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## Catalyst for Resolution

Once described by a colleague as 'getting great results but leaving unacceptable collateral damage', I have experience as both the perpetrator as well as a resolver of conflicts in the workplace. I can relate to the entire cast in an office drama, not just the hero.

Casting a backward glance from the hilltop of middle age, I could choose to believe that my working life has followed an inevitable path, each staging post along the way a natural precursor to my work with *ConflictBox*. In truth, I lurched from one misadventure to the next, learning the same lessons repeatedly: that we become entrenched in our positions, get stuck and often cannot find reverse gear. When this happens it requires a catalyst to unlock the jammed mechanism.

I have been that catalyst in both military and corporate contexts, navigating situations as extreme as war, terror attack, kidnap, piracy and extortion and I have learned some crucial lessons for the work I do in business today. I find the battlefield not so very different to the boardroom.

In Bosnia we were tasked with de-conflicting both coalition and enemy troops, aid agencies and journalists. Consensus was impossible and objectives could be achieved only by taking executive decisions and imposing control. That we were able to do so under pressure and at odds with each other's egos was testament to the healthy and fluent way we embraced conflict. I would later discover how rare it was to find this esprit de corps in business.

Some conflicts are so entrenched that there can be no immediate resolution. Clearing landmines and unexploded bombs in post-Soviet Afghanistan and Angola was easy compared to de-escalating lethal situations caused by tensions between key stakeholders in those countries. I had to de-escalate conflict before I could begin the work of synthesising positions and finding a way forward. There were no binary answers and I learned that we move forward only when all parties get enough of what they need.

Whether I'm trying to broker a compromise between ruthless South African diamond miners and equally ruthless Angolan troops, or leading crisis teams in the wake of the cyber-attacks, it all comes down to the same basic principle: we should not fear conflict, we should embrace it. Creative consensus can be forged in the furnace of disagreement. Conflict can be dynamic, but first we must free ourselves from deadlock.

It is at this crisis point that a catalyst for meaningful change is required. I am proud to say that *ConflictBox*, the synthesis of a lifetime's experience and learning, is it.

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