

Conflict Resolution

INTRODUCTION TO CONFLICT

People have different thoughts and feelings about conflict. Those thoughts and feelings are usually a result of our personal and professional life experiences. *This opening statement should lead to discussion around how people generally do not enjoy conflict situations – put it in your own words.*

Please take a few moments to complete each of the sentences below. Please complete the sentences according to your beliefs. Then provide alternative endings based on how you think other people in your life might complete the sentences. *Give participants a chance to complete the sentences and then ask if anyone wants to share their sentences. There is not really any right or wrong answers – just discussion points. You may want to complete the sentences ahead of time so you have something to share in case the group needs a nudge.*

Conflict is: . .

Emotions involved in conflict situations include . . .

Methods for dealing with conflicts include . . .

INTRODUCTION TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Although some people find conflict to be frustrating and a waste of time, conflict is a normal part of life. Conflict in and of itself is not positive or negative. Most conflicts, if managed effectively, can be constructive and result in positive outcomes. The conflict management skills selected by the individuals involved in a conflict determines whether the conflict will be constructive or destructive. *This is another discussion area that you need to put into your own words*

You could put these bullets on a flip chart page

Conflict is:

- An inevitable part of everyday life.
- An opportunity for learning about other information or perspectives.
- An opportunity to correct an existing problem.
- An opportunity to prevent unnecessary future conflicts.

It will help if you have some personal examples of each of these bullet points

These can be put on flip chart page as well

When a conflict arises an individual has essentially two choices:

- React emotionally (flight-fight response)
- React strategically.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Although conflict situations vary greatly depending on the underlying issues, available time, and the individuals involved, it is helpful to have a process in mind for managing conflicts. Two conflict management processes are described below because some conflicts require an immediate, on-the-spot solution while other conflicts require an in-depth problem-solving approach. *Go through the process quickly and explain that many of the steps are done in a split second so while the processes look long and tedious they are actually quick and if practiced enough will become second nature.*

On-the-Spot Conflict Management Process

1. Stop and Think

- Identify your goal(s) in the conflict. Consider short-term and long-term goals.
- Identify the source(s) of the conflict.
- Choose the conflict response style that will most likely help you achieve your goal(s)?

2. Engage in Cooperative Communication

- Express emotions appropriately.
- Use verbal and non-verbal language that does not escalate the conflict.
- Acknowledge others' perspectives then share your perspective.
- Share interests.

3. Agree on a Solution

- Quickly identify potential options for resolving the conflict.
- Compromise if a win-win cannot be achieved. (If a compromise is absolutely not appropriate then try to reach agreement on next steps.)
- Be specific about the terms of the agreement and put it in writing.
- If agreement cannot be reached try to agree on next steps.

Planned Conflict Management Process

1. Stop and Think

- Identify your goal(s) in this conflict. Consider short-term and long-term goals.
- Identify the source(s) of the conflict.
- Choose the conflict response style that will most likely help you achieve your goal(s)?
- Schedule a convenient time to discuss the situation.

2. Share Perspectives

- Express emotions appropriately.
- Use verbal and non-verbal language that does not escalate the conflict.
- Acknowledge their perspective then share your perspective.
- Share interests.

3. Explore Options for Resolution

- Brainstorm options for resolving the conflict.
- Gather additional information, if necessary.
- Revisit personal goal(s) and interests.

4. Agree on a Solution

- Evaluate and prioritize all options.
- Compromise if a win-win cannot be achieved. (If a compromise is absolutely not appropriate then try to reach agreement on next steps.)
- Be specific about the terms of the agreement and put it in writing.
- If agreement cannot be reached try to agree on next steps.

5. Follow Up

- If an agreement is reached, schedule a time to follow up and review the agreement to see if it has been or continues to be effective.

TYPES OF CONFLICT

Conflict analysis requires an understanding of sources of conflict, types of conflicts, and conflict escalation and de-escalation. In addition, effective conflict managers must be able to take responsibility for their own role in a conflict

There are many ways to categorize conflicts. For the purposes of this workshop, conflict will be categorized as:

This is another great place to use flip chart pages

- **Intrapersonal Conflicts:** Conflicts within one's self.
Examples: Ask for examples from participants (have a few of your own in case the group needs some help)

- **Interpersonal Conflicts:** Conflicts between two or more people that are caused by personal factors.
Examples: Ask for examples from participants (have a few of your own in case the group needs some help)

- **Organizational Conflicts:** Conflicts between two or more people that are caused by organizational factors.
Examples: Ask for examples from participants (have a few of your own in case the group needs some help)

- **Systems Conflicts:** Conflicts between two or more people that are caused by systems factors.
Examples: Ask for examples from participants (have a few of your own in case the group needs some help)

Sources of Conflicts

Conflicts can arise for many different reasons. Some examples are listed below. Based on your experiences, you may add additional sources to the lists. *Review the lists and ask if anyone has additions for either of the lists*

| Intrapersonal Conflicts | Interpersonal Conflicts | Organizational Conflicts |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Financial needs | Financial needs | Budgetary limitations |
| Time constraints | Time constraints | Project timelines |
| Lack of prioritization | Lack of prioritization | Lack of prioritization |
| Internal value conflicts | Miscommunication | Lack of clear goals |
| Self-Image (ego) | Different values | Miscommunication |
| Peer Pressure | Attitude toward conflict | Unknown policies |
| Short-term vs. Long-term goals | Different experiences | Unknown procedures |
| | Different goals | Lack of training |
| | Personality types | Power issues |
| | Self-Image (ego) | Cooperative vs. competitive workplace environment |
| | Lack of respect | Individual vs. collective rights |
| | Power issues | New culture vs. old culture |

Sources of conflict may also be examined in other categories such as possessions, environment factors, opinions & values, control, personality traits. *This is another area where you could ask for participant examples*

The effective resolution of a conflict depends on the individuals' ability to identify the underlying source of the conflict. Potential solutions to conflicts vary greatly depending on the underlying source of the conflict. Just as it is important for a doctor to correctly diagnosis the illness underlying the stated symptoms, so must individuals correctly identify the source of conflict underlying the current problem. In both situations, an incorrect diagnosis will allow the underlying problem to continue to fester and make the real problem even more difficult to resolve. *Put emphasis on the importance of identifying the underlying source of the conflict*

Conflict Escalation and De-Escalation

This is a section you will need to explain in your own words and then review the chart and ask for additions

Most daily conflicts are resolved simply without much concerted effort, because the conflicts are managed with effective conflict management skills and therefore they do not escalate.

When conflict escalation does occur, it is important for one or more of the individuals involved to recognize the escalation and to begin to use skills to de-escalate the conflict. Failure to do so, will likely lead the individuals to hard feeling and an impasse that will make the conflict more difficult to resolve at a later time or spawn new conflicts in the future.

Effective conflict managers are aware of factors that escalate conflicts and they have the ability to use de-escalation techniques even when the other individual(s) are intentionally or unknowingly engaging in escalation behaviors. Review the list below and add addition items based on your experiences.

| Escalation Factors | De-Escalation Factors |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Aggressive Body Language | Neutral Body Language |
| Raised Tone of Voice | Calm Tone of Voice |
| Accusatory Statements | Using "I" statements |
| Blaming Statements | Acknowledging/Validating Feelings |
| Vague Threats | Acknowledging Perspectives |
| Threats of Formal Action | Asking for Suggested Solutions |
| Personal Attacks or Insults | Scheduling a Specific Time to Talk |

CHARTING CONFLICT ESCALATION EXERCISE

This exercise can be used to develop the ability to recognize conflict escalation and the ability to implement de-escalation techniques. The exercise can help individuals identify behaviors, word choice, intonation, and/or body language that escalate disputes.

Draw a step/stair design on a flip chart page -

You may choose to chart a real-life conflict or a conflict from a movie or television show. Ask the group to select a situation or have one already selected.

Ask the group what happened to escalate the conflict chosen. On top of each step write the escalating factor. Once you have listed all of the escalating factors go back and underneath each step write what de-escalating technique could be used to de-escalate the conflict.

EXPRESSING EMOTIONS APPROPRIATELY

Put this all into your own words and have the group complete the exercise at the bottom of the page and share their responses.

Many conflicts escalate and get out of control because individuals are unable to appropriately express their emotions in conflict situations. The importance of being able to express emotions appropriately has recently become the basis for several popular books related to the topic of emotional intelligence.

“Quite simply, emotional intelligence is the intelligent use of emotions: you *intentionally* make your emotions work for you by using them to help guide your behavior and thinking in ways that enhance your results. Applications of emotional intelligence in the workplace are almost infinite.”

Source: Emotional Intelligence at Work, Hendrie Weisinger, Ph.D., 1998

Emotions have the potential to create or escalate conflict. Like conflict, emotions are not necessarily good or bad; it's the inappropriate expression of emotions that often leads to the escalation of conflicts. Conversely, conflict has an impact on emotions. Generally, the longer a conflict exists, the more likely emotions will intensify and the more likely problem-solving skills will diminish.

The most frequently described emotion in conflict situations is anger. However, anger has been termed the “masked emotion”, because it hides underlying emotions such as hurt, fear, rejection, frustration, humiliation, or loneliness. It is important for individuals in conflict situations to have the skills to accurately perceive, identify and express emotions.

The first step in learning to use your emotions appropriately is to develop the ability to recognize what behaviors and situations trigger an emotional response from you. Please identify those triggers below.

Identify your emotional triggers (i.e., pet peeves, things that bug you, etc.):

The next step in learning to express your emotions appropriately is to develop methods for calming your emotions so that you can respond strategically rather than emotionally. It is important to have immediate and long-term calming methods because some conflicts require an on-the-spot resolution, which requires an on-the-spot calming of emotions. Calming one's emotions is not the same as "stuffing" the emotions. The process of calming or taming emotions allows an individual to vent the emotions in a way that does not escalate the conflict. *Use your own words then have the group complete the exercise below. Let the group share their calming techniques.*

Identify ways in which you can calm/manage/tame your emotional triggers:

Use your own words to explain the 5 step process below

As noted above, the best way for individuals to control their emotions, so that they do not create or escalate conflict, is for individuals to know their hot buttons and to learn how to control them. The following five-step process, which can be easily remembered and practiced, is one quick and simple method for gaining control over emotions.

1. Name the Emotion. Be specific with how you feel. Remember, if you describe your emotion as anger or even upset and mad, delve deeper for the underlying feeling. Ask yourself, "What, exactly, am I feeling?"
2. Claim the Emotion. You must take responsibility for your emotional response to the conflict. You must acknowledge the feeling, whether it is appropriate or inappropriate
3. Tame the Emotion. If you are uncomfortable with the intensity of your emotions, engage in mental or physical activities that reduce them. Techniques include going on a mental vacation to a serene place, taking deep breaths, counting to 10 slowly or taking a walk. The important thing is to calm down and not react. You should also resist impulses to strike back, give in or walk out.
4. Reframe the Situation. When possible try to give the other person the benefit of the doubt. Try to avoid assigning a negative motive to the other person. This will allow you to approach problem-solving with a more cooperative attitude.
5. Aim the Emotion. Direct the energy of emotions into appropriate ways to handle the conflict. You may be able to identify and implement changes that will remedy or remove the source of your emotions.

This five-step process does not require you to share your emotions, although sharing your emotions with others may be helpful in some conflicts. This process does not deny

the validity of strong feeling – it simply offers one way to channel strong emotions into constructive action.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE SURVEY

Use the attached survey to allow participants to determine what their conflict management style is. Be sure to allow plenty of time for this as it is usually one of the most helpful parts of the session

CHOOSING A CONFLICT RESPONSE

Review this section and put it in your own words

It is important to remember that in any conflict situation, an individual chooses how to respond. Individuals who have not developed their conflict management skills often respond based on their instinctive flight-fight impulse. This reactionary response to conflict situations seldom yields effective outcomes.

Effective conflict managers are able to control their initial instinctive response, and therefore, are able to strategically choose the most appropriate response based on their goal(s) in the given situation. These individuals do not respond based simply on habit or emotions, but base their responses on practical factors.

Researchers¹ have established that when confronted with a conflict situation, individuals choose from five basic conflict response styles which are commonly labeled as:

- avoiding
- accommodating
- compromising
- competing
- collaborating.

Individuals tend to prefer one style to the others, but in each conflict situation individuals have a choice to select the appropriate response style. The selection of the response style is critical to effective resolution. None of the conflict response styles are necessarily right or wrong; it's the appropriate matching of a response style to each conflict solution that determines whether the response results in escalation or constructive resolution of the conflict.

Avoiding Response

Individuals who use the avoiding response appropriately choose it to stay clear of trivial conflicts, cool down and reduce feelings of stress, gather additional information, and/or save resources when there is little or no chance of satisfying their interests. These individuals do not fear conflict, they simply pick their battles wisely. It is important to note that these individuals sometimes only choose avoiding as the first step, then select another response style to resolve the conflict after they have cooled down or gathered the appropriate information.

Individuals who use the avoiding response inappropriately tend to view any conflict as negative and something to avoid at almost any cost. In general, these individuals have a feeling of hopelessness in a conflict and are willing to allow others to make decisions about how the conflict should be resolved. It is difficult for these individuals to achieve their personal goals or maintain constructive relationships.

Accommodating Response

Individuals who place a high value on a personal relationship or accept another person's perspective use the accommodating response. In general, individuals who choose this response style are willing to listen with an open mind, be agreeable and flexible, sidestep conflict or unpleasant exchanges, acknowledge errors, strive to create and preserve positive relationships.

This response style is used appropriately for conflicts in which an individual has determined that the relationship is more important than achieving the desired goal, a constructive relationship is the goal or the other person is correct.

The accommodating response is inappropriate for conflict situations in which an individual's goals are very important. These individuals mistakenly attempt to maintain a relationship at all costs with little or no concern for their goals. Although their willingness to give in and appease the other person prevents harming the relationship, important goals are not satisfied.

Compromising Response

Individuals who choose the compromising response believe that something is better than nothing for both sides. In general, these individuals believe that a win-win solution is not possible and seek an expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies each of the parties involved.

The compromising response is inappropriate if it is being used routinely to get a "quick fix" for a long-term problem or if it is forestalling the exchange of information that would create a win-win resolution.

However, the compromising response is appropriate in situations in which satisfying all interests is not important or in which full satisfaction of interests does not justify the outlay of resources. In these situations, compromise provides a relatively quick resolution under time pressures and offers a way out of an impasse.

Competitive Response

Individuals who choose the competitive response are assertive and focus heavily on their goal(s). In general, these individuals assume that a win-win solution is not possible and that it is important for them to satisfy their goal(s).

Appropriate use of the competitive response occurs when an individual must make quick, decisive decisions or when an individual must commit to a particular position or principle.

It is inappropriate to select the competitive response when an immediate decision is not required and an on-going relationship between the individuals is important to satisfy long-term goals. Individuals who frequently use this response style are often labeled “difficult” because they believe they do not need information from others and view every conflict as a win-lose situation. Overuse of the competing response tends to damage relationships, create adversarial attitudes, and prevent effective conflict resolution over the long term.

Collaborative Response

Individuals who choose the collaborative response emphasize objectivity and the use of information and creativity to achieve mutually beneficial agreements. In general, this response is used by individuals who want to resolve a conflict through a process that maintains/improves relationship and helps all individuals achieve their goals. An important characteristic of the collaborating response is that it does not require an individual to decide whether preserving the relationship or satisfying goals is more important, because it attempts to achieve both. This conflict response style tends to create trust and therefore individuals are more willing to cooperate. As a result, the individuals improve relationships and build a sense of ownership in an agreement, which makes implementation and maintenance of the agreement much easier.

The collaborating response is appropriate when input from several individuals is necessary to achieve the best solution or when buy-in is necessary for effective implementation of a solution.

Because the collaborating response requires time for individuals to meet and share information and ideas, it is inappropriate to use this style when issues are trivial or a quick, decisive answer is required.

In Summary

Effective conflict management requires strategic responses that guided by the interests and goals involved in the conflict situation.

Poor conflict response habits, like most habits, are routine behaviors acted out without any conscious thought. Often these conflict habits are learned and just become a ritual way of handling conflicts. These habits can be overcome by acknowledging them and by remember to be strategic – instead of reactionary – when choosing a conflict response style.

EMPATHETIC LISTENING

If time permits review this section with the group. If not just point it out let the participants review it on their own.

Empathic listening is the skill of hearing a speaker's message and reflecting it back in a way that captures what the speaker has said in the listener's own words. This is an especially important skill in conflict situations because it lets other people know that they have been heard and understood. During problem solving, an empathic statement should reflect the facts and feelings expressed by the speaker.

Empathic listening enhances the conflict management process by:

- Allowing venting that helps dissipate the emotions
- Demonstrating a willingness to listen and try to understand the speaker's perspective
- Helping to clarify the listener's understanding of the feelings that are underlying the facts in the conflict situation

Effective empathic listeners also possess the skill to appropriately express their emotions as discussed earlier in this manual. Therefore, effective empathic listeners are able to de-escalate conflict situations by helping others to express their emotions in a more appropriate way.

Empathic listening restatements should not include the words, "I understand why or how you could feel . . ." Telling individuals involved in the conflict that you "can understand just how they feel" may make them angry. Instead, it is best to begin by saying, "After listening to you I hear you saying . . ." or "Let me see if I understand what you are saying" or some other introductory phrase that is comfortable for you. ·