

Resolving Differences

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Introduction

Difference – this word can be used only when making a comparison between two entities. It is the dissimilarity – the aspect that is present in one entity and not in the other entity.

The world is created with lots of differences and it is those differences that make life interesting and livable. In human beings too, between man and woman – there are lots and lots of similarities and there are a few dissimilarities.

Differences are a part of our life – we ought to live with them. It is very important to know how to resolve differences in inter-personal relations to have a happy life as well as to have a cordial relationship with all those we need to interact with.

If we do not resolve our differences, -

1. It can lead to frustration
2. Frustration can lead to either depression or aggression
3. Depression damages your health and makes you withdraw into yourself
4. Aggression can make you an outcast which can lead to further frustration

Why do differences crop up?

We do not mind physical differences. We have learnt to deal with them. In fact, we would be surprised to see identical appearances – we treat them freaks of nature – say twins are OK even though we treat twins as rare. Should you come across a person who resembles you on the street, we get some very interesting thoughts about how those similarities came about !

What we do mind are the mental differences that manifest in our interactions with others. Isn't it weird that we consider physical similarities as freaks but mental differences as unnatural?

This paper deals with these differences – real or perceived – and proposes mechanisms to deal and resolve them.

Why do differences crop up at all – well consider these –

1. Childhood environment
2. Childhood experiences
3. Words and deeds of our parents, teachers, close kith and kin
4. Different education
5. Different race, religion or language
6. Different interests - locals-non-locals

7. Different roles – hunter-prey, boss-subordinate, haves and needy, owner-employee, seller-buyer, father-son, elder-younger, wife-husband, teacher-student, judge-defendant etc.
8. Status – economic and social
9. Innocence/ignorance/idiosyncrasies/stupidity – hey – of the other person not me – don't look at me like that!

There can be more reasons – suffice it to say that differences are natural.

How do we resolve differences?

The following are some of the ways to resolve the differences – by no means are these exhaustive – there can be more ways and you may come up with your own unique ways too.

1. Do not recognize them
2. Do not resolve them
3. Agree to disagree
4. Convince or be convinced
5. Escalate

Do not recognize them

We do not need to recognize differences. For example – the way Eskimos live and we live, there are major differences. We don't have to learn about the way Eskimos live and Eskimos too need not learn about our way of life. We both can go about our lives without noticing the differences between us. We meet somebody weird while traveling – do we take notice of him and try to resolve our differences – you may – but it is not necessary. We don't need to recognize the differences - always. Wherever you need not, do not recognize differences. Do not trouble trouble – unless trouble troubles you!

But it is not always possible or feasible to ignore the differences – right?

Do not resolve them

Many a time, a person in our circle of acquaintances, holds different opinions, comes from a different religious background, we recognize the differences but it is not necessary to resolve them. He prays God in his own way, and we do our way. He eats food his way (chop sticks?) and we eat our way (spoon and fork?). We can live with recognized differences in many situations – wherever you can, live with them.

But it is not always possible or feasible not-to-resolve differences – right?

Agree to disagree

We can often agree-to-disagree and still be happy. Let us say, your co-worker and you disagree on the method to execute a piece of work – you both can agree-to-disagree –

each can execute it in his own way and still come up with right result. You can see examples in students preparing for exams in different ways, two brothers/sisters/friends going their own way and still be friends. This is possible, when we do not depend on each other or one's outcome does not influence the other – wherever you can, agree-to-disagree and get on with life

But it is not always possible or feasible to agree-to-disagree and move forward differences – right?

Convince or be convinced

This becomes necessary when none of the above is applicable/possible. These are the ways to convince the others –

1. **Might is always right** – a strong position always gives you strength to convince the other person. A strength can be physical strength, rank, position, social standing, possession of a weapon or specialized knowledge, locus-standi (being a person of the place – you are noble prize winner, but the bus conductor in which you are traveling has locus-standi and can order you around!) boss has authority to convince his subordinate. A traffic policeman's interpretation of traffic law prevails over the errant driver. A strong person in a dark alley makes the weaker person give right of way or even part with his property. On a deserted road, an eighteen-wheeler gets right of way from a small car, irrespective of the rule or law. But if both are equally strong or weak and might is not on your side?
2. **Entreat/plead/logic/reason** – basically it is pleading – give the other person a reason / plea – that appeals to him, makes him feel noble, makes him feel guilty, makes him feel winning, makes him feel that he is doing the right thing – to get convinced by your argument. But if both are equally eloquent and equally strong/weak – then?
3. **Show a reference** – organizations have rules/regulations/processes. Show the other person the reference and claim your right. You need to have ready reference precisely – book, chapter, section and paragraph. In society, we have a hierarchy of references
 - a. **Law of the land** - laws of the government, laws of the organization where you are working – these are applicable to every one. These are implementable and have legal recourse.
 - b. **Encyclopedias/dictionaries/knowledge repositories/research findings/anecdotes of great persons** – these are very good reference material and it is very difficult for any body to contradict what is given inside these documents – they always win the day.
 - c. **Religious laws** - these are fast losing their relevance – but are useful when there are no defined laws of the land available. These have moral force but have no legal recourse.
 - d. **Precedents/customs/practices** – past occurrences and corresponding solutions – these are predictors of right outcomes and have no legal recourse nor moral force but are still a very good argument

