Conflict, Dispute Resolution and Dealing with Difficult People

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Objectives

• To understand what conflict is and when it is helpful versus harmful
• To understand what contributes to conflict and why it needs to be resolved
• To understand your approach to conflict
• To learn strategies for avoiding, de-escalating, and resolving conflict
• To learn how to deal with the high conflict individual
• To practice some skills for real-life situations

What is Conflict? The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

• Conflict is a normal part of any relationship
• Conflict generally arises from differences or disagreements over values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires
• When handled appropriately and with respect, conflict can lead to a greater understanding and move parties toward mutually agreeable solutions
• When handled inappropriately, conflict can lead to resentment, anger, and even become toxic
How Does Conflict Affect Us Personally?

- Physiologically
- Emotionally
- Intellectually

When Conflict is Helpful?

- Conflict is natural and can even be a good resource
- Leads to issue identification— if an issue is not raised, it cannot be resolved
- It can help us discover underlying interests
- If handled well, it can lead to necessary discussion and solutions for moving forward

When Conflict is Harmful?

- When conflict is more than just a disagreement and a real or perceived threat is not resolved
- When conflict is ignored and left to fester
- When conflict is handled with anger, explosive reactions (verbal or physical), or violence
Where Did it All Go Wrong?
What are some examples of typical conflicts that can and do happen in our daily lives that get us off course and into conflict?

How Does Conflict Affect our Group?
- Effectiveness
- Collaboration
- Relationships
- Cohesiveness

What is Your Approach to Conflict?
- Competing
- Accommodating
- Avoiding
- Collaboration
- Compromising
Accommodation
Compromise
Avoidance
Collaboration

Understanding Dispute Resolution:
Preventing and Resolving Conflict

Strategies for Preventing Conflict
- Focus on the present and let go of the past
- Pick your battles—know when to let something go
- Be an active listener
- Minimize misinterpretation—seek clarity
- Pay attention to verbals and non-verbals
- Constantly consider things from another’s perspective
- Agree to disagree
- Recognize and manage your own emotions
- Be willing to forgive or be the “adultier adult”
- Avoid conflict generating language and behaviors
 Approaches to De-escalating Typical Conflict

- Respect People—Attack Problems
- Focus on the issue or problem and NOT the individual
- Understand that you are not going to change the person
  (and sometimes the person is YOU)
- Make understanding a priority, rather than winning or being right (Seek first to understand, then to be understood)
- ALWAYS demonstrate respect for the person, even if you don’t like what they are saying
- Make yourself non-threatening
- Listen to the other person’s feelings (go beyond just words)
- Acknowledge and accept their emotions/feelings
- Be willing to share your emotions/feelings
- Use a calm voice and tone

 Approaches to De-escalating Typical Conflict

- Accept responsibility for your contribution and apologize for it
- Use humor to diffuse tension
- Paraphrase the issue (What I understand you to be saying is... Is that accurate?)
- Reframe the problem (cognitive restructuring)
- Use de-escalation language

 What Not to Do

- Do not attack a person—focus on the behavior or issue
- Do not assume you are right
- Do not give conflicting messages (words versus actions)
- Do not overgeneralize (”You ALWAYS, you NEVER”)
- Do not lower yourself to the level of those behaving badly
- Do not scream, shout, or strike at another
Facilitation Skills

- Set guidelines for discussion
- Seek clarification of the issue
- Understand the complained about behaviors (CABs)
- Solicit the effects of the CABs
- Ensure each person gets their chance to do their "storytelling"
- Redirect parties to the issues and facts when they start to digress or attack
- Solicit possible solutions (brainstorming with no judging)
- Identify solutions to implement
- Evaluate success
- Call a timeout, if needed
- Set a time limit for “venting”

Dealing with Difficult People: Mediating the Problematic Personality

How to Handle the High Conflict Individual: Tools and Language for Working with REALLY Difficult People

- Understand the person’s intentions—seek to understand their motivation
- Recognize that they are often trying to make the choice that seems the best from their perspective in the current moment
- Let the person know where you are coming from (they may think you are the difficult person)
- Look at the situation objectively
- Choose not to be an adversary
- Foster a connection or a common interest or goal
- Do not get dragged down
- Don’t take it personally
How to Handle the High Conflict Individual: Tools and Language for Working with REALLY Difficult People

- Turn the mirror on yourself - what might you be doing to contribute to the way this person is behaving?
- Recognize that you may be the difficult person's difficult person
- Do a little homework in advance
- Know your triggers and their triggers
- Be prepared with how you will respond
- Call out the specific behaviors that are a concern to you
- Spell out what you want to change
- State your needs clearly with assertive communication
- Stick to the facts
- Identify and assert consequences, if necessary
- Walk away if necessary
- Seek out professional assistance

4 Quick Steps to Resolving Conflict

- Step #1: Raise the Issue
- Step #2: Discover the Underlying Interests
- Step #3: Invent Options for Mutual Gain
- Step #4: Develop Agreements Based on Objective

Step #1: Raise the Issue

- To solve a problem, you need to know what the problem is.
- You need to focus on the problem and the effects of the issue or behavior.
- You need to remain calm and willing to listen to multiple perspectives.

Ask: Can you help me understand what you see as the problem and how that impacts you or others?

Language you can use:
- Tell me more.
- Help me understand.
- What are the effects of this?
- Can you clarify for me?
- How so?

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Step #2: Discover the Underlying Interests

- There is typically a conflict because there are underlying interests in defending positions...what are they?
- Ask clarifying questions to get at the interests.
- Ask them to articulate what they understand the issue to be and why they feel so strongly about it.
- Sometimes these are obvious...and sometimes you really need to be a detective.
- Ask yourself why you are affected by it and what your own interests might be.

Step #3: Invent Options for Mutual Gain

- Provide time and a safe space for discussing options for resolving the issue.
- Do not attack ideas–promote discussion around the pros and cons
- Look for solutions that provide mutual gain

Language:
- Can you tell what you think would solve the problem?
- What are some possible options for us to consider?
- What is your understanding of my/our perspective?
- If I understand correctly, you would like me/us to ***? Is that right?
- How can we achieve *** where your concerns about *** can be addressed and my concern regarding *** is taken into consideration?

Step #4: Develop Agreements Based on Objective

- Decide which option(s) you would like to try and, if relevant, in which order.
- Write out what the agreed upon option is
- Provide any necessary detail for implementing option(s)
- Evaluate the success of the options (set a timeframe to revisit)

Consider bringing in a facilitator or mediator if you are unable to achieve resolution on your own.
When conflict occurs:

Ask Questions:

How do you think that ____ went?

Use your four steps

Discuss the issue/problem
Discuss the underlying interests
Invent options for mutual gains
Develop agreements based on the objective

Try this when you anticipate there will be conflict:

Get ahead of it
Speak with those who will be at the event/meeting
if it is reasonable to do so
Communicate the anticipated conflict and seek
input to improve communication
Respect all viewpoints
Set meeting ground rules such as:

Meeting Ground Rules I use:

WELCOME!
Our goal is to have a productive and enjoyable meeting. As a committee participant you can influence the success of the meeting.

Openly contribute your ideas with enthusiasm
Restrict discussion to the topic at hand
Ask questions when you do not understand
Avoid telling stories of individual cases unless it furthers the discussion
Respect the views of other participants
Be “present” for entire meeting
Think critically and behave constructively
Be aware that our time together is limited
Avoid side conversations
Inform your constituents and be informed by your constituents
Consider the local, regional and state implications of our decisions
Respond with “yes and” never “no but”
Questions?

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