

Free Yourself from Conflict at Work,  
at Home, and in Life



*optimal*  
outcomes

8 Practices to Break Free From Conflict

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## Practice 1: Notice Your Habits and Patterns

Your conflict habits arise based on how you have been conditioned or taught to approach the world. What you learned from parents and other family members, teachers, sports coaches, religious clergy and other influential people in your life has a strong influence on your conflict habits. Your habits interact with other people's habits to form a conflict pattern that keeps you stuck. But the good news is, you can change your habits and the patterns that result.

## Practice 2: Increase Clarity and Complexity

When you take a step back and use a wide-angle lens, you gain a more complex and nuanced understanding of a situation that previously seemed black and white. This allows you to identify levers for change that were simply impossible to see before, and develop approaches to the conflict that are different than if you were still looking at the situation in a simpler way.

## Practice 3: Put Your Emotions to Work for You

Pause to reflect on your emotional experience. Ask what messages your emotions are trying to send you. Then take constructive, pattern-breaking action based on the messages. If other people express emotions in a way that is challenging for you, remember that they are living their own journey. Even if they are reacting to something you said or did, their emotional expression is theirs, not yours. By making an observation and asking what is going on for them, you can reroute their emotional expression back to them (and away from you), where it belongs.

## Practice 4: Honor Ideal and Shadow Values

Unlike ideal values, which we're proud to hold openly, shadow values are hard for us to admit, even to ourselves. Because we're in denial about them, we're often unaware that they lead us to speak and act in ways that exacerbate conflicts. Ideal values and shadow values differ widely from person to person, and they can conflict in multiple ways—with other people's values, and within yourself. Acknowledge the existence of your own and others' ideal and shadow values—even when you don't like or agree with those values—to help break the conflict pattern.

## Practice 5: Imagine Your Ideal Future

In recurring conflicts, we are typically focused on what happened in the past and who is to blame. It can take extra effort to look ahead at what we do want. But when conflicts are driven by deeply held emotions and values, even rational, forward-thinking solutions are not sufficient. To deal with this, engage your imagination instead. Use all of your senses and your emotions to imagine the future you'd like to create. Then communicate that ideal future to others to make it a reality.

## Practice 6: Design a Pattern-Breaking Path (PBP)

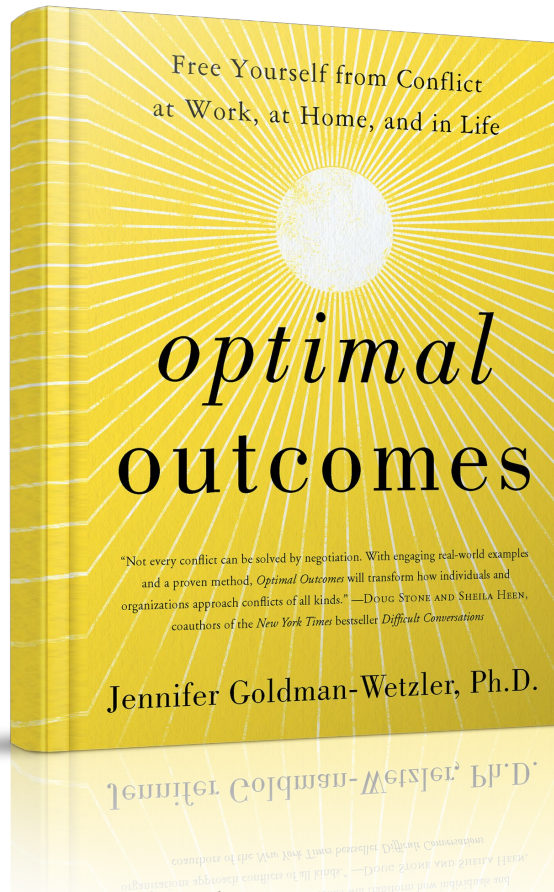
A Pattern-Breaking Path (PBP) is a linked, yet simple, set of action steps designed to interrupt the conflict pattern of the past, and to help you create your imagined future. It is important to keep the actions that comprise your PBP simple. The simpler your movement, the easier it will be to track your impact, and the more likely the effects will be what you intend.

## Practice 7: Test Your Path

It is critical to think through the potential unintended consequences of your actions, so you can prevent or mitigate those. If you don't do this, no matter how carefully you've thought through your PBP, you risk making things even worse than they already are. To ensure that your PBP creates the outcomes you intend, test small pattern-breaking actions in a safe environment, review your results, and adjust as needed.

## Practice 8: Courageously Choose an Optimal Outcome

To identify an Optimal Outcome, assess your options: ideal future vs. staying in conflict vs. any alternatives you've fantasized about. Compare their feasibility, costs and benefits. The feasible option with the lowest costs and greatest benefits is your Optimal Outcome. It may take courage to pursue it, but remember that courage blossoms as you overcome fear. Your actions are a contagious form of leadership; when you free yourself from conflict, you help free others as well.



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