

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

DEALING WITH CONFLICT

Serving Atchison, Gentry, Holt,
Nodaway, and Worth Counties

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This *Special Edition* of the Community Development Newsletter is devoted to the topic of conflict.

- **Conflict is inevitable.**
- **Conflict can be healthy.**
- **Conflicting viewpoints may be generational in origin.**
- **Conflict is "wrapped in many different package styles."**
- **Defensive communication has many facets and may be expressed as "It's my way or the highway."**
- **Conflict happens when a "trigger point" has been touched..**

MEANINGFUL OR DESTRUCTIVE CONFLICT?

Are you comfortable standing up for your beliefs and values? Tension can become unhealthy in organizational behaviors. How does this happen?

Criticism given to fellow workers can be in the form of "digs" or putdowns. Others will often criticize how a process is being implemented or handed down. Whenever e-mail wars begin, leadership often learns too late that the atmosphere has been infected with negativity.

Skillfully listening to others can provide meaningful insights into beliefs and how desired results are communicated. When "team players" are pushed by a negative agenda in the workplace, it is often very difficult to remember the times when problem solving worked at its best.

The organization's staff must be committed to common goals and finding the best idea and the best solution rather than what will benefit personal interest.



Look for signs that a conflict is getting out of hand.

Negativity in the organization often begins by finger pointing or placing blame on some one instead of working to a committed response.

Successful leaders often sit down with co-workers and identify positive discussion strategies that would allow the group to begin constructive conflict discussion and debate.

Conflict is usually uncomfortable. Knowing how to raise difficult issues and

have meaningful discussion often relieves certain tensions within the group. However, there are some who seem unwilling or lack the skills to participate in constructive discussions. In such cases, conflict often becomes more difficult to manage.

Effectively managed conflict does have a healthy impact. Knowing how to "frame the issues" and become inclusive in seeking individual responses during discussions are effective tools.

TIPS FOR HAVING HEALTHY CONFLICT

Setting clear organizational expectations should be done with others in a non-threatening manner. As has often been said, "winning in the short-run, often leads to long-term negative consequences.

To reduce conflict, provide

descriptive feedback with problem-solving purposes rather than attacking an idea.

Effective listening cannot be assumed. Grasp the non-verbal communication that constitutes up to ninety-three percent of all messages received from others.

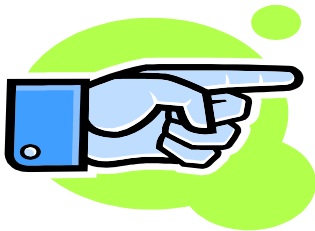
Ask questions of others rather than making statements. Vague messaging can result in taking a negative approach to issues. Conflict does not have to be painful. When viewed as an opportunity, conflict can be beneficial.

Conflict can be real or imagined!

The emotional reactions during conflict include anger, fear, surprise, disgust, sadness, and happiness.

Conflict may involve contrary attitudes, temporary or sustained hostility, new information, assumptions and conclusions.

People in conflict may view opposing parties as having low credibility.



Those in conflict often blame others for not supporting the agreed-upon goals.

WORKPLACE POLITICS CAN BECOME A “SPORT”

Visualizing what can happen in the workplace is often forgotten when the office is running smoothly. Yet, conflict happens every day.

Regardless of how the conflict appears, involves itself, etc., the adage, “To thine own self, be true,” applies.



There are times when...

There is a saying among real estate professionals, “Location, location, location.” In personal relationships, that phrase could say, “Integrity, integrity, integrity” which increases as the 3 B’s are followed: be competent, be content, and be consistent.

Thomas Jefferson spoke of law and order and that “every man comes forth to preserve it at the first call of the magistrate.” Reacting with sense and sensibility are the desired results of all conflict.

When goals are adequately articulated within the workplace, it is anticipated that workers will “get it.”

Yet, there are times when many are carried along by others for a period of time before they see things as they really are, and they begin to realize that workplace politics are not valued nor beneficial to the desired goals.

Every work situation has occurring behaviors that are viewed by some as conflict and “workplace politics.” It is necessary to understand why conflicting behaviors occur, to determine an appropriate response (if any), and to determine what one individual or the group can do to resolve the conflict. This is perhaps the greatest of all skills in the workplace.

WHEN I DISAGREE, IS IT BECAUSE...

SUMMARIZED FROM ANN LANDERS

Everyone disagrees with something or someone from time to time. Conflict is both healthy and normal. However, when disagreements occur, one must ask at least five questions.

—Am I afraid of change? Change can be healthy, productive, and necessary to

accomplish the goals or mission.

—Is the suggestion unpopular? Many fear loss of identity or a sense of value.

—Is the idea one I wish I had suggested? Brainstorming in the workplace often provides a multitude of powerful ideas from which to choose.

—Often one has to ask, “Do I

dislike the suggestion because it is supported by those in whom I have limited trust?”

—Finally, workers often question whether the idea will increase the work load and effort.

As disagreements occur, a self-check of one’s attitudes may be needed.

SEVEN RULES FOR RUINING A CONVERSATION

Adapted from Prather and Prather

Mothers often say, “Think before you speak.” Such advice is still valid.

Prather and Prather identified seven rules for ruining any conversation.

1. Bring the matter up when at least one of you is angry—when concentration is impossible.

2. Be as personal as possible when setting forth the problem. Using the word

“you” will most assuredly cause this to happen.

3. Concentrate on getting what you want. This idea often emphasizes what your colleague will lose rather than win.

4. Think of only what you can say next. Never ask a question. Always cut the speaker off before he or she is finished speaking.

5. Correct anything and

every idea someone else is attempting to put forth. When people question you, respond with, “That is not what I said!” Never accept others’ view-points.

6. Mention anything from the past that is likely to make your colleagues defensive. And, continually respond, “I didn’t mean it that way.”

7. Always end your remarks by saying something that will never be forgotten.

DEFINING CONFLICT IS DIFFICULT

WHAT IS THE REAL ISSUE?



In a recent discussion, a client revealed the reason for disliking an observed behavior. Observing conflict is unpleasant. Being upset can give way to inward anger, feelings of guilt, pain or a mixture of many of these feelings.

To survive, colleagues often use a "mask" to hide their true feelings. This masking of behaviors make accurate interpretations of nonverbal behaviors difficult.

As people increase their masking of behaviors, internal conflicts increase. As the intensity of a conflict

increases, the opportunity for explosive behaviors grows.

To address the direct and indirect exhibited behaviors expressed during conflict, one must succinctly identify the problematic issue.

A common practice used in resolving conflict is to write the problem in one simple sentence. This may take a considerable amount of

Write the problem in one sentence	
Pro	Con
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

The most difficult step is to identify the problem.

reflection and time. Once identified, the next step is to determine what opportunities exist to reduce or resolve the identified conflict issue. The third stage of the process determines what negatives

are likely to result from identified possible actions. When new pathways are chosen, confidence and trust among the participants needs to be high.

Want to Get Along Better?

- *People are more likely to better remember what is discussed when the speaker stands beside them rather than in front of them.*
- *Any argument that sustains itself for more than 9-10 minutes is likely to lose focus.*
- *People are prone to emotionally respond better to smells than to harsh words. The room environment may make a difference.*
- *Vague, non-decisive language can be a turn-off. Be specific.*
- *Pay attention to the non-verbal issues—tone of voice, appearance, etc. Avoid wearing patterned clothing on the upper half of the body when knowingly entering into a "tough" discussion event because the design may be distracting to the conversation*

TEACH PEOPLE HOW TO COMPLAIN

EFFECTIVE COMPLAINTS FOLLOW A PATTERN

The shortest distance between Point A and Point C is to take a direct route bypassing Point B. The same concept is true when teaching clients how to make a complaint.

The first step is to go directly to the source of irritation or cause for the conflict.

Once the conflict issue has

been defined, present only facts. Avoid personality assessing statements.

To blame another does not address the conflict. Stick to the facts of the issue at hand. Effective complaints are void of personal attacks.

"If at first you don't succeed, try again." Always make the complaint at the point-of-beginning. If not

satisfied, move up the ladder one rung at a time.

Do not be embarrassed to ask for commitments. Clarity in communication is required.

If legal action is anticipated, count the direct and indirect costs. Maintaining integrity is the key.

Never give up! Listening well pays well.

TELL YOURSELF THE TRUTH

Psychologists have indicated that if a person tells the same lie 10-12 times, the difference between fiction and reality becomes hazy for the "teller."

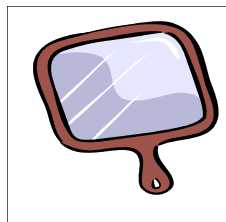
News stories repeatedly identify those persons whose "lies" have deceived even themselves.

The use or misuse of power often creates a climate for self-deception—particularly

with those who assume it is their right to "seize the moment."

People can distort the discussion, deliberately use "colorful" words and phrases, or make a misleading statement by ignoring the facts in order to achieve a desired result. Words spoken with

"color" are risky because of misinterpretation. And, they are often taken negatively.



Mirror, mirror on the wall, tell me the truth.

Lying is often a reaction to pain, hurt, guilt or ignorance. It is the latter that creates the most heinous acts. Presenting a viewpoint without foundational knowledge creates false reactions.

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Live. And Learn.

The principles for disagreeing diplomatically include:

- Reflect on what you think you heard. Check the wording. Were words such as "I think," "I feel," or "I want" used? If so, construct a response that uses similar language. Doing so will indicate the opposing opinion is valued and that an exchange of ideas is taking place.
- One can use the phrases, "I don't agree," or "I disagree." However, an accepting tone of voice is needed.
- Even though the other person may have an opposing view, let that person know s/he is valued in some way.

Conflict Style Characteristics



FIGHTERS often fight to the end. They may be flamboyant and threatening. They often try winning by bullying. They may not be "bad losers" because they get their "jollies" out of the contest.



CONTEMPLATORS may hear only their position. It is virtually impossible to convince them the other side has merit. A Contemplator may bear a grudge because they "knew they were right."



PACIFIERS pretend everything is OK. They may bend over backward to make everything nice even though it means not resolving an issue. The Pacifier style may be dangerous because of the refusal to reveal where they stand on issues.



NEUTRALS do not assert a position. They likely will avoid confrontations more than Pacifiers. They may have an internal position but refuse to express it. As a result, Neutrals may not complete an unpleasant task making conflict resolution impossible.



REALISTS view breakdowns in communication as opportunities. Although they feel strongly about their viewpoint, they are open to hear the other side. They view relationships and viewpoints as separate components.

Source: *Ironing It Out*, Crisp Publications

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DESIGN FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION HELPFUL HINTS USED BY OTHERS

A number of conflict resolution strategists set forth numerous ways to deal with conflict. Most boards and committees within organizations have significant opportunity for conflict to arise.

Advisory board members certainly experience conflict in interpersonal relationships, meetings, and negotiations.

When dealing with personal conflict, always determine if the conflict is perceived as being between two or more people. If you think that is the problem, set up a private meeting between you and the other person. As the other person is being listened to, respect their opinion. Take a few minutes to think through how the other person is seeing the situation.

- Deal with one issue at a time
- Make specific statements
- Attack the issue—not the person
- Solve initial demands before addressing counter demands
- Stay focused on the here-and-now; use past events only if they are relevant to the current situation
- Summarize frequently

Proven conflict resolution strategies indicate direct, accepting communication brings desired results.

Find some grain of truth in what is being said and build upon that idea.

When noticed, write down the issue that is perceived to bring about the conflict. Does the issue keep resurfacing?

Others may see the conflict differently than those who are involved. Ask others opinions.

Board members are in the

position to make decisions. After hearing the recommendations and/or suggestion, seek out the person and have a private discussion during a break in the meeting.

Present your view being careful not to force agreement. Sometimes, things need to "cool" for a moment before addressed.

Compromise is to some a "nasty" word. Yet, without

compromise, there is hardly room to grow an idea. A defend and attack approach is non-productive and always has a negative result.

Using cautious language, summarizing often, and re-checking perceptions will often help reach the desired resolution to conflict.