

# Style MATTERS

The Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory

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The Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory

By Ron Kraybill, PhD

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## Ordering Information

*Style Matters* is available **printed** in full color throughout or in black and white text with color cover. You can also purchase rights to reproduce at modest cost and **print your own copies**. A fully automated **web version** with a detailed report tailored to your scores and features not found in the print versions is available online. For all pricing and ordering information, visit [www.ConflictStyleMatters.com](http://www.ConflictStyleMatters.com). Or contact us by phone at 202-580-8656 or email at [Center@RiverhouseEpress.com](mailto:Center@RiverhouseEpress.com).

## Leading a Workshop?

You can get a free *Trainers Guide to Successful Conflict Styles Workshops* from Riverhouse. Send a request to:

[TrainersGuide@ConflictStyleMatters.com](mailto:TrainersGuide@ConflictStyleMatters.com)

An eighteen-page PDF document with clear step-by-step instructions will be sent to you immediately by return email.

## Style Matters Online

The interactive *Style Matters Online* on the Riverhouse web site offers automated scoring and features an emailable, four page score report summarizing key findings for each user.

## Riverhouse ePress

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Revised 2008, 2010, 2011

ISBN 0-9755071-2-5

**Riverhouse ePress**, Harrisonburg, VA

[www.RiverhouseEpress.com](http://www.RiverhouseEpress.com)

## About the Author

Ron Kraybill has been a leader in the field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding since 1979. He was founding director of the Mennonite Conciliation Service, Akron, Pennsylvania, 1979-1988. He spent the years 1989-1995 as Director of Training and head of special projects at the Centre for Conflict Resolution in Cape Town and as training advisor to the South African National Peace Accord. He was a professor in the Conflict Transformation Program at Eastern Mennonite University 1995-2006. From 2007 to 2009 he was an independent consultant in Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Amman. Since 2009 he has been a Peace and Development Advisor for the United Nations. Other books by Kraybill include: *Peace Skills: A Manual for Community Mediators* (Jossey-Bass, 2001); *Cool Tools for Hot Topics: Group Tools to Facilitate Meetings When Things are Hot* (Good Books, 2007), and *Restoring Those Who Help Others: Spirituality and Self-Care for Those in Danger of Burnout* (In press). See [www.RiverhouseEpress.com](http://www.RiverhouseEpress.com) for his essays and a blog on peace processes.

## More Resources on Conflict Styles

For a large number of essays on conflict styles, culture and conflict, and resources for trainers, go to the Riverhouse website. On the front page of the site, click on the Resources section in the left menu.

## Introduction

We all experience painful differences with others as a part of living. Perhaps more than any other challenge in life, our ability to work out differences with others affects our ability to live well and be happy. Yet most of us get little thoughtful guidance from parents and teachers on how to do this. We figure out a few things by trial and error, but we are often confused and hurt by what happens in conflicts.

***Style Matters: The Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory*** gives specific, practical help for dealing with differences. In a handful of pages, you will get more help than most of us get in a lifetime of learning. This information can help you understand confusing situations and make a real difference in the quality of relationships in home, school, work, and community settings.

So how do you respond to conflict? Most people aren't sure how to answer. It is often easier to describe how others respond than how we ourselves respond.

*Style Matters* gives you a snapshot of yourself.

With that picture in hand, you can make conscious choices in responding to others when things are tense. You can build on your strengths and improve on your weaknesses. You can assess responses of other people and deal more constructively with them.

Bear in mind as you answer the questions in the next few pages:

- There are no "right" or "wrong" answers.
- No test is perfect, including this one.
- No one is "set in stone", including you.

The questions and your scores are only the beginning of the learning process. Thoughtful self-reflection and conversation with others about what happens in conflict can teach a great deal more. *Style Matters* will help you to do that and to think about what really matters:

How to respond most constructively to the disagreements and conflicts in your life tomorrow?

## Instructions for Getting Started

You can take this inventory in one of two ways. If you live and work in a cultural setting known as individualist (also sometimes referred to as “low context” for reasons you can read about in Note 1 on page 22), the context in which conflict takes place is not so important. People in these settings see conflict as a matter between individuals that requires only moderate awareness of status, roles, community customs, etc. They feel free to respond as they wish when there is disagreement, no matter who is involved. If this sounds like your life, Instructions A will probably work best for you.

On the other hand, if you live and work in a setting known as collectivist (or “high context”), chances are you have a strong instinct to first examine the *context* of a problem before responding. In such settings, social status, age, roles, and the expectations of others have a big voice in deciding responses. Specific information about the context must be known before answering questions about “what to do” in conflict. If this sounds like your life, Instructions B may feel more realistic for you, since they guide you to select one specific conflict or kind of relationship and hold it in mind as you take the inventory.

Many people operate in mixed settings so either instruction set could work. Welcome to the complexities of modern living! You can learn more about the differences between the two modes on Note 1 on page 22, as well as cultures/regions of the world often associated with each. If you are undecided, we recommend Instructions B. They work for everyone, regardless of background, so long as you remember that the picture of yourself they yield at the end cannot be generalized to other

situations. Instructions A result in a broad *sketch* of your behavior in general. Instructions B result in a specific *snapshot* of your behavior in one context only, and you may want to later take the inventory a second or third time with other contexts in mind to get snapshots of yourself in several settings.

### Instruction Set A - General Sketch

**Think about your typical response** when your wishes differ with those of another person. Questions A-J deal with your response to disagreement in the beginning stages, when you have not yet grown frustrated or greatly upset. Questions K-T deal with your response after the disagreement has gotten stronger. Though there may be exceptions, what is typical for you? Your “gut-level response” to the question is likely to be the most accurate. For each question, choose the number between 1 and 7 that best describes what you actually do.

### Instruction Set B - Context-Specific Snapshot

**Choose a context for answering the questions.** Select a person or particular kind of relationship (for example, co-workers of same status as you, personal friends, a committee in your religious community, etc.) with whom you have experienced disagreements or conflict. Hold this situation in your mind, or ones similar to it, as you answer the questions. Questions A-J deal with disagreements in the beginning stages, when you have not yet grown frustrated or greatly upset. Questions K-T deal with your response after things have gotten more difficult. For each question, choose the number between 1 and 7 that is most accurate in describing what you actually do.

**Calm Settings**

*When I first discover that differences exist and feelings are not yet high. . .*

**A.** So long as feelings are still under control, I push to bring our differences to a resolution that benefits both of us.

**RARELY**

**USUALLY**

**B.** If the disagreement is not resolved, I focus on what's important to the other person.

**RARELY**

**USUALLY**

**C.** When feelings are high, I look for ways to resolve the disagreement without work.

**RARELY**

**USUALLY**

**D.** I try to hear the other side's view. I try to understand their perspective. I try to find a way to resolve the disagreement that is fair to both sides.

**RARELY**

**USUALLY**

**E.** In a mild disagreement, I am likely to be calm and peaceful.

**RARELY**

**USUALLY**

**F.** When I am in a disagreement, I give priority to achieving peace.

**RARELY**

**USUALLY**

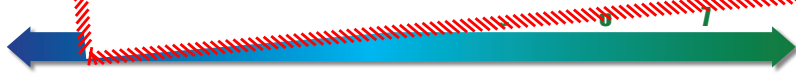
**G.** When the disagreement is still low-key, I put as much effort into understanding the other side's views as I put into explaining my own.

**RARELY**

**USUALLY**

**Features of Style Matters**

- Research validated.
- Suitable for diverse cultural settings.
- Clear explanations; no purchase of additional materials required.
- Discussion questions provided for group work.
- Free Trainers Guide available for download.
- Online Version also available with automated scoring and detailed 5 page score report based on user's scores. Easy emailing of report to user or trainer.
- Priced to be accessible.





**H.** If tension is not yet high,  
I focus more on making sure that my opinions are heard than on keeping the other person happy.



**I.** In the early stage when people are not yet upset,  
I deal with differences by finding ways to postpone the discussion.



**J.** When emotions are not yet high,  
I deal with differences by offering to give up some things in exchange for others.



**Storm Settings**

*If differences persist and feelings escalate, what do you do then?*

**K.** If the conflict gets heated,  
I make a lot of effort to get us to work together in finding a solution that we are both happy with.



**L.** As emotions rise,  
I focus more on my goals and less on how others feel about things.



**M.** When feelings escalate in an argument,  
I seek a solution where both parties win some and lose some.



**Storm Settings (cont'd)**

*If differences persist and feelings escalate, what do I do?*

**N.** When I without

**RARELY**

**O.** If the conflict I prefer our relationship

**RARELY**

**P.** When an I decide to

**RARELY**

**Q.** If the conflict My attention relationship

**RARELY**

**R.** When things

**RARELY**

**S.** When an argument I put a lot of effort

**RARELY**

**T.** When tempers I try to move on

**RARELY**

**Who Uses Style Matters?**

- School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University
- Business School, Stanford University
- Department of Public Safety, State of Texas
- Canadian Defence Force
- Department of Agriculture, State of Pennsylvania
- Department of Transportation
- Medical School, University of Calgary
- Justice Institute of British Columbia
- US Federal Judicial Center
- Statistics Canada
- Institute for Conflict Analysis and Research, George Mason University
- AT&T Wireless
- Valspar Corporation
- Plus hundreds of other colleges, universities, government units, trainers, consultants, religious congregations and their leaders, human resource managers, and team leaders.

or than threaten

ng the

e's goals.

it.

**USUALLY**

**Now go to the next page and tally your results.**





# Style Inventory Tally Sheet

When you have answered all the questions, transfer the number you chose for each question to the chart below. For example, on question A, if you circled 1, write 1 on the line beside A in the chart below. When you have transferred all the numbers, add them in each column, A+G, K + S, etc., and enter the total for each column in the gray box.



A <input type="checkbox"/>	K <input type="checkbox"/>	B <input type="checkbox"/>	— <input type="checkbox"/>	C <input type="checkbox"/>	M <input type="checkbox"/>	D <input type="checkbox"/>	N <input type="checkbox"/>	E <input type="checkbox"/>	O <input type="checkbox"/>
G <input type="checkbox"/>	S <input type="checkbox"/>	H <input type="checkbox"/>	Q <input type="checkbox"/>	J <input type="checkbox"/>	T <input type="checkbox"/>	I <input type="checkbox"/>	P <input type="checkbox"/>	F <input type="checkbox"/>	R <input type="checkbox"/>
Calm	Storm	Calm	Storm	Calm	Storm	Calm	Storm	Calm	Storm
<b>Cooperating</b>		<b>Directing</b>		<b>Compromising</b>		<b>Avoiding</b>		<b>Harmonizing</b>	

Now tranfer your score totals from the gray box above and the style names they are with to the columns below, placing them in order from highest score to lowest.

<b>Calm</b> Response when issues or conflicts first arise	<b>Storm</b> Response when things escalate or stress rises
Highest <b>Calm Score</b> ^ <b>Style Name</b> ^	Highest <b>Storm Score</b> ^ <b>Style Name</b> ^
<b>Style Name</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup>	<b>Style Name</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup>
<b>Style Name</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>Style Name</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup>
<b>Style Name</b> 4 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Style Name</b> 4 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Style Name</b> 5 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Style Name</b> 5 <sup>th</sup>

## Guidelines for Interpreting Your Scores

The Guidelines below show how to use knowledge of conflict styles to improve your effectiveness in conflict. As you work through them and the Learning Suggestions that accompany each, you will gain an understanding of your scores and how to strengthen your responses to conflict. If you are leading a group, see the Trainers' Guide for more exercises and inputs for each principle. (To download a free copy, send an email request to: TrainersGuide@ConflictStyleMatters.com.)

### 1. Learn the five styles and how each functions.

This knowledge will open choices for you that you couldn't see before, It will also help you to recognize what others are doing, and take steps to bring out the best in yourself and others.

**Learning suggestions:** Study the diagram "Five Styles of Responding to Conflict" on page 11 for a few minutes. If you can, view the short slide series on the front web page of [www.ConflictStyleMatters.com](http://www.ConflictStyleMatters.com). When you have a sense of each style, go on to Guideline Two below.

### 2. Be aware of your own *conflict style preferences*.

Most people have a clear preference for one or two styles. This style feels natural to us since we learn patterns with conflict as children and young adults. Each of us was shaped by a situation unique to us, created by our own needs and abilities, interacting with the conflict styles of people

close to us, and the institutional boundaries of school, religion, and society. As adults, many of us still prefer the style that we learned to rely on in those early years. That style is fine, neither good nor bad. But if we use it *automatically, in almost all conflicts, without awareness* that we are using it or that *other responses* are also available, we set ourselves up for difficulty.

**Learning suggestions:** Study your scores, using the chart on the bottom of page 9. Discuss them with others, for in describing your scores and commenting on them, you deepen your understanding. For one-on-one discussion, see Exercise 1 on page seven. In group settings, see Exercises 1-4. In order of priority according to the time available, pay most attention to:

- a) The style you rely on the **most**. This is normally the style with your highest score in Calm or Storm. If in doubt, give priority to

your highest Storm style. This style probably reflects some of your greatest gifts as a person but is also a style you are likely to over-use. Understanding its strengths and limitations will help you to choose other styles when appropriate.

- b) The style you use the **least**. This is normally the style with your lowest score in Calm or Storm. If in doubt, choose the style that you feel is the hardest for you to use well. Since this is the style you are probably least skilled in, expanding your ability to use it will open new options for responding in conflict.
- c) If your numbers are very close, you may be equally skilled in all styles. This is in general good, for it indicates flexibility. Ask people who know you for comment: Do they see you as indeed flexible in using all five styles? Or do you sometimes rely too much on one or two styles? Chances are that you have an inner sense about one or two styles that are more difficult for you than others; pay special attention to these. Also, be aware that flexibility can make you seem unpredictable to others. You can counteract this by making special effort to communicate your intentions to others so they can understand what you are up to.

**3. Develop style flexibility.** Understand and respect the unique value of each style. Each

has strengths and weaknesses. Each is the right choice in some situations and wrong in others. Become skillful in all five styles so you can use each appropriately. A few people are naturally flexible and have a “flat score” in this inventory, meaning their numbers all fall within a few points of each other. However, most people have a preference for one or two styles, reflected in a score of two or more points higher than other styles. The stronger your preference for a particular style, the more likely you are to experience the costs of over-use described on pages 12 to 14.

**Learning suggestions:** In the section “Understanding Conflict Styles”, pages 12 to 14, study the benefits of each style and the costs of over-using it. *Pay particular attention to the costs of over-use of the style you use the most and the benefits of the style you use the least*, for this knowledge will assist you to broaden your repertoire of responses. Review these out loud in the presence of others (a partner or a small group, with all sharing about themselves) and comment on those that especially seem to apply to you. The section “Choosing Responses to Conflict”, pages 15 and 16, gives additional information on each style. In real life, practice being conscious of which style you are using and make a point of experimenting with styles you rarely use.

**4. Increase awareness of your Storm Shift.**

Some people experience a change in preferred style as conflict heats up. They begin a conflict with one style but as emotions and stress go up, they shift to a different style. They may shift from a style of Harmonizing in Calm conditions, for example, to Directing as things move into the tension of Storm conditions; from Directing to Avoiding; from Cooperating to Directing or Harmonizing, etc. This Storm Shift can be quite sudden and thus surprise, shock, or hurt others.

**Learning suggestions:** Compare your numbers in Calm and Storm for each style. (Use the totals in the gray line of the upper chart on page 7.) If there is a shift in any of your styles of two points or more from Calm to Storm, pay attention to this. If the shift is four points or more, chances are that your Storm shift sometimes confuses or alarms others. In conflict situations, learn to recognize the inner signs that accompany a shift: a suddenly pounding heart, heat in the face or neck, a flash of anger in the head, churning in the gut, or icy fear in the chest. Ask people who know you well to give you feedback about what they notice when you become stressed in conflict. Simple *awareness* is your most important tool for self-management. If awareness alone is not enough to achieve the response

you seek, discuss with others you trust what you could do when you feel stressed that would help you use the style you want to use.

**5. Learn strategies to make it easy for others to be at their best.** Each style has certain requirements other people can help to meet, if they choose, that lower stress and anxiety and improve performance. Often these are simple things others can do without sacrificing their own goals.

**Learning suggestions:** Study the section “Strategies for Working with Styles of Others”. First learn the tips you wish others would use for *you* by studying your preferred styles in Calm and Storm. Then, if you are in a group, go around the group with each person sharing the tips for his or her preferred styles that seem especially helpful. Listen well, for you will learn much about the needs of other styles besides your own as well. (Exercises 2 and 3 on page 20 are a variation on this.) Do the same discussion with a partner you live or work with. In real life, look for opportunities to apply support strategies discretely, in ways that help others without calling attention to the fact that you have done so.

# Five Styles of Responding to Conflict

High Focus on Agenda



## **DIRECTING**

Focus on own agenda: High  
Focus on relationship: Low

**I win/you lose.**

*"We're doing it my way..."*

*"Let's just get the job done.*

*(We'll worry about the relationship later...)"*



## **COOPERATING**

Focus on own agenda: High  
Focus on relationship: High

**I win/you win.**

*"My preference is.... And please tell*

*me yours.... If we each explain what*

*we want, and keep talking, we can find a way for both of us. "*



## **COMPROMISING**

Focus on own agenda: Medium  
Focus on relationship: Medium

**I win some/you win some.**

*"I'll meet you halfway..."*

*"Let's make a deal..."*

Low focus on

Relationship

High focus on

Relationship



## **AVOIDING**

Focus on own agenda: Low  
Focus on relationship: Low

**I lose/ you lose.**

*"Forget about it..."*

*"Conflict? What conflict?"*

*"Can we talk about this some other time?"*



## **HARMONIZING**

Focus on own agenda: Low  
Focus on relationship: High

**I lose/you win.**

*"Sure, I'm flexible ..."*

*"Whatever you want is fine with me ..."*

Low Focus on Agenda

## Understanding Conflict Styles



### DIRECTING

*High focus on own agenda and low focus on relationship*

*"We're doing it my way..."*

**I win and you lose.**

**Strategies:** Persuade, insist, demand and repeat, compete, control, refuse to negotiate, attack. As leader, discourage challenges, cite policy, set limits and consequences, instruct.

**Source of power:** From position, role, control of resources, ability to impose consequences.

**Benefits:** Speed, decisiveness, gaining or protecting things important to the Director. Useful in emergencies - no time lost negotiating duties when the ship is sinking. Stability under unswerving leadership.

**Costs when over-used:** Inequality, resentment, reduction in trust, loss of cooperation. In time, others display lower self-motivation, atrophy of gifts, diminished self-respect, or depression. Reduced emotional and spiritual growth in the *Director* if others fear to challenge them.



### COOPERATING

*High focus on own agenda and high focus on relationship*

*"My preference is.... And please tell me yours."*

**I win and you win.**

**Strategies:** Assert self *and* invite other views. Welcome differences, reflect jointly on strengths and weaknesses of all views. Cooperate in seeking and evaluating additional information.

**Source of power:** From trust, skill, ability, coordination, goodwill, creativity, mutuality.

**Benefits:** Trust and mutuality. High potential for creativity and personal growth. Others blossom and develop new gifts. This style has immense rewards of satisfaction, energy and joy when successfully used on meaningful issues.

**Costs when over-used:** Fatigue and time loss, distraction from more important tasks, analysis paralysis. Used for many trivial issues, people weary of "too much processing". Attempted without attention to the skills and time required, failure is likely; cooperation gets a bad name.

**COMPRO**

Medium focus on r

"I'll meet yo

I win some

**Strategies**

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## Style Matters and Research

A 2005 doctoral study using Style Matters found that the instrument performed well in reliability testing and is "valid and reliable".

In 2009-2010, a study project conducted by researchers at West Chester University of Pennsylvania administered Style Matters to more than 300 subjects and tested various wordings of questions for validity and reliability, standard benchmarks of consistency and accuracy of measurement in testing. The researchers rated Style Matters well on both counts, and reported their findings to the academic community in October, 2010 [Braz, M.E., Lawton, B., Kraybill, R.S., & Daly, K., "Validation of the Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory", submitted to the 96th Annual Convention of the National Communication Association, San Francisco, CA.] This present edition of Style Matters reflects the learnings from this study. Riverhouse ePress actively supports objective scholarly research into conflict styles by providing access to Style Matters at no cost to serious academic research projects, while maintaining a policy of complete objectivity regarding findings. No financial or other resources have exchanged hands in these research projects.

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community.



## HARMONIZING

*Low focus on own agenda and high focus on relationship*

*“Sure, I’m flexible ...”*

*“Whatever you’re happy with is fine with me....”*

**You win and I lose.**

**Strategies:** Agree, support, acknowledge error, give in, convince self it’s no big deal, placate, smile and say yes, grin and bear it.

**Source of power:** From relationships, approval of others, from fitting in.

**Benefits:** Flexible and easy to work with, wins approval and appreciation of others, creates pleasant atmosphere. Freedom from hassle, at least in the short-term.

**Costs when over-used:** Frustration for others who want the engagement of *Problem-solving*. Resentment, depression, and stunted growth of personal gifts in the *Harmonizer*. Dependency on others. Denies others the benefit of confrontation if the Harmonizer accepts unhealthy patterns or behaviors that ought to be challenged.

## Principles to Remember

- 1. Diversity and conflict are part of being human.** Most people function better in conflict if they accept that it is a normal part of life.
- 2. Self management** is the most important and challenging part of conflict management.
- 3. Self-awareness** of your conflict style preferences and the strengths and dangers of your preferred styles is a big step towards self-management.
- 4. Style flexibility is the goal.** No style is always best. Each has benefits and costs.
- 5. Each conflict style has a particular set of preferences for how to interact** (pages 17-19). Taking steps to meet these frees up energy for addressing the issues at conflict.
- 6. No matter how aware or skillful you are, you will still get hurt or fail sometimes.** We’re human, not gods. Learn from mistakes, make right what you can, forgive when you are able, get on with things. Live fully, not perfectly.



## Choosing Responses to Conflict

We are most successful in conflict when we are flexible in our abilities and can use each of the five styles skillfully as needed. However, most people rely on one or two preferred styles and use them unthinkingly in *all* conflicts, regardless of the circumstances. This section will help you make conscious choices about which style is best in a given situation or moment.

### Directing

#### Most useful when:

- an emergency looms
- there is no time for give-and-take discussion
- you are sure you're right, and being right matters more than preserving relationships
- the issue is trivial and others don't really care what happens
- weaker parties need to be protected from stronger ones
- principles are at stake and must not be compromised, regardless of cost

#### Least useful when:

- *Cooperating* has not yet been attempted
- support and cooperation of others who want to be treated as equals is important
- used routinely for most issues; others either get annoyed and resistant or fall into passiveness and dependency in the

presence of someone who chronically directs

- self-respect of others is diminished needlessly

### Cooperating

#### Most useful when:

- the issues and relationships are both significant
- long-term ability to work together is important
- a creative outcome is important
- time and energy are available for discussion
- reasonable hope exists to meet all concerns

#### Least useful when:

- time is short
- the issues are trivial
- you're overloaded with "processing"
- the goals of the other person are wrong beyond doubt

**Compromising**

**Most useful when:**

- getting a quick settlement matters more than exploring all
- work resources
- when less staler
- when misun

**Least used**

- in-depth creative *Cooperate*
- when you of getting
- deep prin

**Avoiding**

**Most useful when:**

- the issue is
- the relation
- time to talk delayed for
- you have little opponent but along with th

**Least useful when:**

- you care about both the issues involved and

the relationship

- used habitually for most issues (leads to “explosions” or “blow-out”)

feelings is likely to

from constructive

you to take a stand personally prefer to

most important

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the issue no wish to

ment acceptance respect

eventually

perhaps depression)

- others wish to *Cooperate* and will feel like *Directors* if you *Harmonize*

**Our Policies Regarding Payment for Use**

1. Our mission: to provide the highest quality conflict style inventory on the market (in clarity, ease of use, aesthetics, effectiveness as a teaching tool, and research validity) at modest cost that is within reach of all interested users.
2. We provide Style Matters at reduced cost and sometimes no cost to users who cannot afford our listed prices. However, this is only by written application and consent.
3. We take unauthorized usage seriously. We have no choice if we are to survive and meet our above commitments. Premium quality at low cost makes for thin margins! We depend on users to pay for their use and we actively monitor for and cite unauthorized users. Your choice to “stay legit” supports a business model designed to make the world a better place. It can also save you and us a lot of hassle.

**Word of mouth advertising is extremely helpful to us. Please tell your colleagues about Style Matters.**

## Strategies for Working with Styles of Others

You can do a lot to help people with styles different from your own feel more comfortable in conflicts and thus function more constructively. Read and discuss the information below with people who live or work with you. If you talk when things are calm about your styles and what you need, you will know what to do to make things easier in difficult times. As you get familiar with the styles, you will soon find you can recognize style preferences even in complete strangers, and you will know how to respond in situations that previously confounded you.

### How to bring out the best in someone who scores high in Directing

- People who use the **Directing** style a lot are often task oriented. They are usually quite productive and concerned to get the job done. Engage them and let them know you are committed to the task at hand or resolving the issue satisfactorily. If you need time to think things through or cool down, they are usually fine with this if you ask, so long as you indicate clearly a commitment to returning to resolve things. You will get a more positive response if you state specifically when you will come back (e.g., in an hour, or tomorrow at nine o'clock, etc).
- Though their task focus makes it easy to forget the feelings and needs of others, many **Directors** feel deeply responsible for those around them and may feel quite bad if they realize they have wounded others. Look for ways to engage them about the needs of others in settings where they are not in the middle of a big job.
- **Directors** usually prefer to deal with things *now* and get anxious when others are silent or passive. Don't withdraw without giving some clue about your intentions. Lack of information about this will increase their anxiety and anger.
- A **Directing** person who is angry can be quite intimidating, for this style is the most active, and "in your face" when anger is high. If this person has a history of abusing others emotionally or otherwise and holds more power than you, look for a path to safety or shelter. If the person is basically healthy emotionally, simply asking for a chance to cool off and think often helps, so long as you state clearly your intention to return and work on things.

### How to bring out the best in someone who scores high in Cooperating

- Feeling heard helps all styles, but **Cooperators** respond particularly well to efforts to structure conversation around listening. Hear them out fully and you are

likely to be surprised at how well they listen to you in return.

- Most **Cooperators** value directness and candor, so long as you are polite. **Savants**

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- The free Trainers Guide makes it easy for anyone to lead a successful conflict styles workshop, even if you’ve never trained before! See the first page of this doc for info to download.
  - There are many free resources on conflict styles on web listings on our site. Go to [www.RiverhouseEpress.com](http://www.RiverhouseEpress.com) In the left menu, click on “Resources”.
  - A simple ten-slide Powerpoint presentation on the frontpage of the Riverhouse website explains the basics of conflict styles. Great for individual users or trainers can project it in a classroom with a Powerpoint projector. Riverhouse offers a money-back guarantee to any user who is not happy with what they purchase. After five years, we still have had no takers!
- More information is available on the website at [www.RiverhouseEpress.com](http://www.RiverhouseEpress.com).

anything you need from them if you use a “two-step” approach. The first step is to let

**Avoiders** know – in thoughtful tones - what you’d like them to think

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**Compromisers** have a strong sense of reciprocity. More than other styles, they

are likely to respond in kind if you back

off somewhat from your initial position. Leave room to negotiate when

appreciative comment flowers, a chocolate

### Also check out... Style Matters Online

The web version is our cutting edge, the place where we easily adapt to the unique needs of our clients. Style Matters Online provides many features that can't be offered in a print version:

- Fully automated scoring
- Easy forwarding of scores by email to anyone the user chooses.
- Two score reports tailored to each user. The Basic Report is a one page summary of scores. The Advanced Report is a four-page report packed with info and practical suggestions. Shows you which styles you should pay attention to, excesses to avoid, what you need from others to be effective, etc.
- An in-depth, self-guided tutorial explains every aspect of conflict styles.
- Short essays on cultural issues, anger management, a template to make a self-tailored list of Support Strategies based on a user's scores, and more.
- Many trainers have users take the Online Version before a workshop and come to the workshop with the printout in hand. Bingo, 30 extra minutes of workshop time!
- An optional Consultant's Access automatically sends your clients' scores to you and prevents them from seeing their scores until you are present.
- An optional Group Report enables you to get a printout of all scores of your class or group on one Excel printout. Names are withheld unless you have given written notification to your users.
- An optional "Welcome Page" can be set up on our site, accessed only by a link you give to your students or clients, to welcome them. You write the text and have easy editing access at any time.

#### How to bri who scores

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## Suggestions for Reflection and Discussion

**1.** Discuss scores in pairs or trios. After sharing your scores, tell a story about a conflict you've been a part of. Do the scores fit your real-life response? What styles would you like to get better at? If your numbers suggest a significant shift in style from calm to storm, are you aware of making such a shift? What factors are most likely to trigger this shift in you? How does the shift affect others?

**2.** Meet in small groups of *similar-style* people. For example, in one group is Directors, in another Cooperators, etc. If you have nearly equal scores in two styles, choose the style that seems to get you in difficulty the most. Discuss the information in the pages above about the style of your particular group. Go around the small group and give each person chance to reflect on himself or herself:

- Which strengths of the style do you see present in your handling of life and relationships?
- Which weaknesses or costs from overuse do you see?
- Which support strategies do you find especially applicable to you?

When you reconvene as a whole group, with all styles present, have a reporter from each small group give a summary of insights from that group to the whole group, so others can

increase their understanding of each style.

**3.** People who live or work together benefit greatly from conversation about their styles.

A suggested discussion sequence:

- Share scores with each other.
- Reflect on the scores, with each person responding to the questions in item 2 above.
- Recall a time when differences arose between you. Do the scores reflect how you actually responded?
- Each person can reflect aloud, in the presence of others, on the "Strategies for Supporting Styles of Others" pages. Which strategies would they particularly like others to use that would help bring out the best in the speaker?

**4.** Have someone who knows you well take the test "for" you based on their observation of you. Then compare your own score for yourself and the one they give you. Where do the scores agree? Where do they differ? What are the gifts of your preferred style(s)? What style(s) do you want to work on for improvement? More comprehensive still: Have several people do this for you. In organizations, you can do a "360 feedback" by having people above, beneath, and on par with you take it "for" you. (Do a web search on the phrase for tips and cautions.)

5. People in teams and organizations will be rewarded by discussing the impact of styles in times of negotiation or decision-making. Each style has different preferences for how to go about things (e.g., how direct and open to be in stating preferences, how much relationship-building time to include in decision-making, how rapidly to make decisions, etc.) Discuss: What insights do we get about our collective decision-making processes from looking at these scores? About difficulties we've encountered? About how to improve decision-making in the future?
6. People in teams and organizations also benefit by discussing difficult style combinations. A lot of conflicts escalate because the people involved have different style preferences and thus prefer differing approaches to dealing with differences. For example, Directors and Cooperators want to put things right out there and talk about them *now*, whereas Avoiders prefer to step back and think about things first. Each tends to assume that "good" people would use the approach they favor. As a result, there are now two sources of tension - one about the issues and the other about how to deal with the issues! With others in your team or organization, identify particular pairings of styles that commonly cause difficulties. Think about recent conflicts. In what ways did style expectations play a role? What insights can people exchange about the

needs of the styles involved that would ease future conflicts?

7. If your group has people from both individualist and collectivist cultural backgrounds (see Note 1 first on page 20), you can have an illuminating discussion. Separate into small groups of individualists only or collectivists only. Ask each group to create a picture showing a conflict someone in their group has experienced, using *vehicles* as a major part of the drawing. Have each group share with the larger group: What kind of vehicles did they choose for the parties and why? Who is driving the vehicles? Who else is in the picture and with what connections to the conflictants? What factors do conflictants consider in deciding how to respond to the conflict? When all groups have shared, reflect as a whole group: What insights did you gain about differences between individualist and collectivist conflicts?
8. Here is a discussion for group settings that inspires hope:  
Select two people who work together and have different styles, but know and trust each other well. Have them talk in the presence of the whole group about their style differences, how they see each other, how they have learned to work with and respect each others' style differences, etc.

## Notes and Acknowledgements

1. People from individualist/low context cultures (like mainstream North America, western and northern Europe, and their derivatives) assume freedom to make choices with little reference to roles, customs, group expectations, or others in the surroundings. They are concerned with: What do I want? What does my opponent want? What should I do now? Individuals in dispute think, "I am in a conflict" and respond accordingly.

People from collectivist/high context cultural backgrounds (like Southern Europe, Latin America, Asia, Middle East, Africa, and aboriginal cultures) are more likely to think "we" have a conflict", a reference to their personal social network which may or may not include the opponent. Every response has to be considered in light of implications for others, such as family, friends, colleagues. This larger context offers both constraints and resources in the form of social networks, customs, values, intermediaries, lines of influence, and expectations. Numerous things indicate whether are free to express a wish or viewpoint to others and if so, how strongly. These include environment, age and status, roles, duty, connections, and obligation to uphold customs. The collective creates powerful expectations for all about what is proper conduct, regardless to

personal preferences or conflict styles. So no matter what your personal style preference is, your opinion is less likely to be challenged if you are from the oldest family in such a community, or are an elder in your tribe or the PhD with the most recognition in your university. And you are unlikely to feel free to negotiate as an equal with such a person if your status is near the bottom.

Modern people have at least some experience with both modes, irrespective of where we live. In airports and commercial centers in big cities everywhere in the world, many people operate in individualist/low context mode. Who they are, their past, their social status are often neither known nor expected to be known in such settings. People do their business, say what they need, and pass on.

Similarly, pockets of collectivist/high context behavior exist in individualist environments. Family gatherings, small religious congregations, cliques of old buddies, neighborhood restaurants with a local clientele are all settings where everyone knows "the rules" and behaves accordingly.

Your context may give you less freedom than you wish to respond in the ways you prefer. That's life. This inventory is about you and expanding



your responses, it is not about context or trying to change it. Still, to be able to name what is going on and examine the options almost always helps. The more you understand conflict styles, the better your chances of responding in ways that are transformative, for you, for your opposite in conflict, and for the community around you.

2. The concept of mapping response to conflict as the interplay of task vs. relationship, or assertiveness vs. cooperativeness, is generally credited to Robert Blake and Jane Mouton, and their classic *The Managerial Grid* (Gulf Publishing, Houston, TX, 1964). It has been adopted by many others, including Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann in their *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument* (Tuxedo NY: Xicom, 1974) and Jay Hall in his *Conflict Management Survey* (Teleometrics International, Inc., The Woodlands, TX, 1973). Of these, the most widely used is the Thomas-Kilmann Instrument, which names the styles Competing (equivalent to Directing in this inventory), Collaborating (equivalent to Cooperating), Compromising, Accommodating (equivalent to Harmonizing) and Avoiding.
3. The awareness that many people experience a stress shift from calm to storm comes from Susan Gilmore and Patrick Fraleigh, authors of the insightful personality inventory, *The Gilmore-*

*Fraleigh Style Profile* (Eugene, OR: Friendly Press).

4. I learned a great deal about the needs and dynamics of different personality styles from Barbara Date, who was taught by Professor Gilmore and has used the Gilmore-Fraleigh instrument for many years.

# About Style Matters

The **Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory** is a research-validated, **easy-to-use** self-assessment tool that shows how to manage your responses to conflict more effectively. It describes and scores **five different styles of conflict response** to help you understand yourself and others. It also has features not found in other conflict style inventories:

- **Support strategies** for dealing with each style
- Special instructions for **diverse cultural backgrounds**
- Recognition of differing responses in **Calm and Storm settings**

Useful in many settings:

- **Individuals** can use it alone.
- **Teams** can discuss the results as a group.
- **Managers and project leaders** will learn how to bring the best out of each team member.
- **Human resources professionals** can help individuals and teams improve conflict resolution and create a better working atmosphere.
- **Mediators and negotiators** can improve their skills or use it to train people entering talks.
- **Trainers** in conflict resolution or leadership skills can plan sessions ranging from one hour to a day around it.
- **Consultants** can give clients specific feedback to improve handling of conflict.
- **Religious leaders** can strengthen their skills in congregational conflicts.
- **Teacher and professors** can lead students in an easy and practical introduction to conflict resolution.

“ I have found the KCSI a wonderful tool in both mediation and counseling settings in the U.S. and internationally. It has been especially helpful in my leadership training courses taught in the U.S., Philippines, and Congo-DRC.”

Tony Redfern, Executive Director,  
New Path Center, Inc., Kingsburg, California

“ Having used the KCSI for several years, I can say it is hands-down the best thing on the market. Extremely useful for training. The results can be used to move into a discussion on cultural competency, on mediation approaches, or to launch a group into specific training such as interest-based negotiation. I have also used it with professionals (engineers, planners, lawyers) and find it effective in introducing concepts and skills of conflict resolution.”

Laura Bachle, Confluence Consulting

“ Finally, a multi-faceted tool that unpacks a diversity of conflict styles without putting one in a box. Bravo! ”

Carl Stauffer  
Co-ordinator, Regional Peace Network Southern  
Africa, Mennonite Central Committee

“ Concise, well organized, with easy-to-follow instructions. Interpretation is clear, simple, and specific. The helpful ‘Hot Tips for Working with Styles of Others’ reflect the competence and experience of the author.

Marcus G. Smucker, seminary professor and  
congregational consultant, Lancaster, Penna.

