

MANAGING CONFLICT EFFECTIVELY

Conflict can be defined as a struggle between opposing forces, such as a clash between opinions, values, interests, or goals. Without exception, every group or organization experiences conflict.

Conflict is a fact of life. And, so are the feelings that go along with conflict: anger, frustration, resentment, disappointment. Because conflict and the feelings associated with it are unpleasant, people try to avoid them or pretend that they don't exist. Most people are conditioned to believe that conflict is bad, that it is wrong to argue or disagree.

****However, conflict in and of itself isn't "bad", what is "bad" is how most people handle it.****

I. Where/Why Conflict Occurs

A. Where?

1. Within the individual: internal conflict; personal choices
2. Within the group: interpersonal conflict; inevitable and invaluable
3. Between groups: most visible and most difficult to resolve

B. Why?

1. Values
2. Goals
3. Perceptions
4. Status
5. Roles

II. Attributes that Help Resolve Conflict

- A. Clear goals and purposes: articulated, understood and accepted by all.
- B. Openness in communications: to secure understanding, not necessarily agreement, between those involved.
- C. Fair and clear procedures: organization; structure.
- D. Acceptance: accept not only other people and ideas, but their right to be different.

III. Techniques to Resolve Conflict

- A. Look for and stress common ground. Emphasize points of agreement rather than points of differences.
- B. Treat contributions as group property. Forsake pride of ownership and handle ideas as if they belong to the entire group.
- C. Treat contributions as hypotheses. Develop a "spirit of inquiry" that fosters and encourages creativity.
- D. Restrict communication until points in conflict are thoroughly understood by all participants.

- E. Compartmentalize the issue in the conflict. If the problem is too complex, break it up into subparts and deal with them one at a time or in small groups.
- F. Try role playing. Can create understanding and empathy with the other person's position.
- G. Don't let ideas just "lie there". Some response is necessary for the group's well-being.
- H. Ask questions. Clarifies issues and exposes real nature of the conflict.
- I. Postpone the item until later. Taking some time to "cool of" can be useful.

IV. General Tips

- A. Stay calm.
- B. See the "big picture".
- C. Discuss the "head", not "heart".
- D. Enter conflict with the idea that it will be resolved to the satisfaction of most participants.
- E. Be willing to compromise.
- F. Show respect for other's opinions.
- G. If you are wrong, admit it graciously.
- H. Be an "active" listener.