



A review on key conflict resolution skills and strategies for healthy work environment

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Abstract

Conflicts are common in the workplace, and conflict-resolution strategies can help peoples solve conflicts and maintain a healthy work environment. Conflicts are struggles that can arise during an active disagreement of opinions or interests, so it's important to understand how to navigate and resolve them. In the workplace, there are many instances in which conflict can happen between coworkers, and when it does, it is important to resolve the situation before it escalates. The objective of this review was cover the Causes Conflict at Work, Benefit of conflict, conflict resolution skills and conflict resolution strategies to resolve the disputes in a much more positive and efficient way.

Keywords: Conflicts, healthy work environment, negotiation strategies, resolution

Introduction

Generally, workplace conflicts fall into two categories: 1. Personality conflict or disagreements between individuals. These clashes are driven and perpetuated by emotions such as anger, stress and frustration. 2. Substantive conflict is tangible and task-related, like the decisions leaders make, the performance of a team member, or your company's direction. If unaddressed, both can spiral into wider conflict between teams, departments or businesses. Conflict resolution can be defined as the process of identifying, addressing, and resolving disagreements or disputes among employees in a professional setting, thereby fostering a positive and productive work environment^[1]. Conflicts occur within a context of perceived interdependence. Conflict resolution is the process of ending a dispute and reaching an agreement that satisfies all parties involved. Since conflict is an essential part of being human, effective conflict resolution is not designed to avoid disagreements. Conflict is a situation between at least two interdependent parties that is characterized by perceived differences and that the parties evaluate as negative. This often results in negative emotional states and behaviors intended to prevail. Conflict is an inevitable and all-pervasive element in our society and in the world. Although conflicts may end up in destruction and even death, conflicts may also result in increased effectiveness, enhanced relationships, and further goal attainment. Indeed, in human terms conflict is one of the "engines of evolution" that allows us to learn, progress, and grow^[2]. Our goal is not to attempt to do away with conflict but rather to skillfully manage conflict to further its constructive potential. In this review we will explore definitions and views of conflict and conflict resolution. Strategies that will enable you to resolve conflicts yourself and to assist people in attaining their outcomes without damaging relationships. The focus of this document is on conflict resolution. A communication process for managing a Conflict and negotiating a solution. Managing the conflict involves defusing any strong emotion Involved in the conflict and enabling the disputing parties to understand their differences and Similarities. Negotiation involves enabling the parties in the conflict to achieve an outcome with respect to their differences^[3]. A conflict situation exists when there are: at least two parties involved who are interdependent, who are experiencing strong emotions, which seemingly hold incompatible outcomes or

beliefs, and at least one of the parties recognize the incompatibility and perceives this to be problematic. In conflict parties perceive themselves to have incompatible outcomes. The word outcome in this context refers to what an individual wants: their preferred solution or position^[4]. Underlying these positions are interests, the reasons why an individual wants to achieve a specific outcome in the first place. Interests are an individual's perceptions and feelings about what is desirable or useful. Interests are central to an individual's behavior and are rooted in human needs and beliefs.

Conflicts of needs grow out of differences in outcomes, person goals, and aspirations of interdependent parties in the presence of scarce resources. Two siblings desiring the same toy are experiencing a conflict of needs, as are organizations trying to reach the same market with their products or services^[5].

Conflict of beliefs grows out of differences in convictions or perceptions about reality among interdependent parties. Ideological conflict falls into this category where contention is rooted in perceived difference in convictions or beliefs, accompanied by strong feelings. Your beliefs, for example, may favor one direction of movement over another. Then again, differences may lie not in direction, but in the methods favored to reach the goal, where people have no interest other than defending their own belief system. To defend your own belief system without attacking another person's is a difficult skill^[6]. All parties must focus on utilizing their differences in a common quest for a shared outcome and real solutions. Conflicts of needs often underlie conflicts of beliefs. In such cases, negotiation and problem solving are useful to resolve the situation. However, conflicts concerning belief cannot always be resolved and must be managed even though no negotiated solutions are appropriate^[7]. Conflict is a matter of perception. If none of the parties involved in an interaction perceives the situation to be one of incompatible outcome, or if none of the parties perceives the situation to be problematic and then conflict does not exist. A situation of incompatible outcomes by itself is only a potential or latent conflict situation. The objective of this review is cover the Causes Conflict at Work, Benefit of conflict, conflict resolution skills and conflict resolution strategies to resolve the disputes in a much more positive and efficient way^[8, 9, 10].

Causes Conflict at Work

Some of the most common causes of workplace conflict are:

- **Unclear responsibilities:** Some team members may feel they do more work than others, or resent those who seem to have fewer responsibilities. Blame and frustration can build due to duplicated work or unfinished tasks.
- **Competition for resources:** Time, money, materials, equipment, and skill sets are finite resources. Competition for them can lead to conflict.
- **Different interests:** People may focus on personal or departmental goals over organizational ones. Or be held up and frustrated by others who they rely on to do their jobs effectively.
- Different personalities or perspectives.
- Unresolved problems from their past.
- Feeling of competition with one another.
- Poor communication skills.
- Uncertainty about roles or responsibilities.

Benefit of conflict

Positive conflict is constructive in nature. It produces new ideas, solves continuous problems, provides an opportunity for people and teams to expand their skills, and fosters creativity. Conflict is often something that we try to avoid. It is often viewed as hostile, frustrating, negative, uncomfortable, and “win or lose” in its outcomes. So what does it mean when conflict is classified as being “positive”? Positive conflict does not mean that the conflict was good, but rather that the occurrence of that conflict led to something beneficial. Positive conflict is constructive in nature. It produces new ideas, solves continuous problems, provides an opportunity for people and teams to expand their skills, and fosters creativity. When opposing ideas are explored, a breakthrough in thinking can occur. Without conflict, you have “groupthink,” which discourages innovation ^[11].

1. Key advantages of positive conflict

Enhanced Creativity and Innovation: Positive conflict can stimulate creative thinking and foster innovation. When individuals with diverse perspectives and ideas engage in healthy debate and discussion, it can lead to the generation of new and innovative solutions to problems or challenges. Different viewpoints and constructive disagreements can spark creativity and promote out-of-the-box thinking.

Improved Decision-Making: Conflict can facilitate more robust decision-making processes. By encouraging different opinions and encouraging healthy debate, teams can consider a wider range of options and perspectives before making important decisions. This can lead to more well-rounded and informed choices, reducing the potential for groupthink and increasing the likelihood of successful outcomes.

Increased Team Cohesion: Engaging in positive conflict can strengthen relationships and promote teamwork. When conflicts are handled respectfully and constructively, it can help build trust among team members. Openly discussing differing viewpoints and resolving conflicts collaboratively can create a sense of unity, shared purpose, and mutual respect within the team.

Personal and Professional Growth: Positive conflict presents opportunities for individual growth and development. Engaging in constructive disagreements allows employees to challenge their own assumptions, expand their knowledge and skills, and gain a broader understanding of different perspectives. It encourages individuals to step outside their comfort zones, adapt to new ideas, and learn from others' experiences ^[12].

Stronger Relationships: Conflict resolution can lead to stronger interpersonal relationships in the workplace. When conflicts are addressed openly and respectfully, it can enhance communication and understanding between colleagues. Working through disagreements and finding mutually beneficial solutions can build stronger bonds and foster a positive work environment.

Organizational Learning: Positive conflict can contribute to organizational learning and improvement. When conflicts are addressed effectively, organizations can identify underlying issues, areas for improvement, and systemic challenges. It allows for feedback and reflection on processes, policies, and practices, leading to organizational growth and positive change.

Increased Productivity: When conflicts are resolved in a positive and timely manner, it can minimize unproductive tensions and misunderstandings that can hinder workflow. Addressing conflicts head-on and finding resolution helps maintain a focused and productive work environment. It's important to note that for conflict to be beneficial, it should be handled constructively and respectfully. Effective conflict management strategies, such as active listening, open communication, empathy, and compromise, should be employed to ensure conflicts do not escalate into destructive or negative situations ^[13].

Importance of conflict resolution

Conflict resolution brings people together to figure out a solution to a problem rather than pulling them apart. The goal of a workplace is to create an inclusive environment of people that know how to manage and limit conflicts. Conflict resolution is crucial for both the workplace and client relationships. Conflict resolution brings people together to figure out a solution to a problem rather than pulling them apart. The goal of a workplace is to create an inclusive environment of people that know how to manage and limit conflicts. You can't expect to have a conflict-free workplace; so instead, you should aim to ensure everyone has the skills to handle conflicts in a professional manner ^[14]. Conflict resolution also means that issues will get resolved much faster, which can lead to greater efficiency in the workplace. Rather than dwelling on an issue for hours or even days, you can resolve the issue quickly and effectively so everyone can get back to work. A poorly handled conflict can lose your business time and money, while conflict resolution can improve your colleague relationships, employee performance, and retention rates. Knowing how to resolve conflicts with clients can also help improve client retention and maintain strong brand identity and trustworthiness ^[15].

Communication, emotional awareness and empathy are crucial elements of conflict resolution that can lead to high-functioning and more satisfying relationships in all aspects

of life. Conflict resolution also builds teamwork, as it brings people together to resolve an issue. When you're able to put aside your differences and come together to reach a conclusion that works for everyone, it shows a lot of strength. It shows that you care more about resolving the issue than being right in the situation. Conflict resolution is essential in order to build strong working relationships that are based on mutual respect and trust. Overall, conflict resolution creates a positive and inviting company culture so that your employees feel respected. No one wants to go into their office every day worrying about what kind of argument they're going to get into that day and how it might escalate. Conflict resolution creates a positive work environment that is based on communication and trust, so you can quickly resolve conflicts and move on with your day ^[16].

Negotiation steps for the resolution of a conflict:

1. Understand the conflict.
2. Communicate with the opposition.
3. Brainstorm possible resolutions.
4. Choose the best resolution.
5. Use a third party mediator.
6. Explore alternatives.
7. Cope with stressful situations and pressure tactics.

Conflict Resolution Skills

Whatever the cause of disagreements and disputes at home or work, these skills can help you resolve conflict in a constructive way and keep your relationships strong and growing. Conflict is common in the workplace. The biggest mistake you can make is to do nothing. Unresolved tensions can affect the health and performance of people and organizations ^[17]. So, hone these some conflict resolution skills to pre-empt, manage and fix conflicts with co-workers:

1. Active listening

At the heart of every conflict resolution strategy is active listening. Active listening refers to the practice of focusing on what the other party is saying, and then including their message when making your own statements. Having active listening skills not only facilitates discussions and increases mutual understanding, but also allows each party to feel heard. The first step in resolving a problem is taking the time to listen to what the other party has to say. It's easy to assume that you're the right one in the situation and dismiss the other person's thoughts, but that mindset doesn't help resolve the issue. Instead, it's imperative to do active listening ^[18].

Active listening entails focusing on what the other person has to say, staying quiet as they speak, and listening to how they phrase things. Genuinely listening to their questions and concerns with open ears shows them that you care about what they're saying, establishing a sense of respect. You should always go into conflict resolution with an open mind so that you can truly see where the other person is coming from. If the other person phrases things in a certain way, you should phrase your words in the same way back to them. If you're confused about something they said, ask questions. This indicates that you actually listened to them, which shows that you care about resolving the issue at hand. Actively listening to the other party during a conflict is arguably one of the most important skills to have when it comes to conflict resolution ^[19].

Here are some examples of active listening skills:

- Stress management
- Managing emotions
- Articulation
- Negotiation
- Decisiveness

2. Communication

Effective communication skills are the foundation of conflict resolution (and every healthy relationship). Not only does clear and proper communication help resolve personal and professional problems, but it can also *prevent* similar situations from happening in the future. Communication is key in every relationship, whether it be professional or personal. If you don't communicate your thoughts and feelings to the people around you, how can you expect them to understand how you feel? Although it might be tempting to remain closed off after an argument, that's not the best way to resolve the issue. You need to nurture the relationship to ensure it heals post-conflict by having an open line of communication for both parties. Everyone involved in the conflict should feel comfortable openly discussing their thoughts and feelings in order to come to a resolution together ^[20].

Communication is also key to ensuring the relationship stays healthy in the long term. You want to create a workplace environment that encourages inclusion, so no one feels judged or afraid to speak their mind about a dispute or argument. Open communication can also prevent an issue from escalating. Here are some examples of essential communication skills:

- a. Verbal and nonverbal communication
- b. Articulation
- c. Persuasion

3. Don't place blame

"I" statements are used to prevent blaming and unfair accusations when arguing. This is because each party may feel like the other has done something, but they cannot prove this to be true. Instead of claiming that the other party acts or feels a certain way, instead, the party will approach their statement by speaking from their *own* experience ^[21].

Blaming refers to the tactic of one or more parties ridding themselves of responsibility for a disagreement—thus placing all the faults on the other party. When blaming is used during a conflict, it can be difficult to get both parties to agree on how they played a role in the situation. When one party looks down upon the other from an inaccurate moral high ground, a real resolution is virtually impossible. The last thing you want to do during a conflict is place blame on one another. You shouldn't point fingers, as this can escalate the conflict and make matters worse. Instead, create a safe environment that doesn't place blame on one specific person ^[22].

You should also avoid going on the offensive, as this can make it more difficult to find a solution. Instead, everyone should have an equal chance to speak without being shut down. It's crucial to let everyone get their feelings and thoughts out on the table. When you're faced with a conflict at work or in your personal life, all the parties involved should work together to resolve it. No one specific person should be held responsible for finding the solution. Working together to find a solution will not only resolve the issue faster, but it will also bring everyone together and encourage teamwork.

4. Emotional regulation

Sometimes, our natural response during an argument is to let emotions like anger and frustration take control, but that seldom results in a resolution. Your tone of voice goes a long way in a conversation, which is why it's important to remain calm when resolving a conflict. Although it might be hard to stay level-headed during a disagreement, it's necessary so that you don't exacerbate the issue. Emotional regulation is used to prevent volatility and insults when managing and resolving conflict. By leaning on emotional intelligence and putting the right expectations in place, and utilizing anger management skills, both parties can reach an agreement calmly without letting emotional reactions influence the outcome.

This is also why it's a good idea to wait after the initial argument before having another conversation. In the heat of the moment, it's easy for your emotions to take over and say things you don't mean. Instead, give yourself some time for your emotions to pass before you immediately jump into conflict resolution. That way, we and the other party can take time to reflect on the disagreement and think critically about what happened and why. You should feel calm and composed when entering into conflict resolution and make sure you get your thoughts together beforehand so you know exactly what to say, and how to say it. Here are some examples of emotional regulation skills:

- Staying calm
- Stress management
- Empathy
- Sincerity
- Handling difficult personalities
- Understanding
- Patience
- Self awareness

5. Collaboration

In a conflict, both parties often believe they're in the right, which is why it's important to collaborate and find common ground and compromise. Conflict resolution is a joint effort. You can't expect one party to come to the solution all by themselves. Instead, you need to work together to reach a solution that works for everyone. Having the willingness to collaborate will also show the other party that you're able to put your differences aside to come to a conclusion as a team. Collaboration ensures that all parties are heard, so the solution won't favor one person over the other. Working together also means that you'll likely come to a conclusion much faster. Collaboration means letting go of your pride and working together so you can resolve the issue at hand [22].

6. Assertiveness

Although it may seem counterproductive, reasonable levels of assertiveness can be beneficial when performed calmly. This is because assertiveness pushes people to address their feelings and voice their expectations of the other party, rather than avoiding conflict altogether. Here are some examples of essential skills:

- Decisiveness
- Fairness
- Self control
- Management
- Voicing and accepting opinions

7. Apologizing

When necessary, the final step to an effective conflict resolution process is knowing when to apologize. It's important to note that successful conflict resolution will bring both of the involved parties to fully understand what they've done and why an apology is needed—rather than simply going through the motions to end the conflict [23, 24, 25].

Conflict resolution strategies

When addressing conflict, there are various strategies that you can follow. All of these strategies are often used in the court of law, but they can be applied to any sort of conflict situation, including in the workplace. Following these strategies can ensure a positive outcome from the dispute. Everyone has a different way of handling conflicts. There are seven Strategies to handle and Resolve Conflicts [25, 26, 27, 28].

- 1) Determine if the problem is worth discussing.
- 2) Use the right body language.
- 3) Focus on the facts not personal opinions.
- 4) Allow everyone to speak.
- 5) Be mindful of the language you use.
- 6) Approach the problem with empathy.
- 7) Refocus the conversation on solutions.

Conflict management skills

When multiple people get involved in a project, conflicts are likely to occur due to differences in opinion and priorities. We can find conflicts between team members, groups and even management, making conflict management important for the success of a project or company. Learning about the various conflict management skills can help reduce employee turnover, keep clients happy and foster a collaborative work environment where employees are highly productive [29, 30, 31].

1. Three and Five C's of conflict management

In conflict management, or any kind of mediation exercise, there are five principle decision models: Circumvent, concede, compete, compromise and collaborate along with three principle decision models: Capitulation, Compromise, and Collaboration shows in figure 1 and 2.

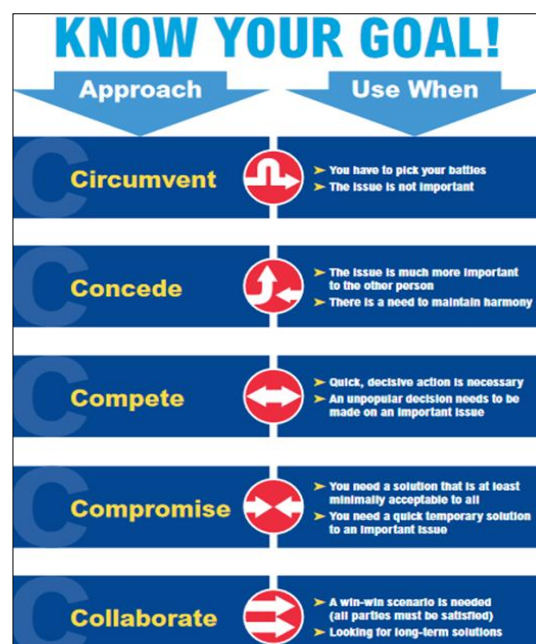


Fig 1: Five C's of conflict management

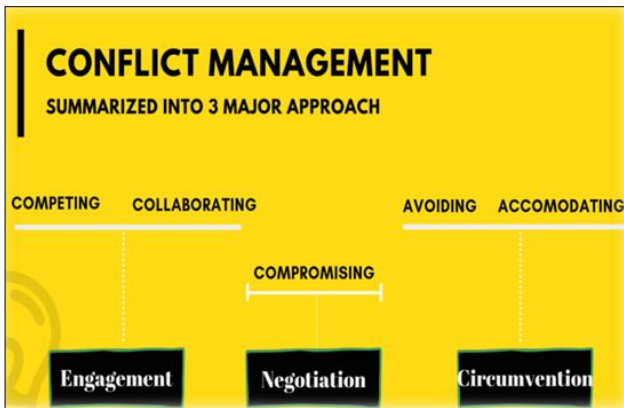


Fig 2: Three C's of conflict management

2. Four C's of conflict management:

The 4 C's to 21st century skills are just what the title indicates. People need these specific skills to fully participate in today's global community:

- **Connect Regularly:** One of the keys to conflict management is establishing a strong connection with your colleagues. Regularly connecting with them allows you to build relationships, understand their perspectives, and identify potential conflicts before they escalate. Take the time to engage in informal conversations, team-building activities, or even virtual coffee breaks to foster a sense of camaraderie and trust [32].
- **Communicate Openly:** Effective communication is the foundation of conflict management. By communicating openly and honestly, you can express your thoughts, opinions, and concerns while also actively listening to others. Be mindful of your non-verbal cues and choose your words carefully to avoid misunderstandings. Encourage a culture of open dialogue, where everyone feels comfortable sharing their viewpoints without fear of judgment or repercussions [33, 34, 35].
- **Collaborate more effectively:** Collaboration is key when it comes to resolving conflicts in the workplace. By working together, you can harness the power of diverse perspectives and find mutually beneficial solutions. Foster an environment that encourages brainstorming, active participation, and idea-sharing. By involving all parties in the decision-making process, you can increase the likelihood of finding resolutions that address everyone's needs and interests.
- **Correct the confusion/Queries:** Conflicts often arise due to misunderstandings or confusion. To effectively manage conflicts, it is crucial to address and correct any confusion or queries that may arise. Encourage individuals to ask questions, seek clarification, and provide explanations when needed. By addressing these concerns promptly and transparently, you can prevent conflicts from escalating and maintain a positive work environment [36, 37, 38].

More tips for managing and resolving conflict

You can ensure that the process of managing and resolving conflict is as positive as possible by sticking to the following guidelines:

Listen for what is felt as well as said: When you really listen, you connect more deeply to your own needs and emotions, and to those of other people. Listening also strengthens, informs, and makes it easier for others to hear you when it's your turn to speak.

Make conflict resolution the priority rather than winning or "being right": Maintaining and strengthening the relationship, rather than "winning" the argument, should always be your first priority. Be respectful of the other person and their viewpoint.

Focus on the present: If you're holding on to grudges based on past conflicts, your ability to see the reality of the current situation will be impaired. Rather than looking to the past and assigning blame, focus on what you can do in the here-and-now to solve the problem.

Pick your battles: Conflicts can be draining, so it's important to consider whether the issue is really worth your time and energy. Maybe you don't want to surrender a parking space if you've been circling for 15 minutes, but if there are dozens of empty spots, arguing over a single space isn't worth it.

Be willing to forgive: Resolving conflict is impossible if you're unwilling or unable to forgive others. Resolution lies in releasing the urge to punish, which can serve only to deplete and drain your life.

Know when to let something go: If you can't come to an agreement, agree to disagree. It takes two people to keep an argument going. If a conflict is going nowhere, you can choose to disengage and move on [39].

Using humor in conflict resolution

Avoid many confrontations and resolve arguments and disagreements by communicating in a humorous way. Humor can help you say things that might otherwise be difficult to express without offending someone. However, it's important that you laugh with the other person, not at them. When humor and play are used to reduce tension and anger, reframe problems, and put the situation into perspective, the conflict can actually become an opportunity for greater connection and intimacy. Humor should be equally fun and enjoyable for everyone involved. If others don't think your joking or teasing is funny-stop immediately. Before you start playing around, take a moment to consider your motives, as well as the other person's state of mind and sense of humor [40, 41].

Conclusion

1. Conflict is characterized by perceived differences and negative emotional states. The issues in conflict can be thought of as tangible and intangible, as needs or beliefs. Conflict often results in destructive ends but it does not have to. Collaboration and compromise are usually available as alternatives in a conflict situation. Pursuing these ends in conflict is called conflict resolution. To manage conflict successfully, we propose that the negative emotions that accompany conflict be managed by the strategic use of reflective listening. The differences in needs that underlie the conflict can best be dealt with by interest-based negotiation.

2. Solutions are found when conflicting parties surface the interest behind their positions. Conflict management is an essential skill in the workplace. By incorporating the four C's - Connect Regularly, Communicate Openly, Collaborate more effectively, and correct the confusion/Queries - you can foster a more harmonious and productive work environment. Remember, conflicts are opportunities for growth and learning, and by embracing these principles, you can transform conflicts into catalysts for positive change. The problem solving process is used to allow the free creation of ideas that will best meet the needs to the two parties. Having good conflict resolution skills is necessary both within and outside of the workplace. Conflicts are inevitable.
3. Everyone in your office can get along extremely well, and you'll likely still find yourself faced with a conflict from time to time. So instead of trying to avoid conflicts altogether, you should work on your conflict resolution skills. The way you handle a conflict shows a lot about who you are as a person. If you can resolve a conflict with grace and calmness, it indicates that you're willing to put your differences aside for the sake of a resolution, which is a very important trait to have. The next time you find yourself faced with a conflict at work, follow the above strategies and you'll be comfortable with conflict resolution in no time.
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Acknowledgments

I am thankful to Almighty God for the wisdom, grace, and strength he gave me to complete this manuscript. Immeasurable thanks to Dr. Rama Rao, CPO, whose candor, patience, understanding, and demonstration of empathy inspired me throughout this challenging journey of manuscript writing. I also want to acknowledge my Colleagues, Dr. Rama Murthy and Sri Latha who truly exhibited their competency and direction to complete this manuscript. Also, I appreciate the support of all my family and friends of amrita sai institute of science and technology whose support, friendship, and advice helped me overcome several hurdles throughout the duration of the manuscript preparation. Very Special thanks to Dr. K. Sai Manoj -CEO, Dr. M. Sasidhar – Principal, Sri K. Rama Mohana Rao Secretary & Correspondent and Sri K. Ramesh babu-Industrialist, Chairman of Amrita Sai Institute of Science and Technology for their co-operation and encouragement during manuscript preparation.

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