

# Combat is Optional

Marriage  
Tips  
Series



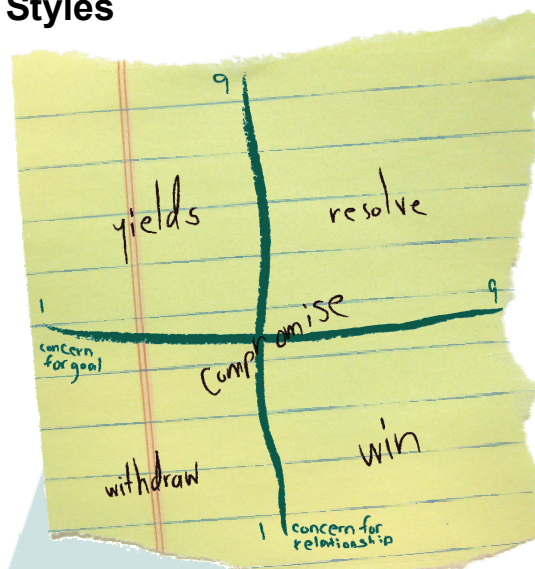
■ by Paul Rhodea, MA, Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist

**C**onflict is natural and can occur in any relationship but combat is optional. Married couples who disagree can respond like Christ. John 1:14 describes Christ as the One "...who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Here all of Christ's attributes are summarized into a simple two-point check list: **grace and truth**. These characteristics of compassion and candor can be used to address our disputes once we identify the patterns of conflict.



## MARRIAGE TIP | Recognize Conflict Styles

I use a diagram adapted from David Augsburger's book, "Caring Enough to Confront" with couples to illustrate the 5 styles. The vertical line represents a concern for relationship, the horizontal line a concern for a desired goal. Each line ranges from 1-9 with "9" showing a high respect for its value. These lines intersect forming four quadrants. The lower right quadrant we'll call a "**win**" style of conflict. Here a person assertively pursues their goal with little or no concern for the relationship. They feel threatened to defend their position. The upper left quadrant portrays a spouse who favors relationship over the goal and therefore "**yields**." They succumb to being nice to preserve the relational peace. The lower left quadrant paints a person who shows little notice for either the goal or the relationship. They're hopeless about a solution so they "**withdraw**" physically or retreat to inner safety by becoming silent. Where the lines intersect typifies a style of "**compromise**." Here couples barter away some of their closeness and desires to reach a cooperative compromise. However, they may feel they conceded too many of their values and be dissatisfied with the outcome which impacts their intimacy. The upper right quadrant pictures those who purpose to enrich their relationship by working to achieve a mutual goal. By speaking the truth in love (grace) they achieve a "**resolve**" that cherishes both their relationship and joint goal.



Paul Rhodea sees clients in our DeMotte and Schererville offices

Individuals may relate to one of these five as their conflict pattern. Rather than view these patterns as rigidly fixed approaches, it is better to think of them as flexible responses used to identify the direction a conflict is taking. It's most effective to use a **resolve** approach but seldom is it one's starting point. **Compromise** is the second most effective method followed by **yielding** which aims to strengthen the relationship so partners can resume the discussion and negotiate a solution. At times a **win** style serves to clarify a point while it may temporarily forfeit the relationship until a compassionate and candid dialog can be pursued again. As a last resort **withdrawal** can provide a time for reflective re-examination and growth in order to move toward an affirming and assertive resolve by use of grace and truth. ■

Augsburger, D (2009) Caring Enough to Confront: How to Understand and Express Your Deepest Feelings To Others. Ventura, CA: Regal Books

Twenty-five percent of the people who come to Chicago Christian Counseling Center come for marital or couple counseling.

We therefore offer a "Marriage Tips" Series in each *Pressing On* Newsletter edition.

Even if you are not married, these tips matter to any close relationship.

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