

PART 1

**Commitment**

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# The Case for Confrontation

We've all heard cynics say, "If you want to know how much difference you make in the grand scheme of things, put your hand in a bucket of water, pull it out, and see the impression you leave behind." That's true of water. Unless your hand is dirty enough to change the color of the water, there is no trace left behind. But the cynic's attempt to make a wet hand analogous to life in general — and your impact upon it — breaks down where the rubber meets the road: relationships.

Sure, if you back out to a wide shot of life, the impact individuals make in each other's lives and careers appears smaller. If you back out to a wide enough shot of our planet, say from the moon, Mount Saint Helens in full eruption is barely noticeable. Planet gazing won't accomplish much when professional success or failure is tied so directly to an immediate relationship. It's a matter of scale, perspective, and proportion. Although interpersonal confrontation is a factor in all relationships, *this* book deals with the scale, perspective, and proportion of *working* relationships between team members and team leaders. The relationships dealt with through the circle of confrontation involve people between whom there is a direct line of reporting.

The human psyche doesn't heal its wounds as easily and effortlessly as water does as it conforms to the shape of its container. Nor does the human psyche forget the most elevating and fulfilling moments in life. Unlike water, the human psyche *resists conforming* to the shape of its container. That makes working with human beings a trickier proposition, more unpredictable and wrought with potential peril than filling buckets with water. It also holds more promise for growth and development. When's the last time water learned a new trick?

## CONFRONTATION'S BAD RAP

The term *confrontation* is considered by some to be synonymous with *conflict*. Other pejorative terms associated with confrontation include *battle*, *contest*, *crisis*, *dispute*, *showdown*, or *strife*. It's true that opposing ideas or beliefs, when trying to occupy the same space in the universe, can (and probably will) lead to a conflictual confrontation inspiring diversity advocates to plaintively plead, "Can't we all just get along?"

Perhaps we can. But people with diverse ideas and beliefs must successfully *confront* their differences, not merely deny they exist, if there is to be any hope of acceptance, inclusion, and co-existence. Despite attempts by ever-optimistic and naïve souls to wish the differences away, people with diverse ideas, beliefs, and opinions must consciously choose peaceful and productive coexistence over combative alternatives. If people of diverse ideas, beliefs, and opinions are to live and work together, they must confront their differences instead of each other. It's not unlike the old slogan: "Attack the problem, not the person."

One enormous difference between conflictual versus constructive confrontation is timing. Confrontation, as most people have come to use the term, means addressing divisive issues *after* they have caused dissonance, discord, disconnects, and disputes. Diverse ideas, beliefs, and opinions, if not confronted sooner, will surely become conflicts later. Diverse ideas, beliefs, and opinions can be so extreme and polarizing that they will never reside peacefully in the same vicinity.

If there is any hope of “getting along,” it will only be made possible by the sooner-rather-than-later confrontation of the issues. This book is not about avoiding confrontation; it’s about using confrontation constructively.

## NEGATIVE CONFRONTATIONS NO MORE

The best way to avoid negative confrontations is to confront. More accurately, the best way to avoid negative confrontations is to purposefully and skillfully engage in constructive confrontation. Conversely, the best way to *guarantee* negative confrontations is to avoid confrontation and hope the negativity will just go away. Sorry. Sooner or later, confrontation will become inevitable. All of the energy and resources used up by avoiding confrontation will more than likely ensure confrontation. The art of constructive confrontation will either work *for* you, or you’ll be doomed to the type of negative confrontations that most human beings will do anything to avoid.

Confrontation, the way the term is used here, is neutral. Confrontation, in and of itself, is not positive *or* negative. It becomes positive or negative depending on whether it’s used proactively and preemptively or whether it becomes a consequence of neglect. Almost any unfortunate, unpleasant, after-the-fact confrontation could be described as “something that should have been confronted a long time ago.”

In light of the negative synonyms for confrontation already listed, there are positive terms associated with confrontation, words that include *meeting*, *encounter*, *face down*, *face up to*, *stand up to*, *meet eyeball-to-eyeball*, or *withstand*. Problems in organizational life are dealt with faster, cheaper, and better when they are anticipated and prepared for. The best use of meetings also includes planning and preparing to meet what lies ahead. Every great plan has at least one contingency, so problems that will potentially be encountered won’t derail the plan.

Negative influences need to be *faced down*, or neutralized. Realities of the internal and external marketplace need to be *faced up to*, or recognized.

Undue criticisms must be *stood up to*, lest they become debilitating. Any influence that threatens or contradicts the health and well-being of the organization and its internal and external stakeholders must be *faced eyeball-to-eyeball*. Shouldn't anything that needs facing be *faced straight on*? Doesn't any worthwhile task, assignment, project, or initiative potentially encounter hazards and challenges that need to be *withstood*?

That's what constructive confrontation is all about. It doesn't mean chatting about something, shooting the breeze, kibitzing, or navel-gazing. Constructive confrontation means premeditated, methodical, systematic, and well-orchestrated efforts to do the following:

- Get after something before it gets after you.
- Position yourself and your team members for maximum productivity and performance with minimal margin for error.
- Minimize exposure by confronting contingencies in advance.
- Shed excess baggage and burden before the seas get stormy.
- Decrease conflict while increasing accountability.

There are a wide variety of benefits the circle of confrontation will afford you. As conversations lead to commitment, commitment leads to covenant, and covenant becomes the basis for constructive confrontation, the stage is set to get the most from what you have. That beats the heck out of paying more and getting less. Your team members are *begging* for responsible, organized, and effective leadership. They won't come right out and ask for it. But when you ask what went wrong or why their performance tanked, you can bet your bottom dollar that they'll blame the failure on the absence of responsible, organized, and effective leadership.

Don't hold your breath waiting for them to blame themselves. To do so would be painful and possibly even humiliating; except for the masochist, who wants to beat him- or herself up. Despite the fact that they'll accept responsibility for any bad thing that happens, whether or not they have anything to do with it, who really wants to work with masochists? Even small children have a natural tendency to avoid self-indictment.

When provided complete indemnification and assurances that there will be no punishment, youngsters will still answer the question, “Who did this?” with, “I dunno,” “The dog,” “The monster,” “My sister,” “A burglar,” or “President (fill in the blank).”

Constructive confrontation will focus and inspire your team members like nothing else, whoever is on your bus. When people bemoan a lack of leadership, this is what they’re truly asking for:

- Someone to listen and understand their issues, even help them identify issues they might not know they have
- Someone who will stand beside them and fight the good fight shoulder-to-shoulder
- Someone who has their personal and professional growth and development at heart
- Someone who will provide guidance, instruction, and encouragement whenever needed
- Someone who will provide support and backup when others question the team member’s motives and methods
- Someone to set boundaries, blow through barriers, and commit to staying the course alongside the team member, beginning to end

## WHAT IF?

Constructive confrontation differs from conventional confrontation in that it’s anticipatory, or pro-active, rather than reactive. It can spell the difference between coming off as a hero or an idiot. When problems arise, the hero says, “Have no fear, we’ve planned for this contingency.” The idiot says, “Gee, I never thought *that* would happen.” The truth is that the idiot never gave *any* thought to potential hazards and obstacles. He *assumed*, and we all know the story about the donkey.

More than any other distinguishing feature, constructive confrontation is grounded in careful planning and preparation, considering all options and anticipating as many potential problems as possible. Socially, a

lot of hip folks make fun of Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, preferring instead to party with their idiot friends. Why not? Idiots are predictably unpredictable and largely spontaneous, always looking for a good time. Meanwhile the scouts are carefully planning — always prepared.

Next time you get stuck in a blizzard on the turnpike, with whom would you rather be carpooling — idiots or scouts? Next time you veer off the ski slope into the woods and twist your ankle, who do you want to rescue you — a ski patrol person who was a scout or a ski patrol person still hung over from last night's idiot-fest at the lodge? We all ride trains or drive our cars over dozens of bridges, large and small, every day. Do you want to drive or ride over bridges built by architects, engineers, and construction contractors who anticipate potential problems and design solutions into the structures, or do you want to have the bridge collapse beneath you?

This isn't a far-fetched analogy. If a bridge collapses beneath a train or automobile traffic or if the wings fall off of a commercial jetliner, confrontation will follow. But by then, it's conventional, conflict-oriented, accusatory, negative, blame-placing, find-a-scapegoat, search-for-the-guilty, and punish-the-innocent confrontation. No thanks.

Wouldn't you prefer the confrontation to have taken place *before* things started to fall apart . . . literally? Like granny used to say, "A stitch in time saves nine." As the old industrial maxim teaches us, "There never seems to be enough time or money to do it right the first time, but there's always enough time and money to do it *over again*." Proper planning almost always makes things turn out more pleasantly, and proper planning always includes constructive confrontation.

Some use the term *constructive confrontation* to describe a positive approach to after-the-fact confrontation. No matter when confrontation takes place, you should attempt to go through positive steps, like defining the problem, expressing how you feel about the situation, reflect to the other party what you understand his or her position to be, and find a compromise, if possible. None of this removes or diminishes the fact that postponing or neglecting regular, conscious, constructive confrontation

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allowed things to tank in the first place. None of the aforementioned positive behaviors, if applied after the fact, will make up for the time, productivity, resources, and money lost by not staying on top of the game.

Given what you've learned so far about constructive confrontation, you can begin considering a wide range of *what ifs*:

- What if structural and aeronautical architects, engineers, and construction contractors didn't anticipate problems? What if they didn't preemptively confront the challenges and potential perils of construction from conception through completion?
- What if teachers and coaches didn't make lesson plans and game plans before class or the big game? How valued would you feel if your teacher passed out a test before giving an assignment or teaching?
- What if teachers didn't confront students who are not performing up to their capabilities? Who's getting cheated? The student and the society that will be forced to subsidize what the student is unable to contribute later in life.
- What if your athletic coach expected you to show up for the game without holding any practices or running you through any drills or exercises? What if athletic coaches didn't confront athletes who settle for performance below their capabilities? What if vocal coaches, acting coaches, or executive coaches didn't confront the people who are counting on them to confront lackluster performance?
- What if executives committed enormous physical, financial, and human resources to projects without a well-thought-out strategic plan? What if they flew strictly by the seat of their wardrobe? That's simply some peoples' style. But the risks they take jeopardize more than their own success. The more that rides on your decisions and execution, the more you owe it to the organization you work for and the people (internal and external) who are affected by your actions to take well-thought-out strategic actions.
- What if project managers, supervisors, managers, and executives

engaged their team members regularly with *what ifs*? Inquisitiveness is a big part of constructive confrontation. We should never stop asking “What if?” or acting “As if.”

## TALK SHOW SHRINKS

Dr. Laura Schlessinger, Dr. Phil McGraw, and other media therapists make a habit of compressing therapy that ordinarily takes months or years into minutes. In other words, they deal more in headlines than details. Call it compressed therapy. After a four-alarm diagnosis, they immediately cut to the chase and begin confronting their callers and guests. That’s where the rubber meets the road. When time is constrained, musing about problems gives way to the confrontation. People who call in or otherwise agree to be on the show are seeking confrontation because nothing else seems to be working.

Unless the on-air diagnosis is an epiphany of epic proportions, the solutions are found in simple behavior modification. Simple to *describe*, that is. If the appropriate behaviors, healthy habits, and productive activities were easy, or resonated with the caller’s essential nature, they wouldn’t need confrontation. If the radio or television therapist *called the callers* daily with reminders and encouragement about the right thinking and behavior, there wouldn’t be as many fires to put out on the air. As a practitioner of constructive confrontation, think of yourself as a preemptive talk show shrink.

Anyone in the mental health field knows the road to recovery is difficult and requires new ways of thinking and behaving. For some it’s easier than it is for others. Some people face mountains of problems while others face molehills. In any case, getting from where you are now to where you want to be requires change, even if it’s only more effort. More anything is a change. Meaningful, purposeful change isn’t going to happen without constructive confrontation. More specifically, change won’t be *sustained* without constructive confrontation to keep goals and purpose in the front seat of our consciences.

## THE COURAGE TO CONFRONT

Confrontation becomes a negative and potentially frightening proposition when it's not engaged early enough. Confrontation is often postponed, neglected, or avoided altogether because of the *perception* that it requires great courage. Confrontation *after* the fact, *after* things have gone sour, or *after* it's too late to do it right the first time requires courage because you know it's not going to be pretty. The need to act courageously is dispelled by caring enough to confront constructively and consistently on the front end. If "caring" sounds too *Kum-by-ya* for your tastes, just think of it as working smart.

What is courage all about if you're facing down a problem that never should have been allowed to fester in the first place? Sometimes you're called upon to clean up a catastrophe you had no culpability in creating. That's why you earn the big bucks. So keep your courage handy. You might be called upon to rise above the crowd. Generally speaking, when it comes to confrontation, consistency diminishes the need for courage.

As a matter of faith, confrontation among believers in certain religions is encouraged and even welcomed when the common principles are forgotten or violated. The key is common principles. Confronting someone over an agenda that person didn't sign onto in the first place won't produce positive results unless the agenda is imposed to preserve social order and the common good. If people share common principles and commit to holding one another accountable, confrontation ranges from a preventative measure to an immediate remedy applied soon enough to make a positive difference.

For Christians who profess love for all God's children as a principle of faith, confronting must be done lovingly lest it impeach the believers' core principles. Similarly, confrontation that upholds and reinforces positive principles is a hedge against hypocrisy. It's one thing to give lip service to a belief. But actively participating in its preservation is proof of commitment. Despite the fact that actions speak louder than words, the cycle of confrontation, with its conversation, commitment, covenant, and

continuous confrontation followed by celebration, consciously and deliberately transforms words into action.

## HISTORICAL CONFRONTATION

Some of the most famous examples of constructive confrontation demonstrate how perseverance and commitment to the long haul have spread inspiration around the world. Unfortunately, fewer and fewer young people recognize the name Annie Sullivan. Thankfully, there are some who can still tell you who Helen Keller was. Annie Mansfield Sullivan overcame a difficult childhood, including life in the county orphanage (circa 1880), separation from her siblings following her mother's and her brother's deaths. She overcame the sight-stealing disease of trachoma, eventually regaining much of her eyesight, to become an advocate for and a teacher of the blind.

Annie Sullivan is remembered most for leading a seven-year-old youngster named Helen Keller out of the darkness and isolation of Helen's deafness and blindness. It was one of the most incredible feats ever accomplished by a teacher and student. Despite Keller's deafness, Sullivan taught her to speak. Despite Keller's blindness, Sullivan taught her to read and write. Helen Keller became one of the world's most celebrated authors and lecturers of her time. It could not have been done without consistent, virtually relentless, constructive confrontation.

Sullivan had to teach Keller fundamental discipline before ever approaching reading, writing, or speaking skills. Helen Keller, used to overprotection and pampering from her parents, was uncooperative to say the least. Things were so physically rough at times that Sullivan had to move Keller out of her parents' house because they couldn't stand the constant confrontation between teacher and student. In the end, it was Sullivan's commitment over the years to confronting Helen Keller's continued progress that produced what many people proclaim was nothing short of a miracle in human transformation.

Helen Keller would never have been able to realize her full potential, and possibly none of it, were it not for the incredible commitment made

by Annie Sullivan. That's what leaders do in the circle of confrontation. They use an organized, systematic approach to help their team members realize their full potential in the context of the professional challenge to be met. In the most difficult constructive confrontation scenarios, 99.9 percent of all organizational leaders never face anything even resembling the challenge Annie Sullivan overcame. If Sullivan had not been willing to continuously confront her pupil and stick with it for as long as it took, very few people, if any, would remember the name Helen Keller.

What if more parents were willing to invest even a fraction of the effort into their children's lives that Sullivan invested in Helen Keller's life? If all else remained equal, teachers, schools, the economy, and so on, it's safe to predict that scholastic performance and discipline in schools would improve exponentially and social issues like teen pregnancy, adolescent alcohol consumption, and drug use would diminish significantly — perhaps to near extinction. Such improvements would transcend gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, and religious affiliation. Human beings are either challenged to excel, then consistently confronted to ensure success, or they're not.

Constructive confrontation is an investment in the future. How different would the world be today if Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Margaret Sanger had not confronted prejudice? How many business owners; community leaders; senators; congressional representatives; municipal, state, and federal judges; public agency heads; and presidential cabinet members would be African Americans, females, Hispanics, or other historically disenfranchised populations? What if John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin hadn't confronted taxation without representation in the name of liberty? What if free men and women throughout the world had not been willing to confront forces of oppression throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Without their sacrifices, world maps would be drawn very differently from how they are drawn today.

THE DESPERATE SALESMAN

Bring it back into the workplace. Consider, if you will, the salesman who was too burned out to continue. He was young and, like most young men, was confused about his direction in life and doubtful as to whether all of his hard work would ever pay dividends. Wracked with self-doubt and emotional fatigue, a wise mentor took the young salesman under his wing and offered hope. The young man didn't know how to respond to a mentor. No one, including his own parents, had ever encouraged him before.

The mentor started confronting the young man on a regular basis, setting goals and building the *skills, habits, attitudes, and activities* the young man would need to succeed. Even with all of the encouragement, the young man wavered and faltered. He knew what he had agreed to do but couldn't seem to complete his mission. His mentor continued to confront him. When the young man pushed back and complained of his emotional exhaustion, the wise mentor told him, "I can't help how you feel. But I can teach you what you need to do to succeed."

The conversations continued. The young man committed to try again, and again, and again. Covenants were drafted, and the mentor confronted his mentee again, and again, and again. It took years, but the constructive confrontation took hold and became anchored deep in the young man's consciousness. Because a wise man cared enough to step into the path of the young man's self-doubt, because he cared enough to confront before and during the progress of the young man's career, their story had a happy ending. The young man is now a corporate chief executive officer (CEO), a figurative million years and miles from that time and place where he nearly threw in the towel. If you ask the CEO today the secret of his success, he'll point directly at his mentor and say, "I'm a success today because that person cared enough to confront me, and I had enough functioning brain cells left to respond."

## CONFRONTATION ON THE COURT

Legendary athletes will almost always point to legendary coaches as the reason for their success. Raw talent, no matter how good it is, won't go very far if it's not molded, focused, and applied properly. It certainly won't be fully realized. This is true of *any* talent: business, musical, literary, visual, surgical, athletic, and so on. What great molders of talent do is confront, early and often. It's not uncommon for the talented ones to resist and even resent the confrontations while confrontation is occurring. With greater maturity, they invariably look back and thank the God of their understanding that someone cared enough to confront, and step into the path of apathy, complacency, and self-doubt.

Basketball fans know Bill Walton as a legendary athlete, from his days as a student athlete at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) throughout his National Basketball Association (NBA) career. Walton points to legendary coach John Wooden, not only as a motivator, but also as a teacher. But it was Wooden's relentless constructive confrontation that shaped Walton's life and career.

True to form, Walton didn't fully understand or appreciate it at the time that it was going on. Writing about Wooden later, Walton spoke for himself and his former teammates, "Of course we didn't understand or realize any of this while we were doing it. We thought he was nuts, crazy." Such is the nature of youth and ignorance. Unfortunately, those with age and wisdom can't slam dunk like they used to. Could you imagine what would happen if John Wooden's mind could be transplanted into Kobe Bryant's body?

Almost three decades after John Wooden ceased to coach Walton in an official capacity, the player still fondly describes how his former coach took him and his teammates to "places we didn't want to go," driving them in "directions that we weren't aware of," and teaching invaluable life lessons through "explanation, demonstration, correction, and repetition." Earning the "privilege of becoming a member of the UCLA basketball team" under Wooden required "living up to your responsibilities."

## COMMITMENT

Through it all Walton describes Wooden's confrontation as "always constructive."

These are the essential elements in the circle of constructive confrontation: *conversation* (explanation and exploration), *commitment* (living up to responsibilities), *covenant* (memorializing what's been committed to), *confrontation* (correction and repetition), and *celebration*. Using constructive confrontation as a premeditated, systematic approach to increasing accountability and reducing conflict is consistent with what Wooden describes as the "triumph of executing an organized plan over hoping that you'll be lucky." Leading people in the workplace without taking full advantage of all constructive confrontation components is trading on luck. Without "an organized plan," you'll be lucky to see your team members meet anything that resembles your expectations.

## CONFRONTATION IN THE RED ZONE

When asked about turning around poorly performing football franchises, Bill Parcells, who has done it a few times, has some philosophies that further illustrate the value of constructive confrontation in workplace relationships. Parcells believes that holding frank conversations with everyone in the organization is essential to success and that those frank conversations include a full explanation of what the organization can and will do for the player and what the player will contribute to the team to help it reach its goals.

When performance is the problem, confrontation is the only way out. Constructive confrontation is the best way to ensure that performance won't *become* a problem.

This is all part of constructive confrontation. The process is not unique to any individual or application. If you're wondering where the celebration is in all of this, wait until the next touchdown.

The road map for constructive confrontation, just like Bill Purcell's turnaround philosophy, is not complicated. It merely requires the effort that you're already being paid to make. Before you start thinking constructive confrontation is some kind of manipulation or punitive ploy on

the part of upper management to get you to work harder, be advised that following the constructive confrontation process makes your life easier by *reducing wasted effort*. Parcels wouldn't do the things he does if the effort was wasted. If his philosophy didn't work, he'd be the first to admit and abandon it.

### WRITE FIRST, CONFRONT LATER

The conversation phase of the circle of confrontation is critical to the process. The commitment phase is equally important. But, for heaven's sake, *write it down*. The horror stories that follow verbal contracts are legion. It doesn't matter how chummy a leader and his or her team members are, write down the commitment in the form of a covenant. Friends don't always stay friends. Bickering over loosely interpreted verbal agreements will end a friendship faster than borrowing money.

There was once a corporate communications consultant who was called in by an old buddy to nail down a new corporate client for his buddy's emerging video production company. The communications consultant had the reputation and track record to meet the high standards demanded by the prospective client. As a result of the consultant's affiliation with the project and a parade of his previously published works, his buddy received the contract. The quid pro quo was simple; the consultant would write the scripts for the corporate media productions at his standard fee. It all looked rosy. The client liked the first production, and it appeared to be the start of a long and beautiful friendship.

When the communications consultant ran into the new client at a charity golf tournament a few months later, he was surprised to hear that the subsequent productions were "okay," despite the consultant's lack of involvement. "I sure wish you had stayed on the project; I nearly cancelled everything when I heard you quit," said the client. "Quit?" the communications consultant thought to himself. "Subsequent productions?" The consultant immediately confronted his "buddy," the production company owner.

He went to the production company offices and took his "buddy" out

to lunch to politely move the conversation off-campus. The consultant, after all, was a communications expert. He went through all the sharing and caring stuff about “I hear you saying . . . blah, blah, blah,” in an attempt to have a *pleasant confrontation*. But pleasant or not, it was too late. The communications “expert” hadn’t written down the agreement in the form of a covenant nor bothered to have the handshake agreement witnessed. His “buddy” invoked selective memory to renegotiate.

Admitting that he didn’t want to pay the consultant his going rate for scripting the corporate videos, the production company owner had hired a less-expensive writer without bothering to discuss it with the consultant. When the client noticed deterioration in the quality of writing, the production company owner told him that the consultant had quit the project and was no longer available. He had to spring for a couple of expensive golf resort weekends for the client, but he hung on to the contract.

By not drafting a covenant up front, the communications consultant created an impossible situation, impossible to get out of gracefully, that is. With no witnesses to the verbal agreement, there was no way to enforce it after it was violated, which the consultant *assumed* would never happen. This is when some people hire the law firm of Louie and Guido to collect. Fortunately, the communications consultant was too classy for that. With all avenues for legitimate remedy closed to him, he smarted over the loss of tens of thousands of dollars in income over the life of the project but chalked it up as an expensive lesson.

The moral of this story: write it down. No matter how warm and fuzzy you feel when you make the commitment, write it down. You might innocently forget exactly what you committed to, the other party might innocently forget what he or she committed to, or there might be nothing innocent about the amnesia when it happens. There might be misunderstandings or misinterpretation. It won’t matter. The only thing worse than an after-the-fact, too-late-to-be-anything-but-ugly confrontation is confronting after the fact with no document to operate from. Little good can come out of an after-the-fact confrontation when the majority of the

damage has already been done. Without a covenant, the process will break down long before there is anything to celebrate.

### EXPECTATIONS

Any relationship is vulnerable to unrealized expectations. Virtually any conflict or hostility in the workplace can be traced to someone's disappointment over the failure of someone else to accomplish what he or she was expected to do. This works up *or* down the organizational food chain. The wild card: who was expecting whom to do what and why? How many times have you heard it said that *assuming* makes an ass out of "u" and "me"? Virtually any conflict or hostility in the workplace means somebody assumed something. There are occasions when someone simply blows off his or her responsibilities. But those are rare and quickly remedied.

Having an expectation is not necessarily a bad thing. The critical factor is how realistic the expectation is. In the absence of a competent approach to constructive confrontation, it is difficult to form a foundation for an expectation. Constructive confrontation begins with a conversation about the expectation and includes a full dialogue about what's real and relevant to the job, task, assignment, project, or initiative. The circle of confrontation virtually assures that expectations are realistic.

Constructive confrontation is, by design, self-correcting. If you discover later that something has not been accounted for or has been misdiagnosed, the cyclical nature of constructive confrontation will accommodate the course correction. There's no vice in admitting a mistake has been made and correcting it as soon as possible. The vice occurs when you operate under false assumptions and unrealistic expectations for a long period of time incurring expensive and possibly irreversible damage.

## CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY

It's important to establish the role a leader plays in the growth and development of every person in his or her sphere of influence. Although constructive confrontation works both ways, leader to team member and vice versa, guiding the performance of every team member is a core leadership responsibility. Some of the highlights to keep in mind as you read this book include the following:

- High performance is everybody's business. The future career options of every person in the organization depend on the ability to get things done. More than that, career success depends on a documented track record of accomplishment. Constructive confrontation not only gives leaders an easy-to-follow road map for maximizing accountability while minimizing conflict, it keeps a detailed written record of the process.
- Think of it as 20/20 foresight leadership. The memoirs of successful men and women in business, education, medicine, science, sports, and public service are filled with tributes to their coaches, mentors, teachers, and trusted advisors — the people who saw more potential in them than they saw in themselves. Constructive confrontation is a road map for leadership.
- Looking back upon their lives and careers, people whose names have become household words and whose accomplishments have become legendary invariably give credit to the people who encouraged them and, more importantly, patiently taught them the processes and disciplines that made extraordinary achievements possible.
- These successful and grateful people, who, like their mentors before them, now enjoy the view from atop a mountain of experience, pay tribute to those who tried to share that view and *cared enough to confront them*.
- With its commitment and celebration components, constructive confrontation is a premeditated, methodical, and systematic ap-

proach to leveling the leadership playing field. Premeditated, systematic confrontation stands the best chance of being constructive. After-the-fact, reactive confrontation will most likely be negative.

- Constructive confrontation is a tactical *pass-it-forward* tool in any organizational leadership system. The simple-yet-profound leadership mantra, *Lead the way you like to be led*, makes confrontation inevitable. It's your choice to make it constructive. Every aspect of clear direction, support, and recognition leaders want from those they report to is equally important to those reporting to *them*.
- Constructive confrontation could be called leadership engineering. Without it, direction and proper course corrections will be coincidental at best. It's a road map that can be easily followed and applied consistently across organizations, between clients and vendors, and with customers.

Let the cynics say, "If you want to know how much difference you make in the grand scheme of things, put your hand in a bucket of water, pull it out, and see the impression you leave behind." Ask Helen Keller, Bill Walton, the desperate salesman-turned-CEO, or Bill Parcells . . . using constructive confrontation *will* leave an impression behind. Not using constructive confrontation will also leave an impression behind. But those are the impressions you'll likely try to forget. It all begins with the next stop: the conversation.

