

Stories We Tell Ourselves

Shannon Lynn Burton, Ph.D., Gamma Xi Chapter (Grand Valley State University)
Associate University Ombudsperson

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THE ANCHOR



FALL 2016



Successful, supportive, and productive conversations are not always easy. In fact, often we may find ourselves in interactions that are downright challenging. Conflict is something that we are exposed to on a daily basis, whether viewed on the morning news, read in a viral social media post, or heard from the irritated customer in front of you at Starbucks.

While it takes two to tango, a big part of successfully dealing with conflict starts with simply reframing how we talk to *ourselves*. So how do we accomplish that?

Shannon Lynn Burton has some thoughts on the matter. As the Associate University Ombudsperson at Michigan State University, she is well-versed in healthy conflict management. When a dispute arises between a student and the university or faculty member, Shannon's goal is to help both sides work through issues to reach a successful resolution. Shannon is also a mother of three who volunteers as PTO president, community track coach, and as a coach for Odyssey of the Mind, the international problem-solving competition.

"The key is to look at the situation as objectively and neutrally as possible," she says. "To begin, try and gain an understanding of your own biases. We all have preconceived notions of a situation. These are often based on how our own lives have been managed or how we think things should progress."

Not only do our preconceived notions alter the story we tell ourselves during a disagreement, but our emotions can become an obstacle as well. Shannon draws from her own experience working with students. "Sometimes it can be hard for them to see the other person's side," she explains. "I think we can get so emotionally connected and blinded by the fact that we think we've been wronged, it becomes difficult to separate and look at a situation more objectively."

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