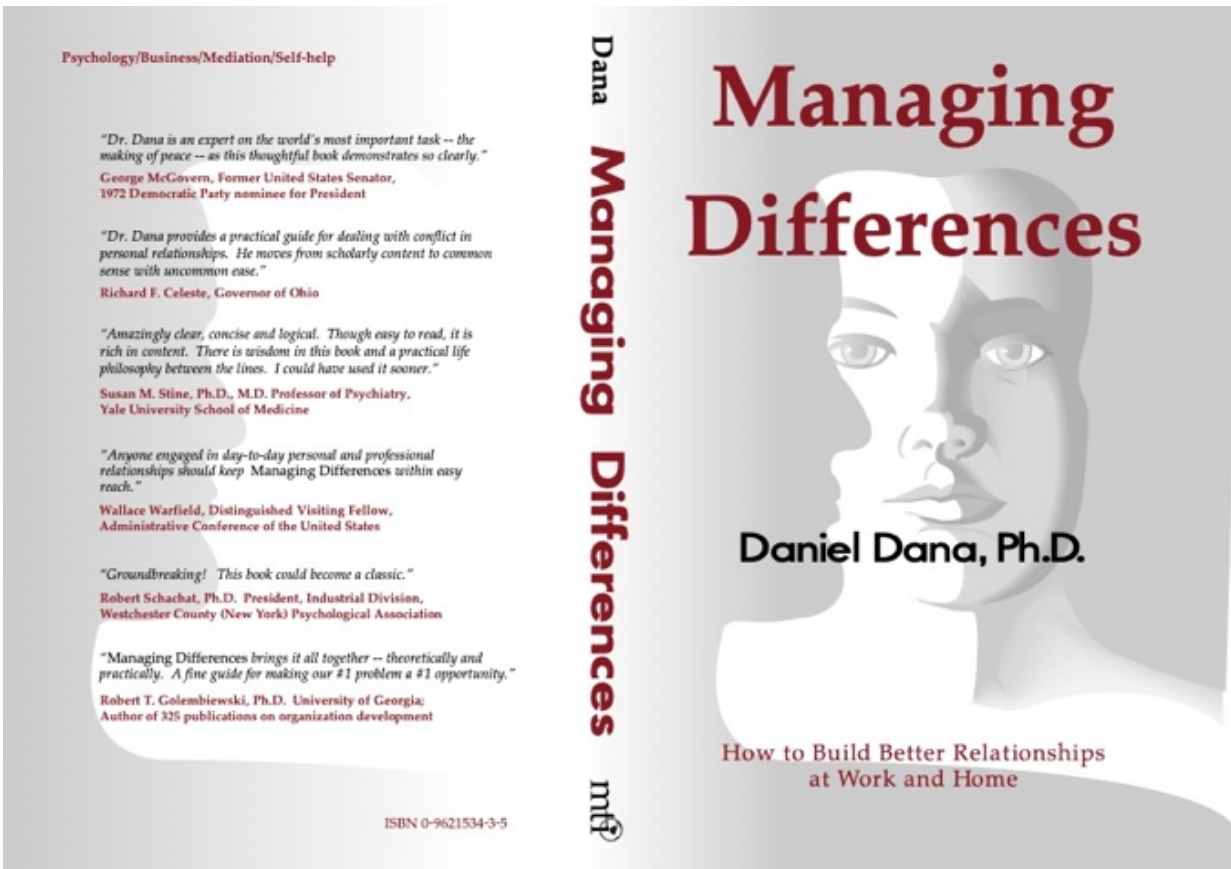


Summary*



Original 1989 cover

Managing Differences: How to Build Better Relationships at Work and Home is a practical guide to a four-step communication method called Self Mediation, which the author presents as a general-purpose tool for resolving everyday interpersonal conflict without professional intervention. First published in 1989 and revised across several editions, with translations into half a dozen languages and use as a corporate and academic training text, the book argues that most destructive conflict stems not from personality flaws but from two universal, evolutionarily inherited "Wrong Reflexes" — Distancing ("Walk-aways") and Coercion ("Power-plays") — that once aided survival on the prehistoric savanna but now sabotage the long-term, interdependent relationships of modern work and family life, where neither fleeing nor fighting is a viable option.

The book begins by establishing the scope of the problem, citing job terminations, divorces, and the substantial financial costs of unmanaged workplace conflict — including a detailed worksheet for calculating losses from wasted time, poor decisions, employee turnover, restructuring, and sabotage. It introduces the "Both-Gain" concept as an alternative to win-lose thinking, and names several psychological obstacles, including the Win-Lose Illusion, the Bad Person Illusion, and the Boulder-in-the-Road Illusion, that keep people locked into destructive

patterns. It then distinguishes three escalating levels of conflict — Blips, Clashes, and Crises — illustrated with parallel workplace and family examples, and notes that Self Mediation is designed specifically for the middle tier, everyday friction in otherwise sound relationships, rather than passing annoyances (best handled through small conciliatory "gift exchanges") or relationship-threatening emergencies requiring counselors or professional mediators.

A large portion of the book is devoted to walking through the four steps of Self Mediation in granular, scripted detail: finding a time to talk (approaching the Other, stating the issue neutrally, making the request, and "selling" it if met with resistance), planning a neutral context free of interruptions and "land mines," conducting a structured Dialogue governed by two Cardinal Rules that forbid walking away or using coercive pressure, and finally making a deal that is balanced, behaviorally specific, and written down. Within the Dialogue, the author identifies specific tasks — staying engaged in what he calls the "Essential Process" and actively supporting any conciliatory gestures the Other offers — as the mechanism that produces a "Breakthrough," a shift from adversarial to cooperative footing. He stresses that resolution is often nonrational, arising from sustained emotional contact and trust-building rather than logical argument, and that lasting change comes from repeated practice across many conversations rather than a single conversation solving everything at once.

The book then turns to the method's limitations, cautioning that it cannot cure conflict altogether, that overburdened relationships have finite capacity, and that selective perception distorts how partners interpret each other's intentions, before extending the same four steps into "Simple Mediation," a role a neutral third party, manager, or team leader can play to help two other people resolve their dispute. This section discusses the "active-passive" debate among professional mediators, argues that passive mediation works best in simple two-person structures, and details specific functions a mediator performs, such as securing participation, enforcing the Cardinal Rules, noticing and supporting conciliatory gestures, and following up afterward, along with the case for "Managerial Mediation" as a cost-effective workplace skill. A further section grounds the method in behavioral science, explaining "mental maps," the retaliatory cycle, confrontation and conciliation phases, and the psychological forces that turn confrontation into cooperation.

The book closes with "Common Courtesy," proposing that internalizing the Cardinal Rules as everyday habits — rather than reserving them for formal Dialogues — can gradually make destructive conflict a rarity in one's ongoing relationships.

*Summary created by perplexity.ai