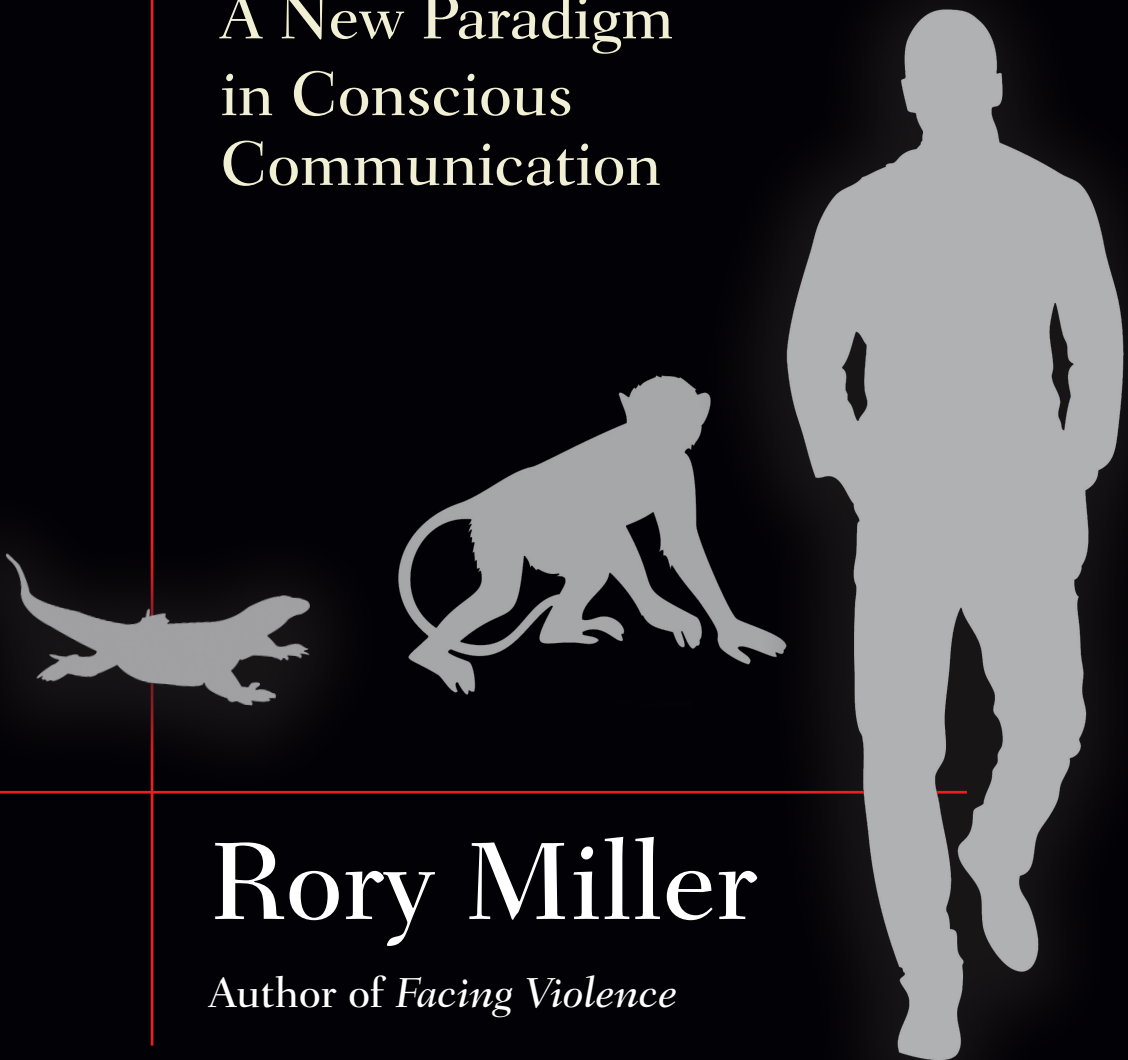


ConCom

# CONFLICT COMMUNICATION

A New Paradigm  
in Conscious  
Communication



Rory Miller

Author of *Facing Violence*

# Your reactions to conflict are subconscious, scripted, and for the good of the group.

“A set of extremely effective tools for predicting, avoiding, and managing conflicts.”  
—MAJ Gregory Postal, MD, from his foreword

“... a priceless skill ...”  
—Jack Hoban, from his foreword

“Once you recognize the pattern ... it will forever change the way you interact.”  
—Lawrence A. Kane, author

“Should be mandatory reading ...”  
—Tony Blauer, Blauer Tactical Systems

“Breaks out of the martial arts and law enforcement genre ...”  
—Jeffrey Cooper, MD

“The standard by which others [writing] on the subject shall be judged.”  
—Steve Perry, *NY Times* best-selling author

“Won’t just help your relationships, it just might save your life.”  
—Alain B. Burrese, JD

**Conflict happens everywhere:** at work, with friends and family, among strangers, and certainly in violence. Why did your boss ignore a suggestion that could save millions of dollars? Why do you have the same argument again and again with your spouse? When someone insults you, why do you get angry? Why do bad guys beat up the weak?

### You have three brains.

- Lizard brain (survival)
- Monkey brain (emotion / social status)
- Human brain (reason)

Each “brain” has a different priority and evolved to deal with different kinds of conflict. They work using different scripts and have a very clear seniority system.

**Conflict Communication (ConCom)** presents a functional taxonomy to see, understand, and manipulate the roots of life’s conflicts. You will have the background, the principles, and a collection of tricks to manage and ideally avoid dangerous conflicts.

**No going back.** After reading this book, you can never go back. Even if you reject everything in the program, even if you refuse to admit how often your monkey brain has controlled your life, escalations toward conflict will never again be invisible to you.

As the fortune cookie says, “*Your life is about to change.*”



Author photo: Kami Miller

**Rory Miller** is the author of *Meditations on Violence* and *Facing Violence*. He served for seventeen years in corrections as an officer and sergeant, working maximum security, booking, and mental health. In 2010 Rory collaborated with Marc MacYoung for a police verbal de-escalation program. That program became *ConCom*. Not just for police, *ConCom* has now been taught in eight countries and to groups ranging from police academies to hospitals and factories. Rory Miller resides in the Pacific Northwest.



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Like the Post-it<sup>®</sup> Note, *Conflict Communication* is something you never knew you needed but cannot live without. The materials are straightforward and easy to apply, yet profoundly insightful. Once you begin to recognize the patterns that Miller describes within yourself and others it will forever change the way you interact. Armed with this new information I was able to resolve a longstanding deadlock on a \$168M contract in less than two hours. It's amazingly powerful and wholeheartedly recommended.

—Lawrence Kane, leader, ITI strategy, sourcing, and asset management  
at a Fortune 50<sup>®</sup> company

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When it comes to self-defense and related topics, no text, no matter how well written, can substitute for professional hands-on instruction. These materials should be used for academic study only.

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# FOREWORD

BY MAJ GREGORY POSTAL, MD

*The first principle [of scientific inquiry] is that you must not fool yourself—and you are the easiest person to fool.*

—Richard P. Feynman,  
Nobel Prize-winning physicist

Rory Miller has devoted many years to developing and refining strategies of conflict management. Those who know him can attest to the fact that while Rory has a heart of gold, when it comes to threat assessment and management he does not gladly suffer fools and seems incapable of allowing fatally flawed methods and theories to go unchallenged. In this we agree: as both a martial arts instructor and an Army psychiatrist I am acutely aware of the crucial roles that accurate prediction and effective strategies play when dealing with potentially violent individuals. Errors in either of these practices can have grave consequences, and Rory's work has certainly improved my practice and teaching of both.

In recent years, psychiatry has made considerable strides in some areas related to violence prediction, especially on an epidemiologic (macro) level. Law enforcement is clearly aided by improved accuracy in statistical predictions of the likelihood that an individual will recidivate after release from prison, or of how much danger is posed by someone who has made threats to a public figure. Despite this, psychiatry is abysmal as a field in terms of our ability to reliably predict or preempt incipient violence by patients. This deficiency becomes all too clear when one peruses data on assaults of clinicians or hears one too many times the assertion that if you work in the field “long enough” you will inevitably be victimized. Why is it that as a field of experts on human behavior we perpetually fail to become more competent in this crucial area?

One possible explanation is that the absence of good empirical data addressing violence on a “micro” level conflicts with our desire to utilize only scientifically proven methods in our work. While it is

true that violence management is difficult to evaluate in a scientifically rigorous fashion (anyone want to volunteer to be in a placebo control group?), an insistence on relying only on data-driven methods can lead to lack of practice and trust in the skill sets we *do* have available to us. As a result, much like victims elsewhere, clinicians are often heard to say, “I should have trusted my gut” after they have been harmed. Also problematic is the lack of quality instruction on the nature of interpersonal violence, which sometimes results in a therapist continuing to try to “talk down” a patient beyond a point where there exists any reasonable chance of success. Exacerbating this trend have been various pseudoscientific programs of verbal de-escalation, which imply that resorting to physical intervention is by definition an indication of failure to comprehend or correctly implement that program’s techniques.

A more likely reason for inadequately addressing the issue is the visceral aversion most people have to imagining a violent attack directed at them. The emotion of fear has played a crucial evolutionary role but has also created a compulsive tendency to avoid situations that make us feel scared or vulnerable. Ideally, when we recognize signs of danger, we respond in ways that increase our safety, avoiding the threat or proactively taking steps to minimize the potential for harm. When perceived threats in our environment cannot be eliminated, other methods must be relied upon to manage this intolerable anxiety. Historically, magical rituals or talismans had been utilized to ward off such fears; for most of us today this process has largely been internalized, functioning on a psychological rather than societal level.

Despite the fact that one could reasonably expect behavioral scientists to be in the forefront of the effort to develop better capacities for observing, understanding, and preventing violence, we too often also cling to a talisman of sorts: the fiction that we are *already* competent at dealing with violence. We know intuitively that were we to undertake a critical evaluation of how well our training has prepared us to address threats of violence, we would reveal dramatic deficiencies, bringing back full force that same sense of powerlessness and vulnerability. Is it any wonder, then, that so many of us avoid grappling with this issue?



In addition to the psychic distress resulting from becoming seriously disillusioned with a discipline to which one has devoted years, another disincentive is what Rory might term a “monkey fear”: openly questioning whether your training has appropriately prepared you to manage violence will likely result in indifference from peers (at best) and condemnation from an organizational hierarchy that perceives a threat to the status quo. From the perspective of your supervisors, raising these issues not only impugns their expertise, it threatens to undermine their own sense of security on this issue. They may *initially* endeavor to explain to you how your anxiety about the threat of violence results from a lack of understanding, experience, self-confidence, etc., but should you persist in this questioning, you may quickly find you are becoming a pariah.

So how does all of this relate to this book (and to Rory’s work in general)? While certainly based in science, what he presents here isn’t *provable* in a strictly empirical sense. Furthermore, it would make a poor substitute “talisman of invulnerability,” since that kind of absolute certainty in the face of a real threat is to a large degree what the ideas Rory presents here are designed to combat.

If, however, you are able and willing to tolerate the ambiguity (and vulnerability) inherent in any true threat assessment process *and* you can briefly set aside what you are sure you “know” about conflict, you can use this information to dramatically improve the likelihood you will avoid becoming a victim. When someone develops a scientifically proven and verifiable system, I will be first in line to sign up. For now, the closest we can come is what Rory presents here: a set of extremely effective tools for predicting, avoiding, and managing conflicts.

MAJ Gregory Postal, MD  
*Psychiatrist, Walter Reed Medical Center*



# FOREWORD

*By Jack Hoban*

Students of Japanese martial arts may be familiar with a formulation called *san-mitsu* (three mysteries), which is thought to be the path to enlightenment. In English, *san-mitsu* can be translated as “thought, word, and deed.” And although it is believed that the three mysteries originated from Tibetan Buddhism, the concept is common to many spiritual philosophies, from Catholicism (“I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do . . .”) to New Age-ism.

But my interest is martial arts, and we see the *san-mitsu* as the key to enlightened preservation of life. If you are reading this book, you may also be interested in protecting life—or at least in the art of resolving dangerous, and perhaps physical, conflict. We all may have thoughts on how to resolve conflict, and there are uncountable techniques pertaining to stopping (or winning or avoiding) a physical confrontation. But it may be the most underutilized of the three mysteries—words—that are the best tools for effective conflict communications. And that is why Rory Miller’s new book, *Conflict Communication*, is so important. For herein are words you can use to resolve conflict.

Mr. Miller is well experienced when it comes to conflict—physical, verbal, and psychological. Rory is a seventeen-year veteran of a metropolitan correctional system. He spent eleven years as a CERT (Corrections Emergency Response Team) member. He has seen and dealt directly with more than his share of physical conflict. But it is his skill in verbal conflict resolution, highlighted in this book, that makes his lessons valuable for all of us—whether we are in one of the protector professions or dealing with the day-to-day verbal conflicts we encounter on the street, in business, with friends and family, with anyone.

Take Rory's characterization of the three aspects of the human brain: the lizard, the monkey, and the human. The lizard is inflexible and hardwired for survival; the monkey is all about the emotions. It is only when we use our human brains that we become optimal problem solvers and conflict resolvers. We need to know why this is so, and Rory explains why. And, when we are under extreme duress or emotionally agitated, we need to know how to trump the lizard and the monkey and use our human brains. Rory teaches us how. Finally, and of surprising importance, we need to know what our human brains can have us say that is proven to be effective in conflict situations. Rory teaches us the words that work—and warns us about the ones that don't. This why, how, and what of conflict communications are worth their weight in gold. They have been field tested in some very difficult environments, but they will work in virtually any kind of conflict. In other words, this book is for everyone; this book is for you and me.

Rory's material is important because it works, but there is even more to it than that. It is not enough just to say the right thing. Rory's approach is ethical—respectful of yourself and the lives of others, all others. When we speak calmly and respectfully, from our human brains, we do the right thing. Sometimes conflict is just a difference of opinion, and the respectful thing may be to just agree to disagree. But, in the real world, everybody isn't always right; in conflict situations there is often a party who is, well, wrong. But, even though the expert conflict communicator may have to correct immoral or illegal behavior, he or she shows respect for the lives of all others—through thought, word, and deed. The ability to deal with someone who is acting immorally or illegally—without disrespecting or “othering” that person—is a priceless skill that is available to you through reading this book. It is the key to being an adept problem resolver—and an ethical protector, for that matter.

Jack Hoban

*President of Resolution Group International, subject matter expert for the US Marine Corps Martial Arts Program, and author of The Ethical Warrior*

## INTRODUCTION

How often have you found yourself in an argument with your wife, husband, or significant other and thought, “Here we go again”?

Have you ever found the answer to a real problem and had it ignored while the person you are trying to help wastes time and energy picking at you, trying to create a personal problem from a good thing?

Have you ever felt singled out and almost victimized for doing too well at a job?

The things that feel very personal are often impersonal. In the pages that follow, I’ll do my best to explain the mechanisms that underlie so much of human conflict. I will try to give you tools so that you can see what is happening and choose another way. Most important of all, this book will help you avoid getting caught in the traps yourself. The two people who developed this program, Marc MacYoung and I, are not academics. We are not scientists. Between us, we have one undergraduate degree. But we do have extensive experience with conflict. Both of us have written well-received books on the subjects of violence and conflict, and both support families largely by teaching the nuances of physical conflict.

Strangely, working with violent, dangerous people is not that different from working with run-of-the-mill angry, annoyed, or selfish people. The difference is that the time compression (a violent person can set you up and execute his plan in seconds; a jealous coworker can work on his gossip campaign for weeks) can make the pattern easier to see. And the stakes, of course, make an incredible incentive to get good at talking things down. If talking fails, someone is going to bleed.

We both had track records for being skilled at talking people down. The question was whether it could be taught. That question got us looking at our successes and mistakes to find the underlying principles. The result of that quest was the original Conflict

Communications course, and this book.

The thing about a really good idea, a principle, is that it applies almost everywhere. As we worked out what was important and what had worked in the past, our students noticed that it didn't just apply to criminals and cops. The feedback for the first few classes made it clear: "Sure, this should work on the street, but you guys just explained my boss!"

Let me repeat something: we aren't scientists. Furthermore, there is very little good science in the study of conflict. Science, real science, isn't based on models or correlations, statistics or theories. It is based on experimental evidence—and no university ethics committee will ever approve an experiment that gets to the heart of fear, danger, and conflict. Not even at the emotional level that most people experience in day-to-day life.

Because we aren't scientists or theorists we don't want to present this as a theory. It is simply a model. There are theories presented in the book, some generally accepted, but none are true. No theory or model has a one-to-one correlation with the world. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a powerful model for understanding conflict but has gaping holes as a theory.

Same with the overall theme of this work. Everything in here was back-engineered. What worked? Why did it work? *No idea*. Then think it through. What did the things that work have in common? *Oh, that reminds me of a theory from college; let me look it up. It worked*. It worked before it was ever a system. And it would continue to work as a model even if the underlying theories proved false. The only difference would be not knowing *why* it worked—and there is no guarantee that we know the real "why" now.

Most of what follows will be intuitively obvious. In a very real way, it is like teaching fish about water. Fish live in water. It affects everything the fish do—but it is invisible, and so whether the currents help or hinder swimming is largely a matter of chance. If the fish can be taught to see the water, they can use the most powerful element in their lives.

# SECTION 1 BACKGROUND

It is easy to know things. If *Conflict Communications* were just a collection of tricks to memorize and use, we would need only section 3.

My experience is that *knowing* something is almost useless under stress, but *understanding* is often helpful. So section 1 is designed to give you the background, the concepts that underlie the program. If you understand the concepts and the principles (section 2), you can improvise under pressure—and the ability to improvise is probably the most valuable tool in dealing with conflict.

## Section 1.1 Sex and Violence

There is a parallel between violence and conflict today and sex in the 1950s. In the 1950s polite people didn't talk about sex. Teachers did not discuss it in schools. No matter their private feelings on the subject, sex was denigrated as “dirty” and something that children should be kept ignorant of.

Today, despite the ritualized violence endemic to entertainment, children are not taught about conflict and certainly not taught about violence. They are told it is bad. How bad? So bad that under many grade-school zero-tolerance policies, even the victim of an assault is suspended. How does this differ from the treatment of a rape victim under Sharia law?

The extent of most of our education on the subject of conflict can be summed up in the single word: abstinence.

Does that work any better for violence than it does to limit teen sex? Understand that both sex and violence *will* happen. In what universe is ignorance of a problem an effective strategy?

This modern taboo has profound implications for managing conflict. The most profound is that it is difficult to solve a problem you are almost entirely ignorant about. You cannot work for peace while ignoring violence any more than a doctor can create treatments while refusing to study disease.

Another effect is that mediators and conflict professionals often bring profoundly unrealistic expectations to a problem. To think that

there is always a reasonable solution is itself unreasonable. To imagine that there is always a win-win solution is to ignore the fact that for some people humiliating the victim (or watching the victim bleed) is part of the win.

By placing conflict into the realm of subjects that people don't talk about, ignorance and misinformation spread. The people who do experience violence and are willing to talk about it are marginalized, actively shunned. The tragedy of this taboo, like any other, is that it prevents the spread of information.

Freud postulated a three-level mind.

The id, he said, includes your fears and desires, your uncontrolled aggressions, your lusts and animal self.

The superego is, for want of a better word, your conscience. It is an amalgamation of everything you have been taught about how you *should* behave: what things are right, and what things are wrong.

The ego maintains a balancing act between the two. It is sweet reason. The "ego" is who you are.

That's what Freud thought.

Modern research blows much of this out of the water. The reasoning voice in your head, the thoughts you are aware of, is not *you*. You see things and make decisions, even complex decisions, very quickly. The reasoning mind plays catch-up. Your conscious thoughts are like the words on a computer screen. They are only indicators of what the machine is doing.

Freud got something right in all this, however. Sex and aggression may not be the most powerful drives in the human mind, but they are the two areas where what we have been taught and what we feel come into powerful conflict. How you resolve the emotions you feel with what you have been taught about right and wrong (or justice and vengeance) greatly shapes your personality. How you control or fail to control your desires is a big piece of who you are.

Very little of this is conscious.



What follows will include a lot of information about violence and conflict. Some of it will seem pretty academic. That's OK. The information is coming to you through the written word and will have to filter through your brain first.

That's only *OK*. It's not *good*. Just like sex, conflict is a thing of emotion. It is something that your gut already believes it understands. Conflict, and especially the higher level of violence, is very much a thing of emotions and feelings, of contact and connections. It is tactile and auditory, and olfactory—something you feel, hear, and smell as much as see.

So maybe, like sex, reading about conflict isn't the optimal way to get skilled at it. The optimal way, unfortunately, is to get involved in a lot of conflict and be lucky enough to survive, physically and emotionally, and then figure out what worked.

When we do sound academic, the science isn't that important. The concepts are important and you need to understand them. You need to understand them the way that you understand any other tool. This book isn't meant to be an exploration of theory. It is meant to be used.

Is violence bad? Is conflict bad? Are these questions even reasonable to you, or do they immediately provoke a response? *Of course* conflict is bad. *Of course* violence is bad. If those words sprang immediately to your mind, the very speed implies that they are emotional, not thoughtful reactions. They are things you have been conditioned to believe, just as sex was “dirty” sixty years ago—*of course*.

## Section 1.2 Why and Wherefore—Maslow

In 1943, Abraham Maslow published his famous hierarchy of needs.



**Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

The idea is simple. If you are in danger of dying—starving, thirsty, sick, or about to be killed and eaten—that is your highest priority. Until you have taken care of your immediate survival needs, you don't care about and you don't waste resources on anything else.

Once your immediate physical needs are taken care of, you can start thinking about your physical security. How do you arrange to have food and water tomorrow and next week? How do you get shelter to protect you from the elements and from predators?

The next stage is the awkwardly titled “belongingness” need. Humans in the wild are poorly adapted to live alone. Providing all of the physical security needs is easier with a group, with tasks divided among several people. This is compounded by the fact that human children cannot survive alone. We are born into a family group of some sort and spend the rest of our lives in groups. Not only are few humans fit to survive alone, most can't even truly imagine being alone for any length of time. I can guarantee you that the most profound introvert you know reads or listens to music every day. Just because someone has trouble with the stress of interaction does not mean that

## SECTION 2      FUNDAMENTALS

Your natural responses to conflict are subconscious, scripted, and for the good of the group.

They do not serve you. They do not serve the task or the job.

They do follow predictable patterns. For the most part, these patterns are invisible. You do not see the game you are playing any more than a fish sees the water it swims in. Seeing the invisible, and teaching others to see it, may seem difficult. It isn't. There is nothing new in this book. Even if you have never consciously seen this process, you have lived it. Just as the hum of your refrigerator doesn't keep you awake at night, you are not aware of something so constant.

One example: Every long-term couple I know has at least one, and usually several, arguments they have word for word, periodically. We know these arguments are subconscious. No one turns to his wife and says, "Honey, let's have that argument we have every other week. You know, argument 2B, the one about rinsing the dishes." No one chooses these: *Subconscious*.

We know they are scripted for a couple of reasons. Primarily, every so often you become conscious enough to recognize the argument. You know exactly what you are going to say and exactly how your significant other is going to respond. But have you ever tried to just walk away? It is almost as if something pulls you back in, compels you to finish the script: *Scripted*.

What took us forever to figure out: *Who is this making happy?* A simple flatworm, which doesn't have a brain to speak of, will move away from pain. If this argument annoys us, why does it perpetuate? It's not making you happy. It's not making your spouse happy. *So, why?*

To your human brain, this repeating argument is an unresolved issue. But to your monkey brain, it is the signifier of stability. Stability is desired by your limbic system far more than happiness. If you have been having the same argument every week for five years, your monkey knows the relationship is stable. Even the bad things don't change. You may be unhappy, but the tribe is safe.

Your reactions to conflict are *subconscious, scripted, and for the good of the group*.

## **Section 2.1 Responses to Conflict Are Subconscious**

In a way, this statement isn't fair. Most of our thoughts, reactions, and even beliefs are not conscious. They are not decisions, or even things we know.

The words in our heads are our conscious thoughts. These are the thoughts we are aware of. There is much more going on in our brains. There always has been and always will be. I equate the words in my head to the words on a computer screen—just a very tiny picture of many deeper things that are going on.

Someone insults you and you get angry. What just happened? Insults are things that make us angry or ashamed or defensive. That pretty much defines an insult. Which came first? Did the words used hurt my feelings? Or did the words become an insult because of my feelings? Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

That's not the important part. The important part is that nowhere in the process did your conscious mind come into play. Nothing was a decision. He said the words. You did not then think, "He said this, which implies that, which might cause me some problem if I did not respond with enough emotion." He said the words; you felt the emotion. Likely, you acted on the emotion or at least showed your feelings well before you thought.

In emotion this is somewhat easy to see. We also subconsciously react to other things, sometimes elaborately, without thinking about them. We will talk about scripts later, but they make a good example here:

The broken record: In any long-term relationship—work, parent/child, or spouse—the pair falls into disputes that are nearly the same word for word each time:

"Clean your room."

"Mom, I can't. I have homework!"

"Why didn't you do your homework yesterday? You had all

weekend.”

“I was busy yesterday.”

“You spent the whole day on the phone. Clean your room!”

“But Mom . . .”

“I’m tired of hearing the same old excuses.”

Or:

“Wilkes, I need the Fischer file.”

“I’m on it.”

“You always say you’re on it. When will it be done?”

“Just a few, Chief.”

“A few what? Jesus! You’re like talking to my five-year-old.”

“I never get tired of hearing that, Chief.”

Or the cop classic, after patting down someone and finding a 35mm canister of meth in his pocket:

“Mind telling me what this is?”

“I don’t know, Officer.”

“It was in your pocket.”

“These aren’t my pants, Officer.”

These are all complex interactions. They are conversations, and they happen in words. You know how they start and you know how they end. You know them word for word, by heart.

So tell me: if you are having the same argument in the exact same words with your wife or teenager or employee every week, how’s that working? It’s not working and you would know it’s not working if you gave it a half second of thought.

But you do it anyway. The only explanation is that you didn’t even give it a half second of thought. Going into the script was automatic.

*Your responses to conflict are subconscious.*

## **Section 2.2 Your Responses to Conflict Are Scripted**

Those were some examples of scripting in day-to-day, low-level friction, but the scripts go deeper.

In my book *Meditations on Violence*, I described the monkey dance. Animal species have ritualistic dominance behavior to establish territory or status between males. It is ritualistic, stylized, and designed to limit injury to the participants.

The human equivalent is the monkey dance. It is not just the fistfight you might imagine, but all of the steps leading up to the fight.

It begins with a hard stare, which is followed by a verbal challenge (often, “What are you lookin’ at?”). The verbal back and forth can go on for some time, or the ritual can be ended with an apology and submissive body language.

If the dance is not ended, one or both of the participants will close the distance. It is completely subconscious, but most will “puff up,” trying to look bigger, spreading their chest muscles and coming up on their toes. Sometimes they bob up and down like roosters. The verbal interplay continues.

Once they have closed distance, an apology still works. If one backs down, then dominance is established and the monkey dance is over. What both parties are actually hoping for is that friends will intervene and pull them apart. If that happens, dominance isn’t established per se, but both have established their willingness to defend status and territory. They can then coexist in the same space with mutual respect.

If they are not separated and neither backs down, the next stage is contact. It will usually be a two-handed push to the chest or an index finger poke to the chest. In some cultures you knock the hat off. In almost any culture, if the contact is poking his nose with your index finger, the fight is on.

The next step is the fight, but it isn’t a very skilled fight. It is usually a series of looping punches aimed at the top and side of the head—exactly the kind of thing more likely to damage the hand of the person punching than the person being punched.

There are also many strategies for circumventing the script, but that concept comes later.

One of the keys to understanding that this is a script is that even

## SECTION 3 TACTICS, TOOLS, TECHNIQUES

The preceding section describes what you need to know to recognize a script and choose your response. None of the material was new to you, because you have lived this process every day of your life. By making it conscious, hopefully you can now practice and develop skill.

Seeing the trap from the inside is the hardest part, but the skill improves quickly with practice.

Section 3 introduces some specific skills, both basic and advanced, that can help you manage conflict. Unlike the fundamentals, though, this is a collection of tricks. There is no direct underlying theme. This means you will have to learn and practice each of these tricks to become proficient.

### **Section 3.1 Coordinating Your Own Mind**

Throughout the book, we have described the lizard brain as something that rarely comes to the surface, an aspect of our own personality that we know little about. That is only partially true.

The lizard rarely takes control. Only in circumstances of extreme danger does the lizard manifest and decide what you will do. But even when it is not acting, the lizard is always watching and listening.

When you get a strange feeling, that is the lizard noticing some detail and sending a message. The lizard constantly compares what it senses with your personal history. That person walks like an old enemy; be afraid. This person reminds you of your first good friend; be trusting.

We get these feelings. Many we dismiss. Some come into conflict with the monkey brain, which is more effectively emotional. Unless the lizard is triggered to the point that it takes over, the monkey often wins.

That probably sounds obscure, but concrete examples are rampant. The lizard sends a signal—duck! Or run! And the monkey

says, “That might make me look silly. Let’s look around first. I don’t want people thinking I’m a chicken.”

You get a bad feeling about an acquaintance or a business deal or even going for a drive and dismiss it: “It’s probably nothing.” Sometimes you regret the decision later.

You must understand that these hunches do not just appear out of thin air, nor are they products of the imagination. One of the weaknesses of the lizard brain is a complete lack of imagination.

The articulation exercise is a simple, effective way to bring your lizard (the part of your mind that notices details like an alert animal) and the human (which, it is hoped, makes the decisions) into a tight working relationship.

Next time you get a hunch or a feeling, take the time to figure it out. When you got a feeling a car was going to cut in front of you, was it because of a little “intention swerve” toward the line and away? Something about the flow of traffic and the speed that made it look like the car was reaching for a gap? Or simply that the anonymity of tinted windows makes some people feel safer to be rude drivers?

When you feel an argument about to start in a restaurant, review the body language and pattern of sound and silence for the clue that triggered the intuition. You don’t need to hear the words or even understand the language in many cases, and your lizard brain knows this.

The articulation exercise really accomplishes two things. As your human and even your monkey brains learn these intuitions are based on concrete things, they trust them more.

As the intuition learns it will be trusted, it sends more signals. Trust between consciousness and the subconscious increases.

The benefits are intense. You start making better decisions faster. You see openings, opportunities, and dangers that others miss. Your confidence in taking risks increases because you trust your lizard to warn you of hidden dangers.

This is an important drill when I teach police officers. They are often required to make split-second decisions about whether to use force and how much. They almost never have enough conscious information to be sure, but the job requires that they act anyway.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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