

A Conflict Resolution Workshop: Mopti Region, Mali (November 1999)

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Jeff Goebel

This is a purposeful first person account of a training workshop I conducted for the SANREM CRSP-West Africa. Leading members of the newly formed Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee of Madiama Commune, local administrative and elected officials, extension agent, and collaborating researchers from the Regional Agricultural Research Center in Mopti united for seven days to learn about conflict resolution and holistic resource management. Here I will only recount those aspects that were an integral part of the conflict management and consensus-building process set in motion during those days.

One of the reasons this process is so effective in transferring skills is the process uses the primary learning ability of people, which is imitation. Because of this, the process is most effectively learned through an experiential process and repetition. I find when I do my work, it is important to be *consciously* purposeful. I am mindful to make sure that everything I do in a workshop is with purpose. My behavior and actions teach more than my words. An observation to make about the transference of skills is to notice the shift of the use of "I" and "they" from the first week to the second week.

Monday: Day One — At 8:30 am, I checked the meeting room. It was set up in an organizational table style. Very much like what is common in the United States. I observed people took their places in the room, as they entered, based on their power base. The Governor's representative and another top official were to sit at the head of the room. Lassine (*SANREM CRSP-Mali National Coordinator*) was asked to seat in the "right-hand man's" position. The more powerful national and regional people sat near the front, as did the Americans. The village people sat in the back, with the only two women sitting opposite each other in the rear corners, the low power base positions. I can see a lot without the words, maybe more.

The room was basic. Two air conditioners screamed out from the wall and the acoustics were poor. It was a long room with tables in the way of creating a circle. It was hot and humid in the room. We waited to begin until the "officials" arrived. They arrived at 10:30 am at which time everyone got quiet and stood for their arrival. A president was selected to manage the meeting for each day, usually a person of stature. There were the traditional formal welcomes. The introductions of everyone were done quickly, each stating in a cold way who they were and what they did.

Next, I was introduced. Because I didn't speak French, I spoke through Sam, my American training partner for Holistic Resource Management. I told them I was here to help them learn to do different things, so they would get different results with conflict resolution. Some of the things may be uncomfortable but many of these things are also uncomfortable in the United States, too. I told them I wanted to transfer my skills to them during the week and have them help me teach. I also told them that I wanted to be respectful to them and if I violated any of their customs, it would not be done intentionally.

I told them that during the first couple days, I would teach a couple hours, then turn it over to Sam to teach holistic management. I said to watch what I do because everything I do is with purpose. I told them I couldn't speak French and it was okay for them to speak in whatever language they were comfortable with

including French, Bambara, and Peul. I was honored to be with them. I told them I like to have new experiences, which helps me to grow.

I turned the meeting over to someone in the group to facilitate the grounding. "Grounding" is a process that models listening with respect, establishes "verbal territory" for all participants. It engages the "whole" brain through thinking and feeling questions, gets people rooted in the "here and now", allows the expression of hidden agendas and shared hopes and apprehensions for the meeting, and provides initial information to the facilitator. I usually have a member of the group facilitate, demonstrating my willingness to share power as a facilitator and to allow participants to realize they can do this process themselves.

I have the designated facilitator open the meeting with three questions: 1) introduce yourself and your relationship to the issue we are dealing with; 2) what are your expectations of this meeting; and 3) how do you feel about being here? The grounding was somewhat awkward as often happens with new experiences. I didn't completely understand what was going on all the time because of the language differences. It went out of order at times and the facilitator wanted to exert his power. We went around twice instead of the usual once.

As the lead facilitator, the "art" of facilitation comes in as to when to let the group do the process even if it's not most effective, and when to intervene. I always demonstrate respectfulness to participants. I also use the adage as a facilitator that my role is to "be the guide on the side, not the sage on the stage."

Next, I had Lassine lead the greeting circle. He did a wonderful job. He seemed excited about the possible uses of the circle. I learned they do a greeting circle after a conflict is resolved, not before. A "greeting circle" is something I have learned and adapted from Native Americans. The participants all stand. The facilitator turns into the circle and greets the first person to their left or right (usually the opposite direction we went in the grounding for the sake of creating balance with whose first and whose last). The facilitator moves to the next person around the circle and the first person greeted turns and follows the facilitator. The circle of participants folds in on itself. The circle of participants continues around until each person greets and is greeted.

The circle is a design of shared power, a theme continually reinforced through the conflict resolution process. People take their turn at greeting and being greeted. Since each culture greets differently, I usually pick a community leader to initiate the greeting by what is customary. The greeting is one of the oldest ways of connecting for humans. The flesh to flesh contact connects us as one community.

I find that many conflicts, particularly the conflicts of intimidation, are resolved through the greeting, hence often the anxiety heard in loud voices as the process unfolds. The participants in Mali helped me see a different perspective of the use of the greeting circle at the beginning of a conflict session. They shared the idea that this allows the conflicting parties to build a friendship and allow them to put the conflict in the center of the circle to be resolved.

We took a coffee break, and then I broke the people into four small groups by counting off. I got a good mix of people in the groups. I had them do "adaptive learning" about the greeting circle. I use adaptive learning to turn experiences into opportunities for learning. I had the people answer, "How did they feel about doing the greeting circle?" and "What did they learn that will help them be successful in resolving conflict?" Conflict resolution is about becoming adaptable, not survival of the fittest. Conflict resolution is learning to find solutions with what I call "And Logic" meaning "how do we do this AND do that?" rather than "either / or" thinking.

For many people I have worked with around the world, the greeting circle is difficult. The activity creates anxiety, often with people meeting others they are in conflict with. Consequently, I find it important to let people express their feelings about the activity first, like a pressure cooker blowing off steam, before they can internalize the learning for the experience. It seems the greeting circle was a big success and a good way to start the week. We took a lunch break and I turned the rest of the day over to Sam.

Later, there was a formal dinner for us in the courtyard. The participants actually did a greeting circle, which I commented on. They seemed to really like the day.

Tuesday: Day Two — I started the workshop with "grounding". I had one of the lesser powerful people lead the exercise, a NRMAC member from one of the villages. He got interrupted several times, but did a very good job. He started with the Bambara speaking people first. It took a long time to go around because everything was translated. I find that I don't need to hear everything.

After the grounding, I had Mike (*SANREM CRSP-West Africa Project Manager*) and Sam role-play the conflict of different views in the room based on where they sat in the circle. This went very well. They played the parts well, spoke louder, started name-calling and asked others to support their viewpoint. This helped the group see about conflicting parties. I asked who was right? I also told them the value of those sitting with a view of both sides of the room and how they are important for resolving conflict.

Next, I again broke them into small groups using the counting method since there still is a great deal of division between groups when people sit in the room. The small groups explored the role of a successful facilitator. This went very well. People really like activities and to be engaged. They are a wise people, so they did a great job defining this role. This activity helps them define how they do their business.

The next activity was to describe the role of a successful recorder. After they made their lists of the usual things, I mentioned how important this role is in developing trust with groups in conflict. I often use these early activities for many purposes. These activities continue to build listening skills, build trust, and help define participant roles.

I then introduced the concept of using a listener when dealing with a one on one conflict. This really stirred the group as they saw this new way of doing conflict resolution as a great way to deal with interpersonal conflicts. Several got up to the board and drew diagrams about how this would work, so they were teaching each other.

I also mentioned about the importance of sharing power at this point in the morning. I mentioned the importance of honoring the role of authority, but when confronting conflict, it is important to involve everyone equally to come to solutions. I have learned that the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics applies to humans as well. Power has a tendency to want to become equalized. Power struggles drain communities of energy and resources. The dominant party seems to prevail yet passive to aggressive undercutting behaviors are prominent from opposing, less powerful parties.

After a solution is reached, the community can implement the solution through the lines of authority. There will be new behaviors with the group if all people are part of the solution. I believe consensus is reflected in a change of behavior, which is much stronger than just word changes. I also find consensus is for all members of the group to do what is right, not necessarily what they want.

Wednesday: Day Three — We began as always with yesterday's reporter telling what happened. Next, a new president was selected. I had also selected a new facilitator from the group. He appeared very nervous to do this. He had only moderate power with this group. I thought I would break some of the stereotypes from the day before of the role of the successful facilitator, such as being a strong, dominant individual.

He led the grounding and did a fine job. We went around pretty quickly. I was pleased with how people are really enjoying this training. The community representatives were especially excited to take what they

learned back home. That's what I came to do. People were mixing a little more in the circle today, which is also a great sign.

Next, we broke into small groups by counting off by six. I had the facilitator pick a facilitator in each group and designate a recorder. The facilitator seemed like he was losing confidence with helping and I was afraid of losing him. I needed Sam to help me help the facilitator be successful. Sometimes I find I need to nudge the facilitator by assuring that he is doing the right thing, in order to help them be successful. Now was the moment! Sam helped and the facilitator finally spoke, with my gentle but strong encouragement. After that, he did wonderfully. It was important to set the model for the group so they could imitate this process and realize that they can do this work.

I had the facilitator direct each small working group to explore the worst possible outcomes after the workshop is over. They did not want to talk about this. There were loud voices and lots of stirring. Finally, they did the task and reported out. They were not happy talking about this. My assumption is this group is really afraid of conflict! They wondered why I asked this question. I had the facilitator give some insights, next, Sam read off the visual for the exercise, and then I finished. That was difficult! They were ready for a coffee break.

Most people I work with have difficulty expressing their worst possible outcomes. It's as if we are afraid to speak of these things for fear they may become reality. I find it is important for people to express their worst possible outcomes from confronting a conflict. These are beliefs of why we won't address the conflict. However, this doesn't make the conflict go away. In fact, if our belief in the worst possible outcome is strong, it affects our beliefs, behaviors, strategies and actions, consequently creating the "self-fulfilling prophecy". What we don't want to see happen, we actually end up creating.

People have a present physiological response to this projected future imagined event usually based on past experiences. After having people express their worst possible outcomes, I also have them express their best possible outcomes. The best possible outcomes are also possibilities of the future, sometimes based on past experience with a present sensed emotion and physical response (endorphin response). Best possible outcomes can become a self-fulfilling prophecy if strongly held. I find the balance of worst and best possible outcomes allows me to achieve the desired results. Conflict resolution is more than just positive thinking.

After the coffee break, I had the facilitator ask the group what were the best possible outcomes after the workshop. There was quite a discussion about what this question meant. I think they just aren't used to thinking this way. The interpretation ended up being what had been said in the first place. They did a great job with best possible outcomes!

Now, they are ready to figure out "how" to make the best outcomes happen. I explained what I call "the Vanna White effect" from the American Television game show "Wheel of Fortune". I put a phrase with a missing letter on the easel such as "B_D". People have a tendency to fill in the space, automatically. The human mind is a problem-solving organ. The mind automatically wants to solve problems. If there are no problems to solve, then we often create problems to solve.

I am glad to have done the worst / best / possibility exercise with a focus on life after the workshop, as I believe this will create more positive movement. I got us back into a large circle and asked a community leader to honor the facilitator. He did with everyone sitting. So, I intervened and had everyone stand, bringing the facilitator to the center. The president from the previous day felt left out and we ended up with 2 presidents, 2 recorders and the facilitator in the center. It was great! They are taking ownership.

Honoring people is another way to build community. After I model the process of honoring, I often use it to resolve conflicts between parties by asking one side to speak to the other by saying something respectful or why we appreciate their presence in our community. The people in the center of the circle, who are being

honored, are often very self-conscious. Again, conflict resolution is about awareness. Self-consciousness is the first step to self-awareness, which allows change of behavior to occur.

When we sat down, I talked about the importance of balance: men and women, Peul and Bambara, young and old. I also spoke of the importance of honoring tradition and honoring the new. Both are important! I have learned that diversity initially strikes fear within most people. Sameness yields comfort and thus the adage, "birds of a feather flock together". However, I have also learned that sameness over time leads to boredom and diversity can lead to richness for the community, or value added. When I first work with groups, it's easy to split them into diverse groups by counting off because the same points of view often sit together.

I spoke of why I had the facilitator help, to break the beliefs, or stereotypes, of what a facilitator needs to be like. I also explained that this gives confidence to the group to do this work after a fine example from a local person. I also mentioned about doing things different than previously taught.

Thursday: Day Four — I got started for the day. I asked Lassine to select today's facilitator for me and to get that started. First we had the reading of yesterday's minutes and the traditional selection of a new president and reporter. Next, Lassine actually selected the person I wanted originally. The new facilitator asked the grounding questions.

I like to rotate the "power" of facilitator and the "listening" of the recorder around the group. This helps reduce the power struggle and fosters continually improving facilitation, recording, and participation skills. It's like riding a bike. At first, we are wobbly and fall frequently. As we get better at riding, most of the activity is done on a subconscious level. This conflict resolution process is the same. At first, it is slow and takes time. As people learn the skills and behaviors with associated beliefs, they do it subconsciously. I use the adage "to go slow, to go fast", to express this change.

People were generally satisfied, but some were uncomfortable and even frustrated that I wasn't giving them definitive answers to the questions. I explained when it got to me that I would be violating my own beliefs if I said my point of view was the only point of view. I referred back to the circle. I also said that everyone in the circle was a teacher and everyone was a student. I also mentioned the importance of leaving things unresolved, for the participant to solve it in their own way. As the grounding continued, I observed that Mike had been skipped because he was sitting outside the circle typing notes. The facilitator took his own initiative to ask Mike to also answer. The process is being adopted!

Once the grounding was complete we went on with the next exercises. I mentioned again about doing different things to get different results. I also said that the conflict resolution process begins by building relationships through respectful listening, resulting in a quick development of trust. This is what we had done earlier this week, which was the important relationship building work. Now we were going to learn the conflict resolution process (see Attachment 1).

I told them I want diverse opinions in the small groups, so I went ahead to create that. Since the group was beginning to be more comfortable with the many participants as observed by villagers and researchers beginning to sit with each other, I used a new way to demonstrate how to create diversity in setting up small groups. I broke the group up by where they lived and had different community members honor people from other community. For example, I had a person from Bamako, the capitol, honor the villagers and visa versa. Since I had "like people" in the center, I had them each counted off into four groups, creating the diversity I desired.

I instructed the facilitator to ask the questions; 1) Define Conflict? 2) What is the evidence of unresolved conflict in their environment? and 3) How do they feel about confronting conflict? These questions let participants assess the present situation from different points of view. People in conflict don't have enough

information to solve the conflict so this step begins gathering the information to resolve the conflict. When groups are in intense conflict, I often begin by using a generic process of understanding conflict and associated behaviors and beliefs. Later I confront the real conflict once they develop an understanding that conflict can lead to best outcomes.

They went to work, but I could feel resistance from several more power members of the group about me not giving answers. They answered the questions just like people in my workshops do in America, except they used the word "fear" rather than "avoidance" to describe their feeling about confronting conflict. I believe Africans with are more afraid of confronting conflict than my American participants, based on many past experiences. I imagine this is because that more serious pain has been experienced or reported in Africa as a consequence of confronting conflict.

I had the facilitator give his insights, and then it was time for the coffee break. I provide my insights to the whole group usually after the participants experience an activity. This gives them a real point of reference to base my insights on and they can see how the experience affected them personally.

When everyone returned, I visually demonstrated conflict. An effective visual activity is a powerful way to communicate concepts for later recall. I had a participant who seemed to be most resistant to me not answering, stand in the center of the circle. I asked him to go a certain direction and I would go in the opposite direction. No conflict. Next I said I wanted him to make me go his way even though I wanted to go another way. He was reluctant to push me, but did with my insistence. Everyone laughed. I said is this conflict? Oui!

I told the group I decided he was too big to fight, so I would go his way. With arms across our shoulders as we walked, I kept tripping him as he tried to walk. I asked was the conflict resolved and they said no. This was sabotage. They had used this word earlier. I honored my friend for helping. I felt if I did this exercise with this person, it would resolve his issue with me. It did.

I had the facilitator have the group answer the Worst Possible Outcomes of confronting and not confronting conflict. Wow! Another conflict. They did not want to answer and spent several minutes debating what the question was. Finally, they worked on it. The groups answered it not in the order like I asked, but it got the point across. The first groups to report out describe the worst possible outcomes of confronting a conflict. They share how bad things can be if they confront the conflict. If they believe it "will" be that bad, they won't confront the conflict.

After the first group reports out, I have the second group report out how bad things can be if they do NOT confront the conflict. Everyone is amazed to learn the worst outcomes of NOT confronting are the same, if not worse, than confronting the conflict. Because the mind wants to find resolution, this creates a paradox in the mind and allows the opportunity to explore another way of confronting conflict, the best possible outcome.

I presented the Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing diagram (see Attachment 2). This diagram is a model of the process people go through in the development of relationships. In the Forming stage, we join together based on our similarities. The Storming phase is where we discover we have significant differences. In this stage, we focus on the worst possible outcomes and people tend to be reactive.

The relationship can go four different directions from here. 1) We can stay in conflict or Storming. 2) We can end the relationship through distance, separation, divorce or even death. The question of whether this relationship is worth it is asked to determine this outcome. 3) We can force or be forced in Conforming, in which one party's desires become submissive to the other party. 4) We can choose to move to Norming, in which a choice is made to accept the relationship even with the differences. As a result, new norms are developed to have a functional relationship.

The focus becomes one of best possible outcomes and proactive. This allows the relationship to move to Performing. The process is cyclical and returns to Forming and Storming as new differences are confronted. The better people can develop skills of effectively dealing with difference, the more time the relationship can be in the Performing stage.

The workshop participants really liked this model and it made a lot of sense to them. All of this was getting translated to Bambara. Next, I had the facilitator have the group work with the Best Possible Outcomes of confronting conflict. They had a wonderful list and they also seemed to feel good inside about this. I believe they were getting the point.

I showed the Change Process diagram with results being either Worst Possible Outcomes or Best Possible Outcomes (see Attachment 3). I showed if you want to change at a basic level, you change strategies and actions — modification. If you want to change at a fundamental level, then you change beliefs and behaviors — transformation. If you are generally satisfied with the results you are getting in your life, then a simple modification of activities and strategies is generally good enough. However, if you are not satisfied with the results in your life, a transformational change of beliefs and behaviors is probably necessary to get different results.

I told them this is where I do my work today. I said if they want to change the Sahel, they have to change their beliefs and behaviors. I suggested that Sam was introducing some new beliefs and behaviors concerning overgrazing. I also pointed out that they were discovering some new ways to confront and successfully resolve conflict. In my portion of the workshop, they were learning new beliefs and behaviors to foster their best possible outcomes of confronting conflict.

I also mentioned it was impossible for them to reverse desertification of the Sahel. I also told them that IS what humans do. They accomplish seemingly impossible tasks, such as reversing desertification. I told them, with belief in my voice, they would do it if they chose to do so.

Next, I had the facilitator have two groups do beliefs and behaviors and the other two groups do strategies and actions. Again, their answers were fabulous! The groups developed beliefs, behaviors, strategies and actions consistent with fostering their best outcomes.

The facilitator did an outstanding job all morning. He was a great role model for the rest of the participants doing all of my simple tips extremely well such as standing outside of the group's circle which respects their community and doesn't impose his presence too strongly on their efforts to resolve their issues. Again, a successful facilitator is "a guide on the side, not the sage on the stage."

We broke for lunch. Lassine seemed frustrated during the morning. He said people were expecting me to "fix" the Sahel. He had told them "how can he if he has never been to the village. He doesn't know what is there." He said I was here to bring tools for them to use.

After lunch, I did the yarn / relationship visual (see Attachment 4). The yarn / relationship visual is a role-playing exercise that demonstrates the complexity of conflict and the amount of energy that is returned to a parties who resolve even one conflict. I started to have one of the women become married to one of the men. A noise came up and Sam said watch it. I was embarrassed, but a researcher who has done a fine job of translating Bambara and English asked what my situation was. I said I wanted to do an exercise and not violate their customs. The group said to have the other woman and man be the married ones. I asked if that would be okay and they all said yes.

I showed two relationships with two people, then how those relationships increased with a son, then a daughter (the original woman enjoyed the idea of being the daughter). I then added farming the land, and a conflict with herders. I showed how resolving the conflict with the herder gives more energy back to the community.

One person said if the conflict was with a hippo, how would the others relate to the situation. With quick thinking, I said if the family went hungry, where would their food come from? I said the neighbors would be mad at the hippo. Consequently, a neighbor's conflict with a hippo can easily become their conflict. They really liked this visual demonstration. I honored the group for helping.

Next, I honored the facilitator, presidents, and reporter. They seem to like this activity and all wanted to join in. I also honored Sam, Lassine, and my Bambara translating friend for helping me to communicate. I had Mike lead a silent greeting circle. There were some giggles from a participant who wasn't at the opening session. I finished with an adaptive learning session in the large group. Everyone said they learned a tremendous amount and were satisfied.

I do three different versions of a greeting circle. I use the "talking" greeting circle usually to open a meeting, particularly with groups that are in conflict, newly formed groups, and old groups. I do this with old groups to create potential equity with the power structure that has formed over the years. I also do a "silent" greeting circle at the end of a meeting to create the balance of opening with sound and closing with silence. People often find this quite powerful and a more effective way to communicate than the "talking" greeting circle. I also do an "affirmation" greeting circle where only the people doing the greeting (on the inside) do the talking which usually is an affirming statement to the participants on the outside.

Friday: Day Five — At breakfast, Mike talked about his concerns for setting the stage for the next week and beyond. He wants the process to be commune driven and respected by the researchers. Mike also wants it to be very participatory as well with other NGOs and agencies joining in and a model for other areas. His conflicts about the present situation and the best possible outcomes gave me a puzzle to solve, the application of the "Vanna White Effect" in my own mind. My question to myself was "how can I make all these things happen given my skills and the opportunities I am presented with?"

At about noon, Mike opened up discussion about SANREM's expectations from the work. It created quite an uproar, which I didn't comprehend verbally, but I made guesses from the body language. Everybody was going around in circles with lots of fears expressed. It seemed there was still the potential conflict between the mayor of the village and the president of the newly formed commune committee. Just before the lunch break, I suggested people remember the four steps of the conflict resolution process.

At lunch, I offered to Mike to use the process to resolve the conflicts and build support. Real situations build much greater confidence for the group to use the conflict resolution process because they can see successful results. It also serves the added benefit of getting a real conflict resolved, adding more energy for the community to resolve other issues. I felt a confidence within myself even though there were many barriers. What an opportunity to demonstrate this work! We talked about his concerns and hopes and he agreed with me. His biggest concern was could we get everything done in the 1-2 hour we had available. I said I had done this many times (but not with a group of people I couldn't understand).

I developed my strategy for success. I would begin with a panel including Mike, Kodio (the lead regional researcher), the mayor of Madiama and the president of the Project's Commune Committee. I select people in a panel who have diverse and strong viewpoints. Mike represented USAID and is American. Kodio represents the leadership of the regional research group and is a Dogon. The mayor represents the newly formed power structure at the Commune-level through democratic elections. The president represents SANREM's newly formed commune committee to represent this project.

A real conflict existed between the mayor and the president. I also wanted to work on resolving that situation. I would also have the local extension agent help me facilitate. I would go through the four steps and end with adaptive learning.

Mike, Lassine, and Sam were strategizing and I joined them. I asked what the purpose of the conflict resolution session was. It was to plan what to do on Monday and Tuesday to help the committee and researchers prepare for the January SANREM meeting. We also agreed on the panel, which they had

already changed, but as we talked, it ended up exactly what I had designed. We went to the room. I met with Sam and the extension agent and discussed the plan. I would start the panel then turn it over to the extension agent.

The panel did exceptionally well. There was agreement about moving this forward within the context of concerns to overcome to make it happen. I had the extension agent honor the panel. Next, I had the other commune committee representatives, researchers, and others go to the center to be honored and counted off. They divided up.

I had the facilitator ask the groups what is one thing they learned from the panel, two things they wanted to say about the present situation and how they felt about it. In the reports out, they said there was a consensus about moving forward.

Next, I had the facilitator ask the worst possible and best possible outcomes of this situation. They did well. They really seemed beyond not believing this was going to work. Their best outcomes were very exciting and uplifting. I now had the facilitator ask how to make this happen, the strategies and actions to foster the best possible outcomes. They came up with a good list of important steps including going back to the village this weekend and letting everyone know.

I also decided to have the four panel members tell the group what they were going to do after listening to the discussion. Even though they talked about lofty things beyond their personal responsibilities, they were ready to go. We ran out of time because the governor's representative of Mopti was there to close the session. I still managed to point out the importance of asking how they felt and what they learned to help them be successful. I also commented on how much they got done in a very short period of time. Everyone was impressed with how this worked. Go slow to go fast! Finally, I honored the facilitator with how great a job he did.

The governor's representative came in with his right hand man. There was a traditional thank you speech and good work. Next, the group went into doing a greeting circle automatically. They also honored the helpers from today. When the governor's representative left, the "Vanna White Effect" took over and they got to develop the agenda for Monday and Tuesday. Everyone stayed. The commune committee agreed to do the presentations at the commune with Sam and I available as resources. Great!!!

Monday: Day Six — We arrived at Madiama at 9:45. The faces were many, familiar and very warm. Lots of handshakes! There was an excitement in the air. We met the village chief. We took a long walk through the rather large adobe village (pop. 2-3000). The mayor and president walked in front together. And again, handshakes! We sat on a mat on the ground next to the chief and the village elders. The welcome was filled with happiness and friendliness reflecting the success of Friday's intervention.

Our workshop was held in an empty rice storage facility. Our meeting room / granary was the largest. The room was set up in a big circle of chairs with easels at the front. The positional power was at the front and the two-committee women sat in the position of low power as illustrated in the organizational table structure.

The workshop was all taught in Bambara and facilitated by village participants from last week. Kodio and Lassine set the stage for the two-day workshop. One of the researchers was selected as president for the day and we had two reporters again. There is a tremendous ownership of the process with today's president. However, he is overbearing with his big size and booming voice and uses it to get people to pay attention. Learning to share power and be the guide on the side versus the sage on the stage is one of the important lessons that still need to be effectively communicated. Kodio said to the group to get closer and make a tighter circle by pushing out extra chairs. I counted 41 people and by the end of the day we were up to 46.

The mayor opened the meeting with a welcome. The committee president, who was designated by the SANREM CRSP-initiated committee formed by this project and still wasn't sure what status it had in the

commune, was growing in positional power and respect. The grounding was a simple: "Who are you?" "What do you do?" and "Where are you from?" Everyone spoke.

The Greeting Circle was received with much surprise and did not begin correctly, but was corrected by the group about half way and turned out fabulously. People were asked who wanted to speak about the greeting circle (adaptive learning) and a randomness of answers came out expressing the pleasure this created and the significance for getting everyone together before entering the conflict. They do this traditionally after a conflict is resolved, but not as a tool before.

Next, they asked about the role of a successful facilitator and recorder. Here it was pointed out that everyone should speak in an order and this was corrected for the rest of the day. They next defined conflict with the group doing the conflict visual. The president began the visual but the person who had helped me demonstrate the visual the previous week corrected it since he lived the experience. They also wanted to show the two ladies (old and young example from Stephen Covey's book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*). This demonstrated conflict resolution very well and the point that both views are right. They also talked about evidence of unresolved conflict and their thoughts about confronting conflict.

I was totally honored by the depth of their learning and their confidence of expression. I just sat back and enjoyed the transfer of skills from last week's students to this week's students. The new teachers of this process also demonstrated the importance of listeners for one-on-one conflict and took it upon themselves to visually demonstrate this using the conflict between a tax collector and a poor farmer.

They did the yarn exercise. They gathered scarves for the demonstration, but one of the women I gave the yarn to produced the yarn and they did the exercise. They really enjoyed this. Everyone wanted to see, getting up and looking. One of the women, Fanta, was asked to play a part. This group was engaged! A high level of trust and respect was present.

They honored the community facilitator and other community helpers. They clap their hands for everyone, which seems cultural. Bringing people to the center of circle is new, but they enjoy doing that and see the benefit. The project is going right where SANREM dreamed, into the heart of the commune. The participants did an outstanding job of presenting. They HAVE some new tools and they incorporated them well in what they are already doing.

Lassine said he has not seen a group pick something up so fast and thoroughly before. The researchers were also very respectful and I believe will honor the community and have built a lasting friendship. It will be easier for them to work here, I suspect.

Tuesday: Day Seven — We got to the village at 9 am. After breakfast, we headed out for a tour of the land around the Madiama commune (10 villages). We went to the causeway first to view rice production on one side and pasture uses on the other. There is a conflict about land use.

Next we looked at pastureland that was recently under water. The "floating herb" grass (*bourgou*) was starting to grow. We went to another site that had a parasitic weed (*striga*) that taps into the root of millet. I found and shared a lavender-colored dung beetle doing its job on goat dung. Termites do a great job of recycling organic matter.

The last site was where large herds of Peul herders held their cattle each night, across the highway. There were volumes of manure there, and it was breaking down. During most of the morning, a conflict brewed between the president and one of the other local participants about the cattle. The conflict was about the fact that the Peul herders were staying in the area more now because they wanted to stay closer to their "good women" at home, this increases the pressure on the commune and its resources.

The conflict was easy to observe as the parties used size and distance throughout the day to demonstrate their level of strength with this issue. Size is often used in terms of importance or "position power" of

people involved in a conflict or numbers of people involved. Distance is used in terms how close or far away individuals position themselves, depending on their perception of their level of power. These types of conflicts are significant to confront and successfully resolve to bring about effective change to the desertification issues of the region.

We got back at 1:30 pm. I sat with the group of lesser power without interpretation of the verbal language. I also displayed my pictures from home on my computer to show people. Right after lunch, Kodio recapped the tour for those that didn't go due to limited space in the three vehicles. For the next 1_ hours, a discussion persisted with the group focusing on tools. I wanted to contribute but decided to do this only if I was asked.

Finally, at 4, the discussion was getting wrapped up. Lassine was going to just break the meeting off, but the group demanded a greeting circle and honoring of all people involved during the week and a half. That was nice. I liked connecting with everyone before I left. I said thank you in Bambara "in-e-chee". Many were surprised and pleased.

After the closing, we went to get the chief's blessing and farewell. We marched back to the chief's place where the elders had gathered.

Conclusion - My primary recommendation is to continue to reinforce training at the commune and researcher levels. Practice and reinforcement is key to adopting new beliefs and behaviors with conflict resolution and consensus building skills.

The process I use honors all people leading to 100% consensual agreement. It addresses concerns and fears that limit action. The process also changes behavior consistent with creating desired outcomes. The skills are highly transferable. One of the reasons this process is so effective in transferring skills is the process uses the primary learning ability of people, which is imitation. Because of this, the process is most effectively learned through an experiential process and repetition.

Additional training activities which confront and successfully resolve conflicts include: a) being successful with finite resources and growing demand, b) decentralization and empowerment and c) managing change in the commune to create desired outcomes and gain individual, village, commune and government support. The first workshop resulted in demonstrating a high level of skill transfer in Madiama commune. This additional learning and repetition is necessary to solidify the successful transfer of skills.

Appendix

Attachment 1 — Basic Consensus Building Process

1. **What is the Present Situation? How do you feel about it?**
2. **What is the Worst Possible Outcome of confronting the situation?**
3. **What is the Best Possible Outcome of confronting the situation?**
4. **What Beliefs, Behaviors, Strategies and Actions will foster the Best Possible Outcome?**

Attachment 2 — Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing model

Of all the influences we have in our life, relationships with others are the most important. We cannot communicate without relationships, we cannot have conflicts without relationships, we cannot have power without relationships.

During the 60's and 70's many studies were done with groups, trying to understand the way in which groups are formed. A series of developmental stages were identified that apply equally well to one-on-one relationships. These have been described in many ways, using different terms, but I have found the following description the easiest to remember because it rhymes.

Remember, though, that this is a road map. It appears linear because it is described in stages, each following the other. In actual experience, we go about this in very different ways. Some stages are fast, others slow, some stages may be left out, some stages may be repeated. Be aware of this as you explain it to others.

STAGE 1. FORMING:

We first meet as strangers, seeking something that will bind us. Our initial conversation is a search... where do you live, who do you know, what do you do? Each of these seeks some commonality that we can talk about, begin to develop a relationship around.

This is the time when similarities are important. We like to be with people who are the same as us. This is the most non-threatening stage of a relationship. We develop a relationship that is safe.

There are some who seek difference, who purposefully seek out that which is different than them. Those they find are also seeking difference. This is their similarity as a basis for the relationship.

STAGE 2. STORMING:

This stage begins when we are confronted with our differences. That which brought us together is suddenly threatened. Because we are curious creatures, we are normally unwilling to be satisfied with the boredom of sameness. We begin to test the boundaries

of our relationship. We begin to mold the other person to meet our needs. This is a movement to the use of power in the relationship.

We are all different in some way, from each other. We differ in our ages, our cultures, our experiences when we grew up.

In the forming stage we may agree on the value of family traditions at Holiday times. We like having the tree with Christmas bulbs and tinsel. This is our similarity. But, when it comes time to share Christmas together, we find that there are differences in approach we had not discussed before.

So, I may want to buy a white fir for Christmas, because this is the way it has always been in my family. But, my wife wants a cedar tree, because this is the way it has always been in her family. I want my soft light bulbs that I have used for years, she wants her bulbs, the kind that blink on and off all the time. They make me nervous after being in the room for a while.

I like to just toss the package of tinsel at the tree and watch it naturally arrange itself as it floats to the ground. Pat likes to place each individual strand on the individual branchlets of the tree. Who decides?

Well, in my culture, the English, the male is the final authority. I will get to decide. I expect my wife to "conform," to comply. This is the approach I was taught to use in my culture. I learned to conform to authority, to what was expected. In fact, my generation was known as the "age of conformity." We wore the same clothes, worked an 8-5 shift, had "standard" job descriptions, and worked to "keep up with the Joneses."

My wife, however, is younger, a feminist, coming from the age of rebellion, the 60's. She is also American Indian, where there is a matriarchy, and decisions such as this are left up to the woman. She decides she will not conform, she has every right to have a say in this issue.

Now we are entering the stage of storming. We have different approaches that have to be resolved. Normally they are resolved by you conforming to my needs, so that you continue to "look like me." That is the safest, most stable relationship to have. It is also the most boring, uninteresting relationship to have.

But, what if you don't conform? What if you stand up for your views? Then I must "force" you, and that is the beginning of the "power struggle", the beginning of real conflict. If I am a flight person, I will appear to comply, and move the storming to the non-verbal arena, by resisting quietly, with passive aggression.

If I am a fight person, I will pit my power against yours. We are in a power struggle, a real storming is occurring. We are now reactive, emotional, motivated by worst outcomes.

There must be a solution to this storming. An impasse is not desired. We rely on the common approaches to conflict resolution. I may deny the problem exists. Or, I may distance myself from the issue, by not talking to you about it, by not speaking to you, or by placing myself where you are not seen.

I may seek a divorce, a termination of the relationship. Then I can do what I want without having to be in a power struggle with you. Or, if the unresolved conflict is too much to bear, death becomes an alternative.

This is the motivation behind the violent shootings of postal workers by a former co-worker, recently. Because he lost his grievance, and could not accept the decision, he felt compelled to visit death upon those who participated, including himself. The inability to somehow resolve the storming phase of conflict is probably behind much of the violence we see in society today.

STAGE 2A: THE PAUSE THAT REFRESHES: This stage is not referred to in the behavioral literature, but I have observed it is necessary. Once the confrontation occurs, a pause is instrumental in facilitating the norming. The pause is similar to "distancing," in that it allows some time to consider, to adapt.

In a consensus session, I provide a break after a group has described the situation, and explored their worst possible outcomes of the situation. This leads them through the storming, and prepares them for the norming. A break allows the mind to re-consider the situation, to re-asses the severity of the worst outcomes.

I normally provide a break after the parties have confronted each other. I pose a question before the break; "How are we going to resolve this to meet all the parties needs?"

After the break, exploring the best possible outcomes develops the basis for the norming. The beliefs and behaviors that foster the best outcome are the norming.

After confronting each other, often in a reactive way, on an issue like the Christmas Holidays, Pat and I will separate, go to different rooms, or I may go for a walk. This allows us to think of what was said, to re-assess our emotional reaction, to become more proactive. We can decide how much we overstated our case. We can decide how much of our connection to the way we do it is "loyalty" to the past. We can consider the points of the other party. Now we are ready for "norming."

STAGE 3: NORMING: In this stage the participants recognize that these differences must somehow be dealt with in a mature and growing way. A decision must be made that the relationship is too important to end. The participants must first affirm that the

differences exist. They seek to understand why they are present. This means learning to understand the other person better. Then the question is asked:

How can we have these differences and still remain in the relationship?

For Pat and I the answer was obvious. The relationship was too important to be the cause of dissension. So, I agreed to buy a cedar tree if I could put my bulbs on it. She put the tinsel on it, a piece at a time. I stayed away from this process, unable to understand the patience it took to do this. The Holidays were somewhat strained, because it was different, but enjoyable.

The next year, it was easy to agree I would get my fir tree, use her blinkety bulbs, and I would get to decorate the tree with the tinsel, my way. Well, Pat actually helped a bit on that.

We have begun to seriously norm, adapting slowly so that we are able to accept and appreciate each other's differences. We are proactive, thinking our relationship through, fostering best outcomes.

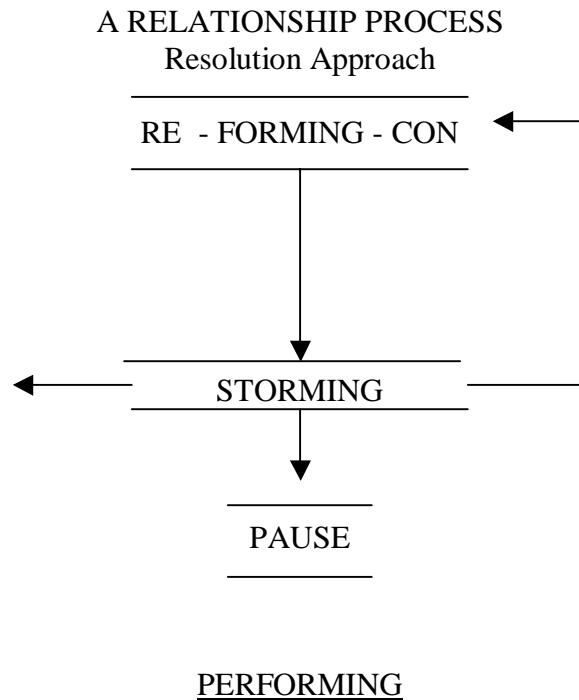
The following year, we bought the prettiest tree we had ever seen. We both liked it, a noble fir. We also bought some new bulbs. And, believe it or not, I found the patience to decorate the tree a strand of tinsel at a time. We enjoyed the experience together. Now, we are entering the next stage, Performing.

STAGE 4: PERFORMING: From this point on, once the norming is established, the relationship can perform at peak levels. There is still difference, but it adds to the richness of the relationship experience, because it is understood, accepted, appreciated. The relationship flows in a natural way, saving time because there is a common focus and an understood approach.

STAGE 5: STORMING - REFORMING: Rarely will a relationship remain for long in the performing stage. The journey through the storming to the norming will cause movement and growth in each person. This changes the nature of their perceptions, and their information base. This in turn affects their beliefs and behaviors. They will become different people.

In time, a new issue will arise between the parties. One party will want to do something new and different, as a result of personal growth. The result is a movement to storming, and as resistance builds, a desire for re-forming. The other party resists, wanting to keep things in the new and accepted way, wanting the other to conform to this new way.

This will require the relationship to repeat the process for storming, norming in order to return to performing.



The cycle is continuous, to be repeated as each person continues to grow and seek to reach his and her potential. Yet, the desire will continue to be to seek stability, to have conformity. It is easier, on the surface, and the reactive and emotional storming stage can be avoided.

Attachment 3 — Fostering the Best Outcomes

Once the best outcomes have been established, then is the time to develop the movement to make them happen. Fostering the best outcomes will often require looking at beliefs, behaviors, strategies and actions. Each of these is a different focus:

BELIEF: A conviction or opinion. These create the behaviors of the person.

BEHAVIOR: Deportment or demeanor (a person's manner towards others). These are manners and attitudes that are created by the basic beliefs of a person.

STRATEGY: A plan of action. A strategy is intended to carry out a vision or mission. It is also a way of actualizing a belief. Strategies are often developed that are incongruent with the person's beliefs. The behaviors will then override the intent of the strategy.

ACTION: The act, process or fact of doing something. These are specific deeds that carry out the intent of the strategy. If they are not congruent with the person's beliefs, the person's attitudes and demeanor will nullify them.

We are used to focusing only on action plans, or strategies. This is appropriate if the change is one of modification, where the beliefs are congruent with the plan.

If the beliefs are not consistent with the plans, they will not be carried out. The behavior will tend to be incongruent with the action. In this instance, the new and adaptive beliefs must be agreed to.

Attachment 4 — Yarn / Relationship Visual

*** THE TIES THAT BIND**

What is a relationship? That is the question I ask as I lead the group into an exploration of relationships, loss and change. Their answer is diverse, as diverse as they are.

The question is asked to get their definition, and to bring them into the arena of discussing relationships. The definition provides an opportunity for the collective view before the activity begins.

1. TWO PEOPLE, TWO RELATIONSHIPS:

I ask two people, a male and a female, to help me in the center of the circle. I have pieces of yarn in my hands, each about 40 inches long. I refer to them as relationship strings, the "Tie That Binds." I hand each a piece of the yarn. I ask them to connect the relationship strings with each other. They look like this:



Person A has a relationship with person B. Person B also has a relationship with Person A. Each of these relationships is associated with a differing perception.

I give an example. Person A is Sally. She tells her friend, "Ted is the man for me. He takes me everywhere, to the movies, the ball game, to picnics with his friends. He tells me his dreams and his hopes. I know he is going to ask me to marry him." That describes her relationship perception.

Person B is Ted. Ted tells his friends, "Sally is a wonderful friend. She is just like one of the guys. She goes to the ballgame, and is always available when I want to see a movie. I sure like to tell her these crazy ideas I have about life. I hope that when I meet the right woman, she will let me keep Sally for a friend." That is his perception of the relationship.

Obviously, these people have different perceptions of their relationship. Yet, they believe and behave as if their perception is the same.

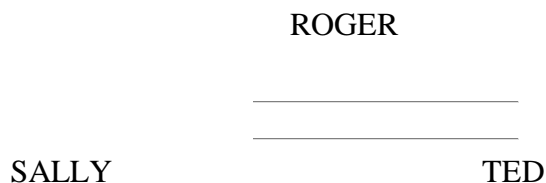
It is only when Sally wants Ted to go to the opera with her on Monday night, and she finds that Ted has a date with the guys to watch football that he won't change, that their differing needs and wants become obvious. Her disappointment, and his confusion, is a measure of their differing perceptions.

2. THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT:

Let's suppose, though, that Sally is right. They do get married. They decide to have a family. Soon, in the appropriate amount of time, they have a bouncing baby boy to them.

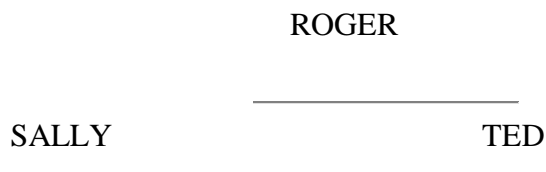
Cute little Roger arrives with a relationship string for Mom and a relationship string for his Dad. They each also have a relationship string for him. I ask another volunteer to come out into the center of the circle to be the baby, and give each the appropriate number of strings. They connect them, a clumsy and uncertain process, just as the establishment of relationships is.

This is how the relationship strings look now.



Be aware of the number of relationship strings. While they have introduced one new member of the family, they have increased their relationship strings to 6, a threefold increase. Each person added has a multiplier effect.

Suppose they have a second child, a beautiful, intelligent girl, Ann. Ann has 3 relationship strings, for her Mom, for Dad, for Roger. They each have one for her.



ANN

There are now 12 relationships to be managed in this family. This is 6 times the original 2-relationship perception! Those who are married with children know how much additional energy it takes to manage this situation.

The number increases as more people are added to the relationship circle. The formula is Number of persons times the Number of persons minus one ($N \times N - 1$). Ten people have 90 relationships (10×9). Twenty people have 380 relationships to manage (20×19).

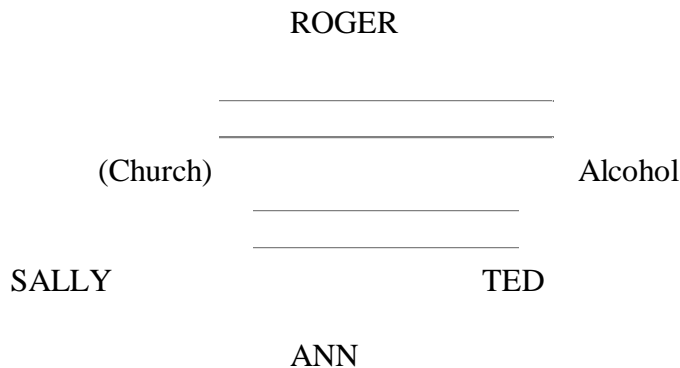
A manager making a change presentation to an audience of 100 publics is managing 9900 relationships. This is why it is important in these situations to use small group process. Each group of ten is then managing only 90 relationships.

3. RELATIONSHIPS WITH THINGS:

We also have relationships with things. You have a relationship with your car, and it has one with you. You depend on the car to start, until one morning it decides to let you down. It is not as dependable as you perceived.

Or, you may have a relationship with alcohol. You believe that you can stop drinking any time you want. The alcohol knows you can't, and is able to tempt you to continue.

If our family above has an alcoholic father, the relationships look like this:



When Ted comes home drunk, he affects all the members of the family. Sally argues with Ted over the drinking. Roger and Ann may choose sides, one of them defending their father. This affects their relationship with their mother. They are now managing 20 relationship strings (5×4).

If Sally has a relationship with the church that keeps her away from the family, this too affects them all. It increases Ted's reliance on alcohol. The children act out to get their mother's attention. They now have 30 relationships to manage (6×5).

4. RELATIONSHIP WITH CONFLICTS:

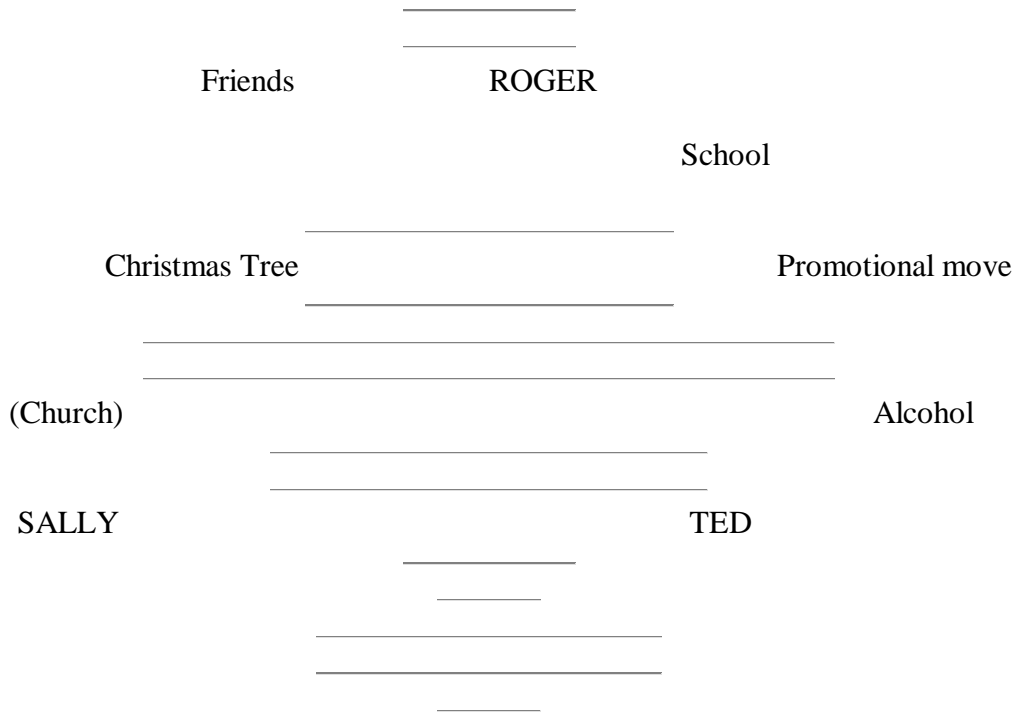
Unresolved conflicts have a way of becoming part of the relationships in a family. If Dad and Mom have an argument over the Christmas tree, this eventually affects them all. The children roll up their eyes and go to their friend's home. Again, they may take sides. Ted just drinks more, using the Holiday as an excuse. Mom spends more time with the church.

Each unresolved conflict impacts other unresolved conflicts. Sally tells Ted he would not be so stubborn about the tree if he wasn't always drunk. He tells her he wouldn't drink if she would agree to move to a new location. They are now managing 56 relationship perceptions (8x7).

5. RELATIONSHIP WITH CHANGE:

Ted wants to move to a new location where he can get a promotion. He can't understand why Sally won't move. Maybe they could start over in their relationship and leave the old one behind.

Sally doesn't want to leave the security of her work with the church. The children don't want to leave their school and friends.



School

ANN

Friends

This family is trying to manage 132 relationship strings (12x11). No wonder they feel stressed out when they get together. No wonder they don't get together very often. Sally is at Church, Ted at the bar, the children at their friends.

These relationships take energy to manage. Each unresolved conflict and change event "piggybacks" energy of the other. When Ted and Sally argue about alcohol, the church, the tree, the promotion, the school and friends become instruments of war.

6. RELATIONSHIP WITH LOSS:

If Sally gives in and agrees with a move, this creates more stress. For each member of the family there is a process of "letting go" and "taking hold" that must happen.

Ted must let go of the old position, and take hold of the new one. Sally has to do the same with church, the children with their friends and school. The change doubles the number of relationships to manage from 12 to 24. This increases the number of relationship bonds to 552 (24x23).

In order to reduce the stress with change, this family must confront the changes they are going through. This begins with reaching closure with the present and the past. The family members explore two questions:

"How do you feel about leaving this location (friends, school, job, etc.)?"

"What did you learn here that you want to take to the new experience with you?"

This allows the family to acknowledge the change, to express their feelings, and grieve about it, to move on to acceptance. Answering these questions allows the past to be integrated into their memory, into their being. This reduces the number of relationships they manage by half, and the number of relationship strings from 552 to 132.

Acceptance continues by reaching out to make sense of the future experience. Similar questions are answered to take hold of the new location: "How do you feel about going to the new location (friends, school, job, etc.)?"

"What do you want to learn from this new experience?"

This process helps the family move through all the change stages.

Change One, Change Them All

Some are panicked by the notion of all these strings. If you are facing the notion of working with 20 people, then there are 380 relationships to manage (20×19). This appears impossible.

Yet, the real power is in the one-on-one relationship. All relationships are interrelated. Touch one and you touch them all. Improve on one and you affect them all. There is no way of knowing if the move is positive or negative, but there is still movement.