

Leading Through Conflict: Coaches' Handout

Austria 2026 · Kyle Pappas · Empire Athletics International

Participant handout

Lead through conflict with four pillars (reframe the other person, manage yourself, go early, bring conclusion), all standing on one foundation: authenticity. In a conflict you can see coming, start with Pillar 1. In one that catches you off guard, pick up at Pillar 2.

The four pillars and the foundation

Pillar	In a line	Principle	Try this
1. Reframe the Other Person	Shared vision is shared purpose.	Not an enemy. A teammate not sharing in the vision.	The other person wants what you want: to thrive in this environment.
2. Manage Yourself	Regulate first, listen second.	"Seek first to understand, then to be understood." (Covey)	Pause. Breathe. It's not personal.
3. Go Early	Be proactive, not reactive. First is always best.	Tension grows while you wait. The earliest moment is the easiest one.	Setting a future time and place is productive in itself.
4. Bring Conclusion	Find the win.	Find resolution, not just a solution.	Align stakeholders before you deliver the decision.
Foundation: Authenticity	Say what's really going on.	Trust is built on what you're willing to say out loud.	Would I want the truth or not, and how would I want to be told?

Fill the shared pool (Pillar 2). People with different information reach different conclusions, and each side's logic looks unreasonable to the other. Before you debate, get everyone working from the same facts: verify what you think you know, and learn what you don't. (Ladder of Inference, Argyris and Schön)

Prepare on paper first (Pillar 1)

1. **Organize your frustrations:** sketch out the issues as you see them, sort them into categories and look for patterns of behavior.
2. **Role-play the conversation:** rehearse how it could go and plan your responses to each area.
3. **Plan for any outcome:** be ready for anything. Forewarned is forearmed.

Stay flexible: your notes are a starting point, not a verdict. Listen first, then adjust.

When emotions run high (Pillar 2)

- **Notice the signs:** voice rising, jaw tight, chin up, eyes wide, arms crossed.
- **Check your body language:** people often reflect what they are seeing.
- **Name it:** “I’m getting frustrated,” or “There seems to be some frustration mounting.”
- **Press pause when** either of you is too heated to listen, you’re about to say something you can’t take back, you’re missing facts, or it’s happening in public.
- **Say:** “Let’s just take a moment. We are all on the same team here.”
- **Pause well:** say why, refrain from assigning blame, and designate a return time.

Five conflict styles: each has a time and place

Style	When it fits	In the gym
Competing	Safety, or non-negotiables	“No spotter, no stunt.” End of discussion.
Collaborating	High stakes, and you need buy-in	Writing the team code with your captains, or goal setting
Compromising	Two fair needs, limited resources	Splitting mat time between two teams
Avoiding	Emotions too high in the moment	Work colleague tension: set a call for tomorrow
Accommodating	Pick your battles, or correcting course	Unimportant and non-priority items

Any style used out of habit instead of choice becomes the problem.

Observer checklist

Tick what you saw, then give the coach one thing that went well before one thing to try differently.

Did the coach...

- ☐ Listen before responding?
- ☐ Ask open questions?
- ☐ Reflect back what they heard?
- ☐ Keep it about the problem, not the person?
- ☐ Stay honest about their own reasons?
- ☐ Pause well if emotions rose?
- ☐ End with an agreed next step?
- ☐ Choose a style that fit?

Did the hidden detail come out? If yes, what question unlocked it?