

# Conflict Management

## Leadership One-Sheet

Conflict is inevitable in any interpersonal relationship or among members of any group. A disagreement between two or more members of an organization can cause stress on the organization as well as individuals. Members may choose to leave the organization rather than face the unpleasant situations created by conflict.

Conflicts should be addressed as soon as they arise. The first step to resolve a conflict is to confront the individual(s) involved and discuss the issue(s). Attitude can play a major role in the outcome of the confrontation, and assuming a win-win, no-lose situation will help in creating a positive outcome. When a conflict occurs it is often assumed one person's needs must win over another causing one person to win and another to lose. In approaching the conflict with a win-win attitude, both party's needs are being acknowledged and compromise becomes a possibility.

### Confrontation

When confronting someone, a three-part message must be communicated. The person's behavior, its effects, and how you feel must all be communicated. In identifying the behavior, you are taking the emphasis away from the person and concentrating on their actions.

Example: "You did not get the flyers copied..." The last part of the message is stating how you feel about the behavior. Making the person understand how you feel about their actions or inaction "...and after all the planning we've done, I am a little frustrated."

Why use this method? The person is not labeled as "bad", you're stating how you feel, you're not blaming the person, and you're making the person aware of their actions and how they are affecting other people.

There are a few difference responses that can come from using this technique.

For example:

- One is compliance, and using the example above, the response would be "I know I didn't get the flyers copied. I will drop them off today and take care of posting them myself. Sorry the stress I've caused." If that is the outcome, say thank you and it's over.

- Another possible response is resistance, "Well I didn't have any time to drop them off", or some other similar response. Don't be discouraged if this happens. Stay calm, and repeat your original message. If that works, say thank you, and it's over. However you may have to restate your message a third time. Make sure you remain calm because if you show some frustration, it might be interpreted as aggression. In restating your message multiple times you are taking the lead to solve the problem, you are not giving up, and in a sense, you're asking the other person for their help in resolving the issue.
- A third possible response is aggression. If the response is valid, acknowledge the fact, apologize if necessary, and then restate the message. If the response is not valid, and you think repeating the message would not serve any purpose, end the conversation and say that you would like to continue the conversation at a later date.

### Mediation

If a conflict is not handled early and evolves, a neutral mediator may be used to intervene and reduce the conflict. In mediation, each party would present their arguments, question the other side, generate options, and select a solution to which both parties can agree.

*continued...*

What is a mediator?

- Unbiased
- Directive
- A good listener
- A resourceful person
- Thorough

The steps necessary for a successful mediation are:

1. State your purpose
2. Listen to each side
3. Allow questions
4. Point out the problem
5. Brainstorm solutions
6. Make an agreement
7. Follow-up

## Styles of Conflict Management

There are several Styles of Conflict Management people use. You must determine your style as well as the style that is best used for dealing with your group.

- **Competing** - An individual pursues his or her own concerns at the other person's expense, using whatever power seems appropriate to win one's own position. Competing might even mean standing up for your rights, defending a position which you believe to be correct, or simply trying to win.
- **Accommodation** - The opposite of competing. An individual neglects his or her own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person. Accommodating might take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's order when one would prefer not, or yielding to another person's point of view.
- **Avoiding** - The individual does not pursue his or her own concerns or those of the other person. He or she simply does not address the conflict. Avoiding includes: diplomatically sidestepping an issue, postponing the issue, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.
- **Compromising** - Find a mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. Compromising might mean splitting the difference,

exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle ground position.

- **Collaborating** - An attempt to work with the other person to find some solution that fully satisfies the concerns of both persons. Collaborating identifies the underlying concerns of the two individuals and to find an alternative that meets both approaches of conflict management. It leads to mutual respect and satisfaction as both sides win.

When a conflict arises in your organization, remember: stay calm and neutral, attempt members to keep focused on pertinent issues, be fair, listen, and propose a solution that will satisfy as many people as possible.

A very important time in any organization's life is the transition of leadership. This period can be a difficult time or of great benefit to your organization. Unfortunately, this stage of an organization's life is often time neglected. The following information is provided to reflect on the importance of transition to the organization and its new leadership.

One of the most important is passing along of knowledge about the organization. By giving this information to the new officers, they spend less time being confused, lost, or adjusting. The new officers will have a good base of information from which to act upon. It also provides closure for outgoing officers. Last, it will help the new leaders start off with greater confidence and direction.

More information is available from:  
Office of Student Life & Leadership Development  
College of San Mateo  
1700 W. Hillsdale Blvd  
San Mateo, CA 94402  
<http://collegeofsanmateo.edu/studentlife>