

CONFERENCE TABLE

Putting Principles into Practice

The work of learning how to communicate biblically (an unnatural thing for fallen men) is just that, work. The Apostle Paul describes the pains he went to in order to practice what he preached (1 Cor. 9:27). It will take us some time, and dedicated effort, but the fruit of the Spirit is worth the extra labor in the field. The conference table is a planned and purposeful effort to bring together parties that are having difficulty communicating biblically and establish godly communication. All of the principles you have just learned (the attitudes of communication, the rules of communication, and the principles of forgiveness) will be utilized. This is useful for couples, but can be used with family members, friends, church members, ultimately anyone who is willing to commit to working through things God's way.

Step 1) Set aside a time daily to come together for the Conference Table – The second rule is to “Keep Current”. Take some time to deal with today's problems today. Also, the goal of the conference table is to establish new habits of communication. Habits take repetition to sink in. You will need to make a commitment if you hope to see long-term change and growth.

Step 2) As appropriate, the leader calls the conference table – Different roles exist in many of our relationships. The purpose in having the leader call the conference is to follow the Biblical pattern and thereby seek the Lord's blessing. If the leadership is trying to follow God, it can more easily flow through the rest of the home, church, etc... In the case of individuals with similar roles, any of them could request the conference table.

Step 3) Sit down at a table – Tables tend to draw people together. You can write easily at a table (you may want to take notes) and it is more difficult to walk away from a discussion when you are seated. Also, sitting at a table is more formal than many other settings. This is something to take serious.

Step 4) Establish and commit to following the rules of communication – Initially, you may have to review them together and read the applicable portion of Ephesians 4. Eventually, they will become cemented into your mind and you will not have to take as much time to review them.

Step 5) Create a process by which failures to follow the rules of communication are pointed out – In an ideal world we would never violate the rules of communication, but we live in a fallen world. Sin will creep in, passions may temporarily flair. How will you identify a breakdown in communication? One individual could raise their hand, stand up, hold up a printed copy of the four rules, etc... Immediately, conversation should cease and all at the table should discuss whether a rule was broken and if so how. This is a really important step. The point is to put off the old man and put on the new man. If we keep allowing the old man to come to the table, we miss the point.

Step 6) Establish rules by which a violation of the rules of communication is resolved – The resolution should be biblical. The individual who violated the rules should acknowledge (confess) their guilt and apologize. Having forgiven the violation, discussion can resume.

Step 7) Begin the meeting with prayer – The most necessary participant at the table is God. Seek His help and His wisdom to resolve the issue. Seek His help to have the right attitude. If things start to get off tract, it may be necessary to pray more than once during the meeting.

Step 8) Bring the Bible to the meeting – Also bring along any other useful Biblical resources to the table and consult them as appropriate. Your goal should be to seek the Lord's guidance.

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Step 9) The first order of business is to discuss the issues of the day and how you have responded to them - The one who called the meeting should take the lead here as well. Confess your failures. Take responsibility for your sin and seek forgiveness from those you have sinned against. This type of leadership will often swing open the doors of communication and many (if not all) problems can be resolved by personal confession rather than loving confrontation. You don't have to limit yourself to issues that have occurred in the past 24 hours. If there is sin from the past God has convicted you of, deal with it too.

Step 10) Lovingly raise other issues that have not yet been addressed – After each participant has confessed the faults they are aware of, the next order of business is to raise other issues that have not yet been addressed. This may be difficult, but it is necessary when sin remains unresolved. Proverbs 27:6 teaches us, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

Step 11) Close in prayer – If you cannot close the meeting in prayer, it is likely the laws of communication have been violated. If all is done in a spirit of love and humility, the Lord will bless the gathering; He also desires to bless the progress made. Seek His continued favor and strength to make a lasting change.

Step 12) Adjust the frequency of the conference table meetings as appropriate – There will come a time when the conference table will not be necessary on a daily basis. How will we know when we get there? Once the principles of communication begin to consistently spill out in your regular communication, you can begin to decrease the frequency of the meeting. You aren't leaving good communication behind; you have actually progressed to the point where it has become part of the life. Remember, you don't have to wait until you are at the conference table to repent. If God has revealed your sin to you, deal with it then. Again, the goal is to put off the old man and put on the new. Good communication doesn't end at the conference table, it begins there.

- *Adapted from Competent to Counsel, by Jay Adams*