Managing Conflict

Conflict occurs when individuals or groups are not obtaining what they need or want and are seeking their own self-interest. Sometimes the individual is not aware of the need and unconsciously starts to act out. Other times, the individual is very aware of what he or she wants and actively works at achieving the goal. It’s important to recognize that conflict is inevitable. However, there are strategies to help manage, divert, and/or resolve conflict.

Beginnings of Conflict & Conflict Indicators

- Poor communication
- Seeking power
- Dissatisfaction with management style
- Weak leadership
- Lack of openness
- Change in leadership
- Body language
- Disagreements, regardless of issue
- Withholding bad news
- Surprises
- Strong public statements
- Airing disagreements through media
- Conflicts in value system
- Desire for power
- Increasing lack of respect
- Open disagreement
- Lack of candor on budget problems or other sensitive issues
- Lack of clear goals
- No discussion of progress or failure relative to goals
- Failure to evaluate the leadership fairly, thoroughly, or at all

Conflict is CONSTRUCTIVE When It...

- Results in clarification of important problems and issues
- Results in solutions to problems
- Involves people in resolving issues important to them
- Causes authentic communication
- Helps release emotion, anxiety, and stress
- Builds cooperation among people through learning more about each other, joining in resolving the conflict
- Helps individuals develop understanding and skills

Conflict is DESTRUCTIVE When It...

- Takes attention away from other important activities
- Undermines morale or self-concept
- Polarizes people and groups, reducing cooperation
- Increases or sharpens difference
- Leads to irresponsible and harmful behavior, such as fighting, name-calling

For more information, call 732-932-6978 or e-mail osi@echo.rutgers.edu
Managing Conflict (Continued)

Techniques for Resolving Conflict:
- Meet conflict head on
- Set goals
- Plan for and communicate frequently
- Be honest about concerns
- Agree to disagree - understand healthy disagreement would build better decisions
- Get individual ego out of management style
- Let your team create - people will support what they help create
- Discuss differences in values openly
- Continually stress the importance of following policy
- Communicate honestly - avoid playing "gotcha" type games
- Provide more data and information than is needed
- Develop a sound management system

Eliciting Resistance vs. Gaining Cooperation
(Adapted from the University of Colorado Ombudsman Office)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviors that Elicit Resistance</th>
<th>Behaviors that Gain Cooperation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insisting that the other person admits to being wrong</td>
<td>Acknowledging responsibility for part of the problem, whenever possible (Ex: I hadn't seen it before, but I think I did make some mistakes in the way I approached you.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimizing or ignoring the other's feelings</td>
<td>Acknowledging the other person’s perspectives whenever possible (Ex: I hadn't considered this from your perspective before, but I see how it looked that way to you.)</td>
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<td>Lying about, denying, or misrepresenting information known to the other party</td>
<td>Being honest with one another</td>
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<td>Blaming the other for problems with “you” statements (Ex: You make me mad when you forget to lock the door when you leave the office!)</td>
<td>Using “I” statements rather than “you” statements (Ex: I want to respond to your questions, but I need some time to think about it first)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating condescension (Ex: You mean to tell me that you’re just figuring that out?)</td>
<td>Conveying you have been listening attentively (Ex: It sounds as if your biggest concern with this program is…)</td>
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<td>Questioning the other party’s honesty, integrity, intelligence, or competence</td>
<td>Giving credit to good ideas</td>
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<td>Making offensive non-verbal expressions or gestures (Ex: rolling the eyes, loud sighs, laughing, interrupting)</td>
<td>Making appropriate eye contact. This is culturally dependant, based on the comfort level of the other person</td>
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<td>Making interpretations of what the other party says based on stereotypes or preconceived beliefs (Ex: All of you never want to attend any of the organization’s programs!)</td>
<td>Avoiding assumptions (Ex: Could you help me understand why that day doesn’t work for you?)</td>
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