



## Conflict Resolution (Revision date 1-12-2013)

No matter how noble your cause, no matter how “nice” the people on your team are or how great of a leader you are, there will be conflicts. Leaders today must be more adept in resolving conflicts than ever before.

Resistance to dealing with conflict is a death sentence to your group. I have observed, first hand, the pain, loss and irretrievable damage suffered as a result of conflict. I have also seen transformation as individuals move to forgiveness and reconciliation with creative solutions that bring opposing people together.

There are destructive as well as creative ways to respond to conflict. We need to shift from impasse to transformation and see within ourselves the true meaning of resolving conflict.

When we are involved in conflict, we may say things we do not mean and mean things we do not say. We rarely communicate on a deep level when upset.

Unfortunately, most leaders hate to confront, therefore, they tend to sweep things under the rug in hopes that it will go away. It doesn't go away. It festers and then blows up over a minor incident.

How far apart are those in conflict? Every conflict we face is rich with positive and negative potential. They can be a source of inspiration, enlightenment, learning, transformation and growth – or of rage, fear, shame, impasse and resistance. The choice is up to us, not our opponents and depends on our willingness to face and work through them.

More times than not, most conflicts can be resolved with each individual making one step forward towards the other. Other times, there may be miles between the two.

While there are many books available on how to resolve conflict, I will offer just a few suggestions to get you started.

- ***Bring the conflict to the surface.*** Summarize the main issue and begin here. Often times, better communication can resolve issues before they get out of control. Other times, it may be personality differences. Whatever it is, you must first recognize exactly what the conflict is in order to get to its source.
- ***Be willing to be a “coach”.*** You as the leader must first be able to model openness to criticism and encourage honest communication.
- ***Create some teamwork.*** Ask those involved to brainstorm five possible strategies for ending the conflict or responding to it more effectively.
  - Create a process where they feel safe. You will experience fewer difficulties if you as the leader create an atmosphere of safety when discussing the conflict.
  - They need to feel listened to and acknowledged.
- ***Encourage constructive feedback.*** No matter what the problem is, most things are good and only a small portion is objectionable to the parties involved.
- ***Share responsibility.*** In most cases, we can all bear part of the blame for a problem or impasse. Don't let pride set in. Admit your wrong and most likely, they will acknowledge theirs as well. If they don't, at least you held yourself to the higher standard and were honest.



- Take responsibility for your participation and contribution to what is not working between you and your opponent.
- **Support for change.** If there is a need for a change in direction or behavior, be ready and willing to do your part. No one person is ever at fault. It is a variety of reasons and personalities.

Results can be achieved in your group when you shift from blaming people to solving problems.

### **Ways that you can avoid conflict in the future:**

- Accept other people and their ideas and feelings about issues that divide. Focus on their behavior and the deeper reason why it bothers you.
- Be curious about reason other people's behaviors bother you. See what you can do to accept others who are different from you. Different isn't what is wrong.
- Be willing to observe and release hostile feelings and judgments.
- Start by thinking of what you can do to find a way to improve a situation.
- Take responsibility for your unrealistic expectations.
- Respect others personal boundaries.
- Keep an open mind and open heart.
- Always be respectful and courteous regardless of the other person's allegations or behaviors.
- Hold on to your sense of humor. Most conflicts are not as important as they seem.
- Never engage in gossip or slandering another person.
- Negotiate good ground rules for meetings.

This is not intended to be a complete expository on Conflict Resolution. It is simply a thumb nail sketch and a few suggestions that you can begin with to resolve conflicts that you face and prevent future ones. If you have a serious conflict within your group, I would suggest that you deal with it immediately or you are doomed for failure.

Seek help from other leaders. Read books - but do something.

Suggested reading:

*"Resolving Conflicts At Work"* by Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith