

Conflict, both large and small, is a part of life and try as we might it cannot always be avoided. The goal in addressing this topic is not only to be able to deal with conflict when it arises but to develop our skills to connect through conflict.

We want to build resilience between producers and advisors/mentors to continue to allow us all to foster situations and environments that enable producer networks to be effective. The goal is to discuss ways to navigate conflict so we can continue to support the producers we work with, build personal resilience, and contribute to the farmer networks and peer to peer mentorship models we participate in.

Being resilient in the face of differing opinions, views and conflict is an opportunity to work to connect amid conflict and find a common pathway through. As we are aware, the value of developing and maintaining strategic professional relationships is an essential part of this industry, and we need to continue to communicate and build trust. However, being an effective communicator, especially with people we may not agree with or who don't agree with us, is sometimes easier said than done.

As mentors and leaders in your own respective field you have likely come up against conflict and have managed difficult situations. Use the space below to reflect on how you have approached these difficult situations in the past. Consider what has been effective and what wasn't, and the lessons you have gained.

Reflection Activity:

Take a moment to reflect on your experiences and make notes below.

- 1) In what ways do you cultivate and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with people in your personal and professional life?
- 2) How have you managed difficult conversations and conflicts in the past? What made these tools effective or ineffective? What did you learn?
- 3) How do other leaders/mentors you admire handle conflict or difficult situations? What about their approach do you admire?

Non-Violent Communication:

There are multiple tools we can use to address and manage conflict in the workplace, one such tool is Non-Violent Communication (NVC). The concept of NVC was developed in the 1960's by Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, a psychologist, mediator and teacher. NVC is a form of communication which at its core assumes that people by nature are compassionate and share the same human needs (Williams et al., 2021).

We can use the NVC process to identify our own needs as well as the needs of others. Through its emphasis on deep listening, both internally and externally, NVC helps us discover the depth of our own compassion.

By approaching communication from this perspective, the NVC process allows for communication to be geared towards meeting a need on both sides of a conflict, which offers an opportunity to better facilitate interpersonal connection (Rosenberg, 2002).

The NVC process highlights the need for all parties involved to work towards a mutual understanding of what the conflict is about and what elements/issues are important to each person involved. Using an NVC structure helps to improve the likelihood of everyone reaching a mutual understanding (Williams et al., 2021).

There are 4 steps in the NVC process:

- 1) Observations
- 2) Feelings
- 3) Needs
- 4) Requests

Identifying and discussing our feelings can be challenging and especially in a professional context may not be appropriate. The feelings stage of the NVC process can be interpreted in multiple ways, it can be taken as a chance to internally identify your feelings and validate yourself while not sharing externally. But it can also be an opportunity to take a calculated risk. If you make the decision to come to the table and take the opportunity to share a feeling(s) you could find that gives permission for the other person to do the same.

The 4 steps listed above are fluid, and don't need to be used in a particular order, they can be changed or repeated as needed. It is important to remember that NVC is not a set formula, but something adapted to each individual context. The essence of the process is in the consciousness of the four components, rather than the words exchanged (Rosenberg & Chopra, 2015).

NVC is meant to be a reciprocal exchange, the process can be broken down into 2 sections:

- 1) Expressing – you share honestly.
- 2) Receiving – you are listening and receiving from the other person.

Based off the steps there is a format that can be useful when thinking about working through conflict using the NVC process:

When I (*insert observation*), I feel (*insert feelings statement*), because I need (*insert needs*). Would we be able to (*insert request*).

1) **Observations** – the goal is to remain as object as possible and remove any subjective judgement. You want to present an objective observation of the situation at hand (ex: when an audience member wants to talk about or refute climate change during a discussion about reducing nitrogen emissions, and objective observation would be to reflect their statement/question back and label it as related to, but not the topic of discussion, while a subjective observation would be to say that they're diverting the conversation)

2) **Feelings** – identifying a feeling compared to a perception is the challenge here.

[Feelings-vs-Faux-Feelings-copy-2.pdf \(johnkinyon.com\)](#)¹

3) **Needs** – expressing a need(s) and a boundary allows the other person a choice to either meet the need or not, giving them autonomy as well as a choice on how to move forward in the situation and with the relationship.

4) **Requests** – an opportunity to directly ask for what is needed to move forward or find a common solution to move through a conflict.

This statement does not need to be used/read verbatim but provides a chance to work through a conflict in stages by taking a step back from our perceptions, judgements and motives and addressing the reality of the conflict at hand.

The original NVC process is heavily based on identifying the underlying emotions and feelings, but much like any tool you can adapt to fit your needs, taking what works for you and leaving what doesn't.

Keeping this in mind, the types of feelings you choose to share in a professional setting can vary from those you choose to express in a personal one. Using this model and identifying the feelings and emotions that arise from a conflict can be a great way to internally recognize and validate yourself, while also allowing you to decide on a professional way to express it.

Reflection Activity:

Take a moment to reflect on and strategize how to work through the NVC process's hypotheticals.

¹ Lasater, I., Kinyon, J., Stiles, J., & Sitze, M. (2014). *Choosing peace book*, [PDF]. John Kinyon Medicate Your Life. https://johnkinyon.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Choosing-Peace-Book_digital-version.pdf

- 1) What would happen if one person is capable, and one is not? How would you manage this situation? What does this look like from an NVC standpoint?
- 2) What are some tools you can use to manage working with people who have very different reactions to conflict than you do?
- 3) What are some techniques/mindsets you must adopt to manage conversations when they get out of hand?

Application Activity:

The goal is to practice the application of the NVC process by working through the below activities.

Tools:

Feelings List: [nvc-feelingslist.pdf \(casra.org\)](https://casra.org/nvc-feelingslist.pdf)²

Needs List: [Feelings-Needs-Sheet-copy-1.pdf \(johnkinyon.com\)](https://johnkinyon.com/Feelings-Needs-Sheet-copy-1.pdf)³

- 1) Scenario 1: You are at a farm event speaking about (*insert your own topic*) and a reporter is in attendance taking notes to write an article for the local farm publication. They listened to and took notes during your presentation. A week later a neighbor comes up to you, they are upset with you, they completely disagree with what they read about the event, and they can't believe you would say something like that. They show you the article about your event, and you realize you have been severely misquoted.

- a) Here is an example of an NVC statement you could use with your neighbour:

When you shared that article with me, I also felt upset because I want your understanding and trust. Would we be able to talk through this misunderstanding over a coffee?

- b) Here is an example of an NVC statement you could use with the reporter:

When I read the article, I felt frustrated because I need authenticity and integrity and I value accurate representation of my words. Would you be able to print a retraction and publish a clarification?

- 2) Scenario 2: In your professional role, you work hard to establish and cultivate a strategic relationship with Farmer A. You host an event and ask Farmer A to

² Center for Nonviolent Communication. (2005). *Feelings Inventory*. Center for Nonviolent Communication. <https://casra.org/cms/upload/eventdatesdetail/docs/208/nvc-feelingslist.pdf>

³ Lasater, I., Kinyon, J., Stiles, J., & Sitze, M. (2014). *Choosing peace book*, [PDF]. John Kinyon Medicate Your Life. https://johnkinyon.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Choosing-Peace-Book_digital-version.pdf

present what they have been doing in their operation. During this event another farmer in the audience (Farmer B) rips into them (Farmer A).

- a) Share your example of an NVC statement for Farmer A:

- b) Share your example of NVC statement for Farmer B:

Reflection:

- 1) How can we invite farmers to challenge themselves or believe in themselves as much as we do?
- 2) How can we encourage farmers to make a change while also maintaining those valuable professional relationships?
- 3) How was working through the NVC process and exercises for you? What worked well? What was challenging/didn't work?
- 4) What were the biggest challenges in applying this method?
- 5) What are some of the tools you will take away from this process?
- 6) In what ways can you see the NVC process applying to your life?
- 7) Are there other methods of managing conflict that work for you, what made them effective?

Work Cited

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