Conflict Resolution Strategies for the Workplace

Steven Eastmond, LCSW

What is Conflict?

- Opposition
- A clash of opposing ideas
- Disagreement
- Fight or battle
- Contention
- Hostility

Causes of Conflict

- Opposing viewpoints or opinions
- Emotions
- Selfishness
- Miscommunication or misunderstandings
- Assumptions

You are standing at a bus stop with a handful of other people. A man suddenly runs rapidly past you, almost knocking you down. He has long hair and a beard and is dressed in a dark, muddy overcoat, jeans, and sneakers. He is carrying a leather briefcase.

A young, well-dressed business woman runs close behind him. Despite her high-heeled shoes, she runs as fast as she can go, her eyes wide and determined.

Next a large, angry-looking, black dog runs rapidly past you, not far behind the man and the woman. White foam is visible on either side of his mouth and he is barking ferociously.

Not seconds later, a van carrying television cameras and a movie director drives past. A man holding a small megaphone leans out of the van and yells after the fleeing man, woman and dog, “Cut! Great work, folks.”

Perception is *Everything*

1. What others see/feel/experience is real and true to them.
2. Perception is built on our personal experiences in life – we interpret present events based on past events.
3. Most people initially perceive the same event at least somewhat differently.

What changes perception?

- Incorporating new information into a present situation.
- Paradigm shift.
- Understanding another’s perception.

Strategies to Get Past Perceptions

I – Avoid Assumptions

- Assume nothing – assumptions are often wrong.
- Ask questions – it's harder to be wrong if you asked first.
- Try first to understand the other's perspective before you try to get him/her to understand yours.
- Consider alternative explanations for the other person's behavior besides what you initially believe.

II – Validation

- Allow the other person to have their experience and perception of the situation.
- Do NOT get defensive.
- Validate what they are experiencing (do not necessarily agree or disagree).
- Sometimes the thing that we think is the solution is actually part of the problem.

III - Listen

- The goal is to *understand*, not to be *right*.
- Do not spend time preparing for what you are going to say back.
- Restate – both to make sure you did understand *and* to help the other person feel that you were listening.

IV – Problem-Solving Skills

- Keep the focus on the *problem* rather than the *emotion* that results.
- Focus on one problem at a time – do not allow old issues to be resurrected as a diversion.
- Brainstorm, select a potential solution, implement the solution, evaluate results.

V – Tell Your Story

- Do not be passive and avoid telling your side of things.
- Do not be aggressive and ramrod your story as the only way it could be.
- Be assertive – get your information out while working to find solutions rather than battles.

Different Styles of Dealing with Conflict

- Withdrawal (mentally or physically)
- Postponing
- Fence-sitting (no fight, no giving in)
- Aggression (fight/argue)
- Passive-aggression (gossip/sabotage)

The Attitude of Resolving Conflict

- Most students do not consciously assume they know everything going in.
- PRIOR to the student's experience, reframe any conflicts or corrections given as an "opportunity to learn and grow."
- Conflicts arise when we view chastisement or correction as a personal attack.

Personality Conflicts

- Since we all have different personalities, these will happen.
- Take time to think before you react.
  - Instincts are not always good for us
- Use good communication skills.

Communication Strategies

- Use “I” statements
- Speaker/Listener technique
- Validation
- Reframing
- Be clear – no hints

Common Myths About Conflict

- Deciding to withdraw from a conflict is weakness.
- Every fight or disagreement must be won.
- Men are supposed to be aggressive, never passive.
- Women are supposed to be passive and submissive, and never stand up for themselves.

Some General Strategies to Resolving Conflicts

- Assume you do not have all the facts.
- Ask questions to understand the other person's perspective.
- Be prepared to compromise.
- Keep people and problems separate.
- Focus on issues, *not* emotions – look for solutions.
- Volunteer to do your part to solve the problem.

Specific Strategies to Resolving Conflicts

- Postpone
- Enforce
- Accommodate
- Compromise
- Explore

  – Cathy Bolger, PhD – *Conflict Resolution Strategies,* 2003

Steven Eastmond, LCSW

1525 Nuttall Dr.
Lehi, UT 84043

(801)369-0053
steveneastmond@netzero.net