

Working with Conflicts and Double Binds



Robert Dilts

Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

The Structure of Choice



In situations involving *free choice*, a person selects between more or less equal alternatives according to a particular criterion —i.e., choosing which type of soap to buy at the supermarket, or which television channel to watch.

Free choice is almost completely “internally referenced” or “self referenced,” meaning that the selection is made totally on the basis of its fit to one’s personal criteria or wishes:

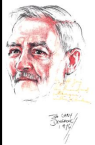
e.g., A is fun. B is more fun. C is safe. D is both fun and safe. Etc.



Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

The Structure of Conflict



Conflicts emerge when there are multiple criteria and constraints which lead to courses of action that are to some degree *mutually exclusive*. In a standard conflict, one part or party wants to do one thing, while another part or party wants to do something else that is incompatible with the wishes of the first party.

First Person/Part
“Let’s do A, because it is more fun.”

Versus

Second Person/Part
“No, let’s do B instead, because it is safer.”



Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

The Structure of Conflict



The issues related to conflict situations are usually stated as *injunctions* related to some course of action. These injunctions may be stated either *positively* (i.e., toward something) or *negatively* (i.e., away from something). Negative injunctions tend to intensify the sense of conflict, because they are *against* something, as opposed to being for something.

Injunctions can escalate the conflict further by putting the issues in an *all-or-nothing* framework:

First Person/Part
“You must do A, or you will never have any fun.”

Versus

Second Person/Part
“You should not do A, or you will never be safe.”



Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

Levels of Learning and Change

Conflicts become more intense as the issues move to higher levels of significance.

Spirit — *For What? For Whom?* Vision and Purpose

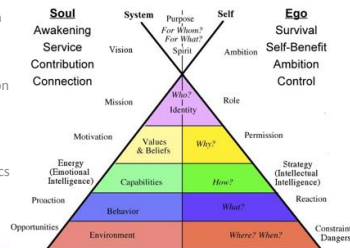
Identity — *Who?* Role and Mission

Values and Beliefs — *Why?* Motivation and Permission

Capabilities — *How?* Mental Maps, Plans and Strategies

Behavior — *What?* Actions and Tactics

Environment — *Where? When?* Context and Constraints



Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

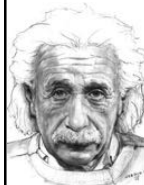
Resolving Conflicts

Solving a Problem Through a Different Level of Thinking Than is Creating the Problem

Consensus in Relation to Intention on Higher Level

↑
Level of Conflict
↓

Complementary Resources on Lower Level



You cannot solve a problem with the same type of thinking that is creating the problem.
— Albert Einstein

Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

Resolving Conflicts

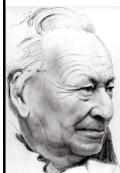


1. Clearly identify the key issues involved in the conflict.
2. Establish an unbiased 'meta-position'.
3. Find the positive intention and purpose behind the issues of each part or party.
4. Make sure that each part or party recognizes and acknowledges the positive intent of the other.
5. From 'meta position', keep 'chunking up' until a common intention on a higher level has been identified that both parts or parties share.
6. Explore other alternatives for achieving the shared intention than the two current choices which are producing the conflict.
7. Identify which choice or combination of choices will most effectively and ecologically satisfy the common intention and the individual positive intentions with the greatest positive impact systemically.

Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

Double Binds



Gregory Bateson

"Schizophrenia --its nature, etiology, and the kind of therapy to use for it--remains one of the most puzzling of the mental illnesses. The theory of schizophrenia presented here is based on communications analysis, and specifically on the Theory of Logical Types. From this theory and from observations of schizophrenic patients is derived a description, and the necessary conditions for, a situation called the "double bind"--a situation in which no matter what a person does, he "can't win." It is hypothesized that a person caught in the double bind may develop schizophrenic symptoms."

Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

Double Binds

More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other to total extinction. Let us pray that we have the wisdom to choose correctly.
— Woody Allen

A *double bind* is a special type of conflict which creates a "no-win" situation; i.e., a situation in which "you are damned if you do, and damned if you don't."

If you *do not* do A, you will *not* (survive, be safe, have fun, etc.).

If you *do* do A, you will *not* (survive, be safe, have fun, etc.).



Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

Comparison of Choice and Double Bind



Double Bind

External Reference
Away From (Avoidance)
All or Nothing Perception
Assume Negative Intention
Confusion of Levels
Out of Your 'Center'

Choice

Internal Reference
Towards
Range of Possibilities
Assume Positive Intention
Separation of Behavior & Identity
Centered



Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

Bateson's Ingredients for a Double Bind



Gregory Bateson

1. The individual involved is in an *intense relationship* in which s/he feels that it is vitally important to discriminate accurately what sort of message is being communicated.
2. The person in the 'position of power' is expressing **two orders of message** and **one denies the other**. The second message is commonly communicated **non-verbally**.
3. The 'dependent' individual is unable to comment on the messages being expressed in order to correct his or her discrimination of what order of message to respond to; i.e., he or she **cannot make a meta-communicative statement**.
4. There is a **tertiary negative injunction** prohibiting escape from the situation, because of survival, love, punishment, etc.
5. It is a repeated experience, not a single traumatic event, so that the double bind becomes a habitual expectation.

Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

Resolving Double Binds



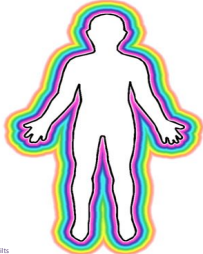
Gregory Bateson

1. Reduce the *intensity* or shift the *nature* of the double binding relationship.
2. Sort out the *contradictory* messages.
3. Make *metacommunicative* statements.
4. Filter out or neutralize negative *identity* messages.
5. Find a way to "*leave the field*".
6. Keep the situation from being a *repeated experience*.

Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

Generating a Second Skin



A second skin is a type of energetic insulation that protects us from potential disturbances coming from the various fields around us without disconnecting us from the important knowledge and information contained in those fields.

Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

Multiple Meta Positions



- Dealing with conflicts and incongruence involves the ability to detach oneself emotionally and step back as if observing oneself (a "meta position").
- Because of the multi-level nature of some conflicts, addressing them requires that one take multiple meta positions (i.e., watching yourself watch yourself).
- Each new meta position not only distances you further from the emotional intensity of the situation, but also allows you to take a broader and potentially wiser perspective.

Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

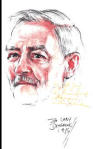
"Cosmic Zoom"



Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

Welcoming Obstacles



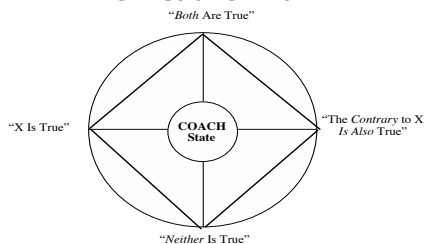
1. "That's interesting"
2. "I'm sure that makes sense"
3. "Something needs to be held / heard / healed"
4. "Welcome...."



Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

The "Tetra Lemma"



Copyright © 2019 by Robert B. Dilts

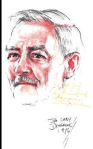
1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019

<http://www.robertdilts.com>

<http://www.journeytogenius.com>

<http://www.nlpu.com>

<http://www.nlpuniversitypress.com>



1979 THE MILTON H. ERICKSON FOUNDATION 2019