MANAGING CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE

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All relationships, personal and professional, experience some kind of conflict.

- Normal
- Natural
- Sometimes even necessary for growth and development.
Let’s discuss some ways to manage conflict AND look at change as a friend.
MYTHS > FACTS
MYTHS AND TRUTHS ABOUT CONFLICT

Myths:

- Conflict is only at work.
- Conflict is dysfunctional in the workplace.
- Conflict represents communication breakdown.
- If avoided, conflict will eventually go away.
- Conflict always results in a winner and a loser.
MYTHS AND TRUTHS ABOUT CONFLICT

Truths:

- Conflict will occur – 42% of leader’s time
- Communication is a must – talk until a solution is reached
- Conflict can help build relationships
- Conflict can be a motivator for change
- Most conflicts can be managed
- Most people deal with conflict by **Fight** or **Flight**
Manager’s Greatest Mistakes in Conflict Resolution

Ignoring the situation
– Most common response
– It will only get worse
– Conflict seldom resolves on its own

Becoming aggressive
“In your face”
## Negative Styles of Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| **Firecracker**  | • Blow up to sudden anger  
                    • Usually apologize  
                    • You know it will happen again |
| **Cold Shoulder**| • Two people who take pride in not communicating with each other  
                    • Contest to see who can hold out the longest |
<p>| <strong>Backstabbing</strong> | • Positive to your face/knife in the back                                    |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Styles of Conflict</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Zinger</strong></td>
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<td>• Throw verbal darts in front of others</td>
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<td>• The “I was just teasing” syndrome</td>
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<td><strong>Trivia Fights</strong></td>
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<td>• Those who battle over the little things</td>
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<td>• Fight over the details</td>
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<td>• Seldom get to the real issues</td>
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<td><strong>Having the Last Word</strong></td>
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<td>• Must have the last remark</td>
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<td>• Conflict is seldom over</td>
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Ingredients of Conflict

• **Diverse**
  - People who think differently than I do
  - Different cultures
  - Social similarity trap

• **Differences**
  - Severe opinions on polarizing issues
  - Speaking in absolutes – (you’re with us or against us)

• **Needs**
  - Ignoring the other party’s needs
  - Confusing needs and desires
Ingredients of Conflict

• **Perceptions**
  - Self-perceptions
  - Perceptions of the other party
  - Perceptions of threat

• **Power**
  - Wanting to control behaviors in others
  - Inflexibility

• **Generations**
  - Perception (these kids today or old and out of it)
The Generations

Traditionalist  Baby Boomer  Gen X  Millennial

8M  70M  61M  85M
Boomer & Millennial Differences
Baby Boomers

- Rode in the back of pick up trucks
- Drank out of garden hoses
- “Hand-me-down” baby cribs with 12 coats of lead paint

Gen Y’s

- Children remain in car seats until age 21
- Unfiltered coconut water
- High tech baby monitors with 24 cameras
Baby Boomers
- Long trips – put kids in back dash of car
- One black & white TV with 3 channels
- Summer jobs beginning at age 10

Gen Y’s
- Each child has their own van row of seats with separate monitors
- Smart phones, tablets, pads and remotes for remotes
- On allowance thru 3rd marriage
Next Generation of Leaders
“Generation Z”
Sources Of Organizational Conflict

1. Change
2. Conflicting Goals & Objectives
3. Limited Resources
4. The Domino Effect
Managing Conflict

Competition
• Emergency situations
• Decisive action
• Implementing unpopular change
• When other methods fail

Avoidance
• If others can resolve conflict more effectively
• If both parties see the issue as minor
• If additional time is required
• If both parties need a cooling off period
Managing Conflict

**Accommodation**
- Preserving the relationship vs arguing the issue
- When the issue is more important to the other person
- When you want others to express their own point of view
- When you want others to learn by their own choices

**Collaboration**
- Merging experiences from people having different backgrounds
- Being creative to explore solutions
- Looking for solutions where there may not be much conflict
Compromise

• To reach agreement when both sides have equal power
• To find common ground when both parties have competing goals
• To achieve a temporary settlement on a complex issue
• To reach a solution due to time pressures
Utilize the three W’s of communication

• **Who**
  – Don’t allow yourself excuses for not speaking to the key person

• **When**
  – Discuss the issue within 24 hours
  – This is not necessarily “the sooner the better”
  – Prepare your thoughts

• **Where**
  – Consider a neutral location
  – Equal footing
Resolving Conflict Begins with Listening

*Paraphrasing*

- It verifies the content
- Let the speaker finish speaking first
- If the speaker indicates you misunderstood, ask them to repeat

~ DON’T OVERUSE PARAPHRASING~

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Constructive Criticism

- Usually applied to performance that needs improvement
- Focus on the issue, not the person
- Plan ahead and handle carefully
- Sandwich method
- Performance appraisals
Criticism and Conflict

Destructive Criticism

– Intentionally used
– Causes Conflict
– Attacks the person vs. performance or behavior
– Commonly used in politics
– Usually a result of anger
Eight Steps to Conflict Resolution
1. Create an effective atmosphere

- Preparation
- Allow time
- Avoid distractions
- Pick a non-threatening place
- Choose carefully initial comments, atmosphere of partnership
- Your turn/My turn
Your Turn/My Turn

Your Turn:
- You go first
- Disarms the other person
- Activate your listening skills
- Paraphrase

My Turn:
- May I give my side of the story?
- Describe problems without blaming
2. Clarify perceptions

- Is conflict an isolated event or another in a long list?
- Identify what the conflict is about and what it is not about
- Organize the points of the conflict from major to minor
3. Focus on individual and shared needs

- Don’t confuse needs with desires
- Always put yourself in the place of the other party
- Identify areas of common interest
4. Look to the future ~ not the past

- Don’t let the past rule your thinking
- Learn from the past –
  - Remind each other of past positive times
Avoid the “HOT” buttons

- Politics
- Religion
- Sex

• Practice the Power of Forgiveness
5. Generate options

- Prepare some options in advance
- Focus on options that deal with shared needs
- Seek options and common ground from other party
- Value past experiences
6. Develop "do-ables" and stepping stones

- Pick the low hanging fruit first
- Start with the small steps
- "Do-ables" are not ends, only steps
7. Strive for mutual benefit agreements

- Establish a partnership on the issue
- Create a new beginning
- Focus on solutions ~ not blame
8. Flexibility - key to conflict resolution

- Be conciliatory
- Apologizing
- Conceding
- Expressing positive feelings for the other
- Initiating a win-win approach
Agreeing to Disagree

• Maintain professionalism
• Give equal access to your common ground
• Know when to seek a facilitator or mediator
PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE PROBLEM EMPLOYEE AND HOW TO MANAGE THEM
"I always give 110% to my job. 40% on Monday, 30% on Tuesday, 20% on Wednesday, 15% on Thursday, and 5% on Friday."
PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE PROBLEM EMPLOYEE

Affect Morale in the Workplace

Everyone is watching
Their behavior sets the “lowest” standard
Cause constant disruption
Constantly looking for sympathy and turmoil
Rumors, gossip and taking sides
PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE PROBLEM EMPLOYEE

Behavior Can Be Contagious

They seek out the new and weakest employees
Constantly looking for sympathy and turmoil
They have much more access to employees
They concentrate on the negative
They fuel the rumor mill and gossip
They are never loners
PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE PROBLEM EMPLOYEE

Actions Toward These Employees Can Bring Sympathy

Employees want “fair” action
It’s the performance, not the person
Assess the situation before any action
PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE PROBLEM EMPLOYEE

Risk of Retaliation by the Employee

Problem employees love to file suits
“Whistleblower” actions
Union contacts
OSHA
They run to anyone who will listen
HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM EMPLOYEE

Never, Never Allow Them to Provoke You

Don’t allow it to get personal
Have a witness when needed
Prepare in advance for confrontations
If you begin to lose control, END IT NOW!
NO shouting, NO anger
HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM EMPLOYEE

Documentation, Documentation, Documentation

• Document the facts only with dates/times
• Objective vs. Subjective
• Document immediately
• Contact Human Resources
• Have all witnesses write a statement
• The problem of “over documenting”
Performance Appraisals

The best tool you have
Give them early when needed
Use examples
Be thorough
Be consistent
Use clearly defined and understood standard terms
Top 10 Worst Things to See on Your Performance Evaluation

(Real excerpts from performance evaluations – What not to say…)

10. "Works well when under constant supervision and cornered like a rat in a trap."
9. "Since my last report, this employee has reached rock bottom and has started to dig."
8. "When she opens her mouth, it seems that this is only to change whichever foot was previously in there."
7. "He would be out of his depth in a parking lot puddle."
6. "This young lady has delusions of adequacy."
5. "He sets low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them."
4. "This employee should go far - and the sooner he starts, the better."
3. "This employee is depriving a village somewhere of an idiot."
2. "His men would follow him anywhere, but only out of morbid curiosity."
1. "I would not allow this employee to breed."
HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM EMPLOYEE

Performance Evaluation

• “What” the employee needs to do to improve

• “When” the improvement needs to happen

• Have the employee sign the document

• Consider a commitment letter and a Performance Improvement Plan
HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM EMPLOYEE

Final Warning Process

Final warnings for incidents
May include suspension
When to issue a final warning
Understanding the meaning of final warning – Final means FINAL
HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM EMPLOYEE

When to Ask for Help…

When it becomes personal turn it over to someone else
Get Human Resources involved early
Make it on your turf and your terms
Never, never, never lose your “cool”
Our greatest defense is our PROFESSIONALISM
Thank you for attending!

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