

Book Review of *Before Conflict: Preventing Aggressive Behavior* by John D. Byrnes.

Reviewer: **William Cottringer, Ph.D.**

Before Conflict starts out with a powerful, attention-getting *Foreword* by Pulitzer Prize-nominated author Dave Grossman. The book then delivers on its promise with practical content that clearly identifies the common errors in dealing with the present epidemic of violent behavior, followed by an abundance of sound solutions that get results at the core of the problem.

Dr. Byrnes' literary contribution to dealing with our most urgent social problem is an absolute must addition to any security, government, school or business professional's library. In fact it should be read by *anyone* who is concerned about the escalating menace of violence and who wants to do something to stop it.

The author aptly exposes the typical folly of over-focusing on the tip of the violence iceberg and the common after-the-fact over-reaction that general follows. Dr. Byrnes makes a compelling case to look deeper at the real problem—aggression—on a continuum from alpha to omega. The only question readers should have is why has it taken us so long to wake up and make this critical paradigm shift?

All readers will likely find chapters four through seven—various persuasion strategies—loaded with useful information they can apply right away to better understand and become more proactive in preventing potentially harmful aggression in others. Perhaps we all need to heed Dr. Byrnes' admonition to move from being part of the problem to becoming part of the solution.

An extremely valuable part of *Before Conflict* deals with the five perceptual filters that influence everything we think about or do. Becoming more in tune with noticing the beginning stages of aggression that may be symptomatic of potential violence, requires the powerful skill of empathy. We must get past our own distorted viewpoints to see what is really going on with another person while something can still be done to prevent further harm. In some cases our own misperceptions may be aggravating a situation.

Interestingly, this important insight about empathy runs parallel to current innovative brain research which is attempting to discover biochemical reasons why it takes us so long to become aware of unconscious instincts to avoid danger (or spot opportunity).

The only shortcoming with *Before Conflict* is the brief bibliography, given the wealth of both historic and new information on aggression management. For instance, the pioneering work on workplace violence by Dennis Johnson, Ph.D. should have been included. Also, sections on suggested reading and a resource guide would have been helpful.

However, Dr. Byrnes more than makes up for this minor fault with his value-added, informative 26-page *Glossary* which is packed with meaningful explanations for a litany of practical strategies for dealing with beginning and escalating aggression. Readers will enjoy the colorfully descriptive concepts, including *proxemis*, *strip phasing* and *instinctive gesticulation*.

If your budget only allows five books this year, make *Before Conflict* one of them. A full five stars from this reviewer.

William Cottringer, Ph.D. is a retired prison warden and now a security consultant, expert witness and security management instructor. Dr. Cottringer is a frequent contributor to *Security Management* and is the author of the best-selling book *You Can have Your Cheese & Eat It Too*. He was a pioneer in the development of therapeutic anger management strategies in the early seventies.