

# **Conflict Incompetence and the Costs No One Ever Talks About**



**Difficult  
Dialogues  
Consulting**

**So, my dear brothers and sisters, get this straight.  
Every person should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.**

**James 1:19, New Testament for Everyone**



**So what makes a dialogue difficult?**



**For our purposes, a difficult dialogue is one that challenges a participant's *values***



**So how well are we handling our difficult dialogues?**



## Conflict in organizations

A number of studies over the past thirty years have asked managers about the percentage of their time they spend dealing with conflict.  
**The numbers consistently fall in the 20-40% range.**

Source: Mediation Training Institute

# Is this still a problem?



The most common reason missionaries go home is not due to lack of money, illness, terrorism, homesickness, or even a lack of fruit or response to the gospel. Regretfully, the number one reason is due to conflict with other missionaries.

Paul Akin, “The Number One Reason Missionaries Go Home,”  
<https://www.imb.org/2017/05/25/number-one-reason-missionaries-go-home>



# The costs no one ever talks about

- MTI's 9 quantifiable cost factors
- Mediation/arbitration/litigation
- Covey's "trust tax"
- Unquantifiable (and probably the most important) costs

**The Bottom Line: Conflict incompetence  
*drains the life out of our organizations***

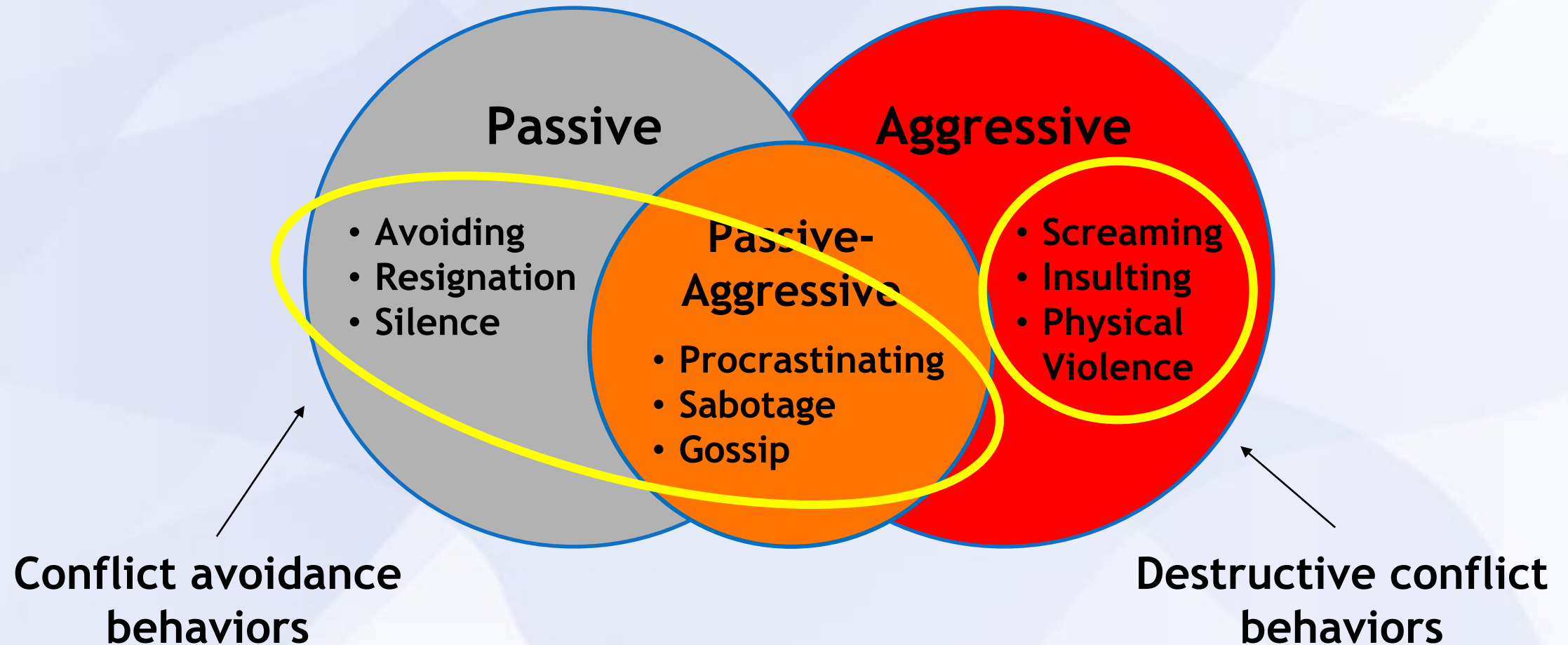
**Missionary life is really tough ...**



**... and it's a lot tougher if we're conflict incompetent**



# Behaviors of conflict incompetence





**Stop paying the heavy costs of conflict incompetence;  
learn to *welcome conflict***



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# Understanding conflict

**I should like to ask you to agree for the moment to think of conflict as neither good nor bad; to consider it without ethical prejudgment; to think of it not as warfare, but as the appearance of difference, difference of opinions, of interests. For that is what conflict means - difference.**



**Mary Parker Follett  
(1868-1933)**

- “The Psychological Foundations of Business Administration,” 1925



# Handling our differences



The three main ways of dealing with conflict are **domination**, **compromise**, and **integration** ...

Compromise is about giving up something; it does not create, it deals with what already exists...

Integration is about finding a solution in which both (party's) desires have found a place.

- "The Psychological Foundations of Business Administration," 1925

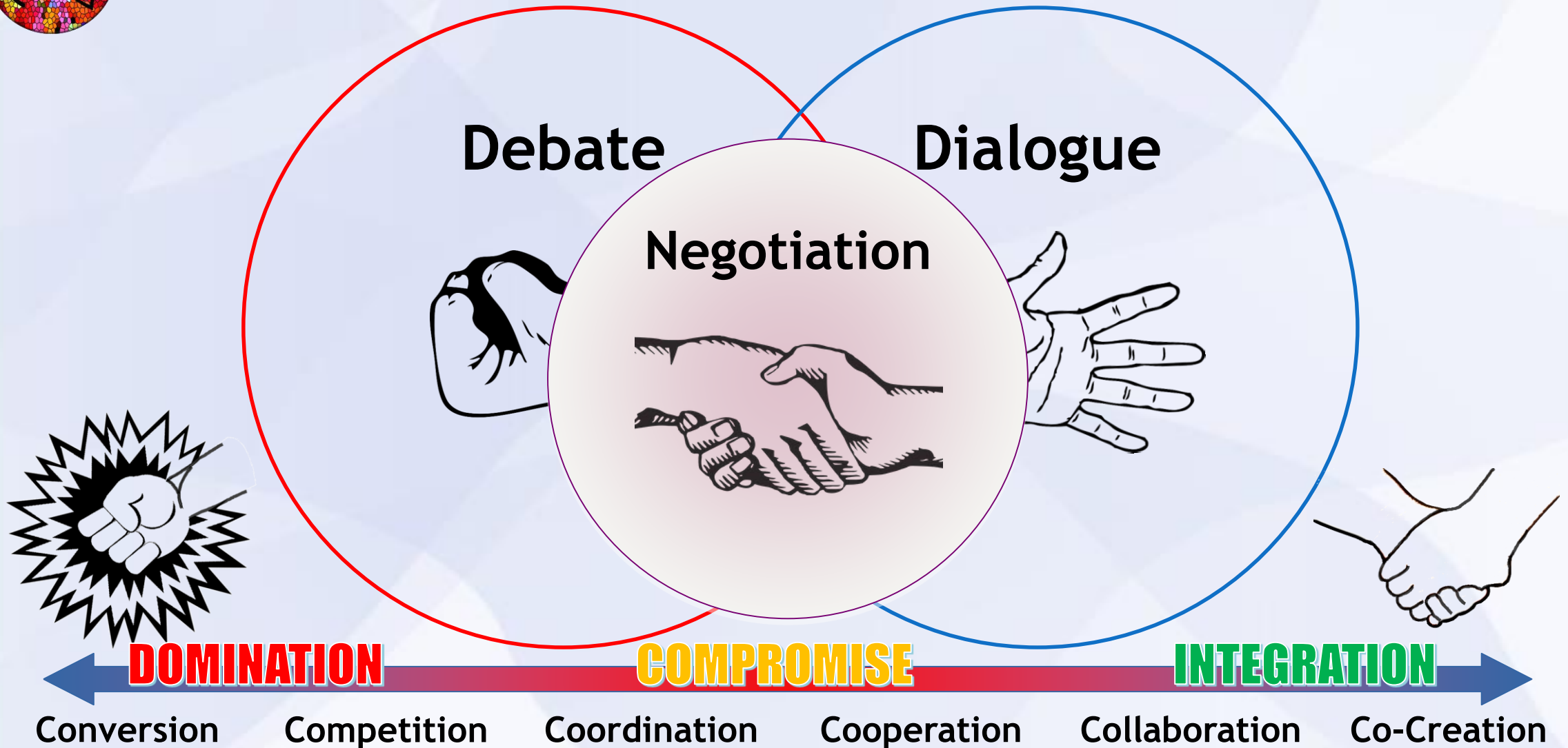


Mary Parker Follett  
(1868-1933)





# How We “Handle” Our Differences





So what is conflict competence?





Conflict competence is NOT conflict prevention or resolution  
(both of which aim to *eliminate* conflict)

The competence approach recognizes that conflict  
may be either **destructive** or **constructive**,  
*depending on how we choose to engage in it*

People who are conflict competent have specific *knowledge*,  
*skills*, and *attitudes* that empower them to consistently engage  
in **constructive** conflict

**Most important: People who are conflict  
competent *do not avoid conflict!***



**Constructive** conflict is not just destructive conflict repackaged in the hope of making it less harmful

It's a process for *creating value* - or as Mary Parker Follett proposes, for “the enrichment of all concerned”



## Destructive Conflict

- *Tears down* participants
- Attacks character and/or identity (“gets *personal*”)
- Is undisciplined
- Is driven by *feeling*
- Sometimes yields gain for some and loss for others (“win/lose”), but often yields *loss for all*

## Constructive Conflict

- *Builds up (edifies)* participants
- Wrestles with *ideas*, not people
- Is disciplined and *deliberate*
- Is driven by *thinking*
- **Yields benefit for everyone (“all gain”)**



# The Problem

The most common reason missionaries go home is not due to lack of money, illness, terrorism, homesickness, or even a lack of fruit or response to the gospel. Regretfully, the number one reason is due to **conflict** ~~with other missionaries~~ **incompetence**.

**The Bottom Line: Missionaries - *just like everybody else* - are having too much of the wrong kind of conflict, not nearly enough of the right kind, and much - if not most - of the time they're avoiding conflict that needs to happen!**

Paul Akin, "The Number One Reason Missionaries Go Home,"  
<https://www.imb.org/2017/05/25/number-one-reason-missionaries-go-home>



## The Solution: **Conflict Competence**

- **Knowledge:** A basic understanding of cross-cultural awareness (without stereotyping), ethnocentrism, and cultural self-awareness
- **Skills:** Perspective-taking, affirming, I-messaging, reflective listening, suspending judgment (PAIRS)
- **Attitudes:** Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience



**Leadership/Management**

**Collaborative  
Learning**

**Intercultural  
Competence**

**K  
S  
A**

**Diversity and  
Inclusion**

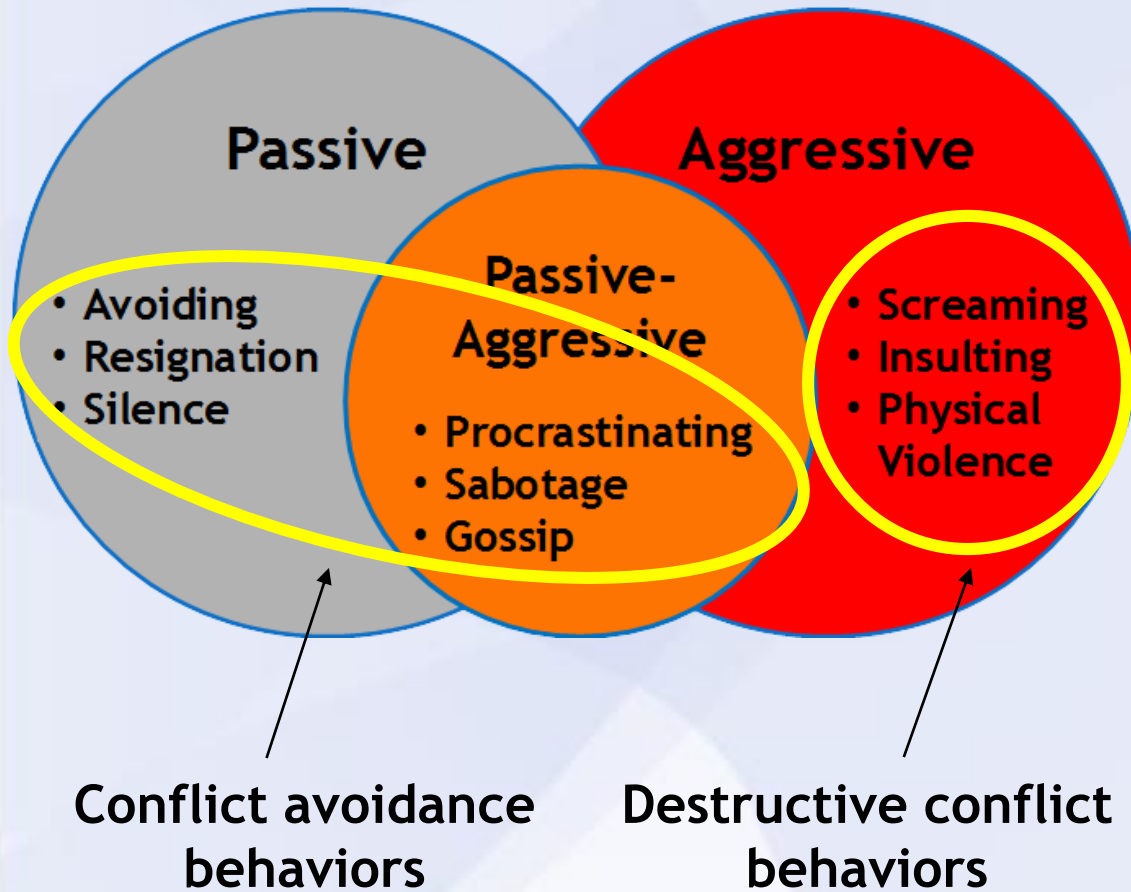
**Intergroup  
Contact**

**Philosophy and Religion**

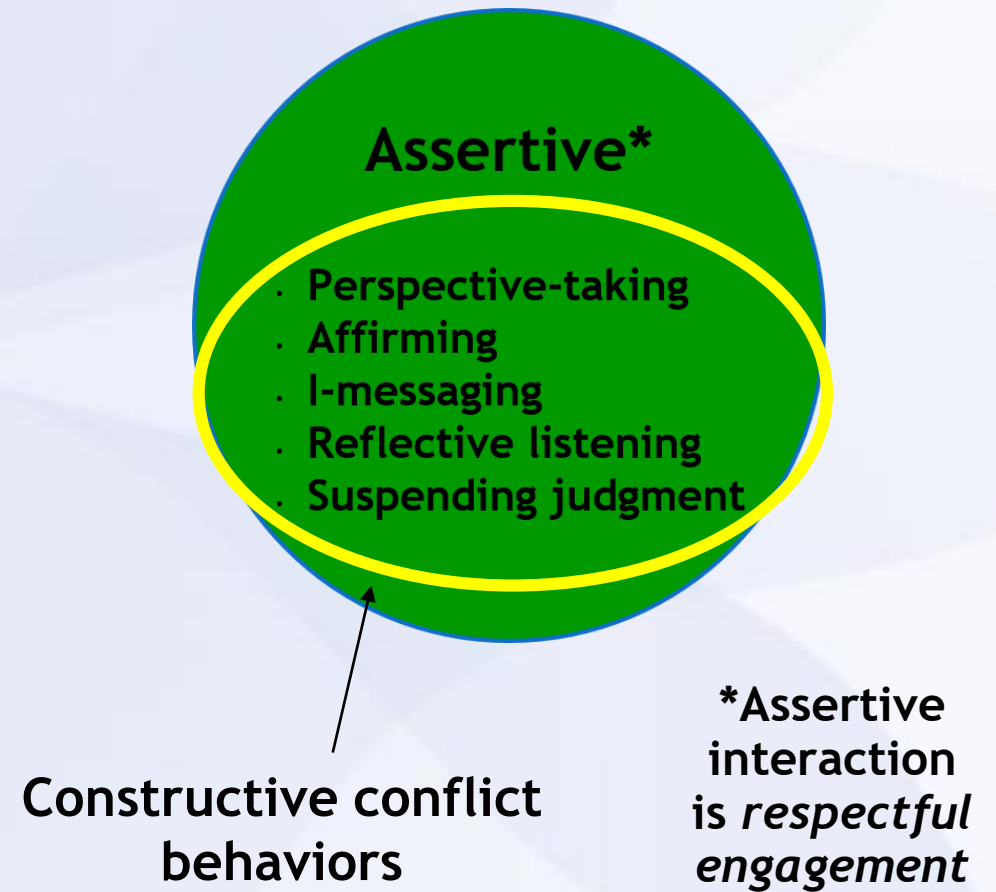
**Healthcare Cultural Competence**



## Conflict Incompetence



## Conflict Competence



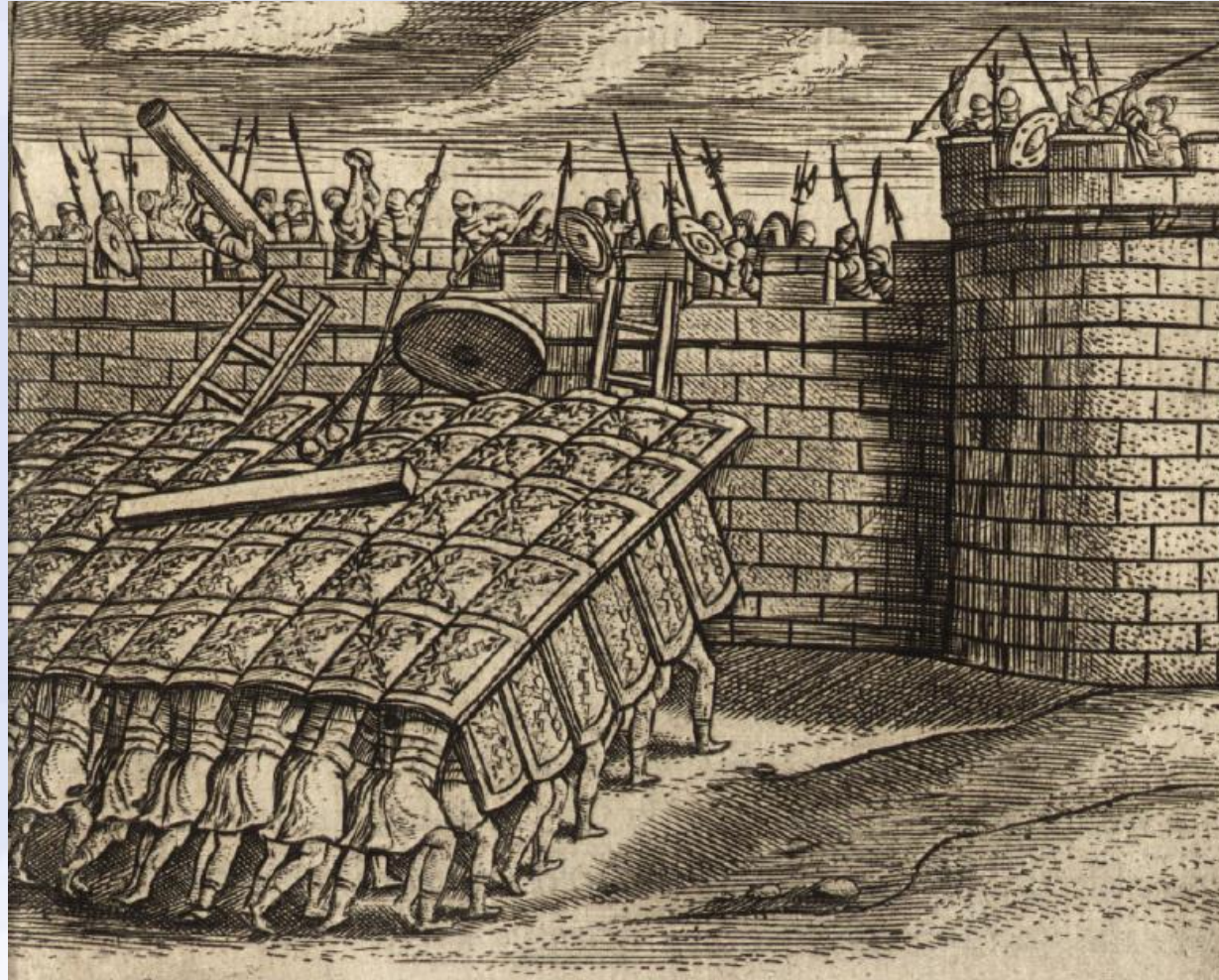
One way to remember  
the attitudes of  
conflict competence







**Don't forget: We are soldiers, NOT gladiators!**





# What has been

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# What could be



The most common reason new Christians cite for their decision to join the Church is the way missionaries handle conflict.

One new believer put it this way: “The missionaries aren’t afraid of conflict, and while we can *hear* Jesus in their preaching and teaching, *we can really see Jesus in the way they deal with their differences.*”

Unknown author, sometime in the future, in an article titled  
“The Number One Reason Missionaries Stay on The Field”

**Stop paying the heavy costs of conflict incompetence;  
learn to *welcome conflict* with the knowledge, skills,  
and attitudes of *conflict competence***





## **Difficult Dialogues Consulting**

**Our Goal:**

**To equip people to *welcome difference and put it to work* in productive difficult dialogues that *generate value* in relationships and endeavors**

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