

5. **We can identify examples of people who sustain positive relationships and learn from their examples.**

   [If you have the time, invite participants to take a few minutes to read and answer the questions in the Reflection box on the bottom right side of page 10 that ask: “Who is a great example of sustaining positive relationships? What can you learn from them?”]

   [**Note:** If you do not have time for participants to complete each of the boxes on pages 9 and 10 of the workbook during the workshop, ask: “Can you think of times you have used these principles to increase your positivity?”]
Applying positivity to your own situation

When we are humble enough to listen to someone else’s view, compassionate enough to want to understand and help, and positive enough to see the good in another person, our hearts are changed. We are prepared to have rich and full relationships with all kinds of people.

[If you have the time, invite participants to take a few minutes to answer the question on the top left of page 11 of the GOHR workbook. It asks, “How could you use the principles of positivity to help you create a more positive relationship with that person?”]

Changed hearts activate loving responses

We won’t be different all at once. We should expect that it will take a while to get our hearts right. And we will likely make mistakes along the way. Don’t become discouraged or give up. Little by little we can learn to be more open to other people (humble), more sensitive to their concerns (compassionate) and more appreciative of their efforts (positive).

When we use these principles that build healthy relationships, we can create new stories for our relationships – stories filled with peace, growth and sweet companionship. Getting our hearts right will help us have the thriving relationships we want.

I encourage you to take a minute right now to imagine how loving and positive your relationships can be when you bring a changed heart to them.

Conclusion

We hope this program will be helpful to you. If you want copies of this publication to share with family, friends or groups, they are available through your county agent.