



## Maximizing Differences in Ourselves and Others

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Have you ever wondered how two people, connected in the same way, can be so different? Spouses, siblings, colleagues; all are sets of people who share so much in common, yet sometimes simple differences tear them apart. It is easy to see differences as a hindrance to the relationship because of the way we view the dissimilarity. It is a natural human tendency to think if it is not being done our way, it is the wrong way. This mentality can lead to unnecessary conflict that hurts both the relationship and the goal the team is working toward. How can different people get along better at home, at work and in everyday life?

First, ask yourself this question, "What are we both trying to achieve?" Often conflict can arise from the simple fact that the goal is so important that both people feel they must put their best foot forward in order to attain it. This frequently leads to toes feeling stepped on. An awareness that both people are striving for the same outcome can make it easier to look at both points of view.

Once you have determined the goal, figure out how the other person contributes to it. Differences in people can be strengths for the overall goal. Someone who is concerned with the big picture can benefit from another who is wrapped up in the details. Both of these strengths are essential to the final product, but you can imagine how these two people could drive each other crazy. Consider for a minute that instead of feeling angry and irritated with each other, they were gracious to have the other fill in where they fell short. How would the relationship change?

In order to begin to appreciate differences in others, you must first start with knowing yourself. Consider your strengths and limitations. Acknowledge what you are exceptional at and what you could do better. With this knowledge of yourself, you can start to see other people as a unique set of strengths and weaknesses and begin to move toward acceptance.

With your goal in mind, picture the other person has the same good intentions for your goal as you do. Align yourself with them by listening to their point of view. Figure out where they are coming from and what angle they may have on the issue. Concentrating on listening and understanding leads to a collaborating with one another to best accomplish your objective.

This is easier to do with some people than with others. The trouble is that we do not always get to pick the people we pair with. Anyone who has attended the second grade learned this when the teacher assigned desks! No matter how you fussed, you were stuck. Sometimes we are left to make the most out of the situation we are handed. So, if we can not change the other person, and we can not change the relationship, the only thing left to change is ourselves.

Remain open to other people's opinions and viewpoints and share yours as well. Even if you don't like the person, getting to know them will lessen feelings of tension. When people feel your support and acceptance, they will be drawn to you. We are all different, that is something we can not change. Learning to accept differences is the first step in benefiting from the natural variations that exist in all of us.