Managing Conflict in the Workplace

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Our Agenda

• Briefly discuss the causes and costs of workplace conflict

• Define and explore the “dynamics” of conflict and uncivil behavior in 2017

• Learn skills you can practice to manage conflict and improve relationships with coworkers and residents
Contributors to Conflict & Incivility

- Doing more with less
- Economic issues
- Long hours/overwork
- Pace of change, technology
- Personal & workplace stress
- Generational differences
- Personality differences
- Passive aggression, hurt feelings, unresolved anger or personal baggage
- Intolerance of individual differences

Costs of Organizational Conflict

Think of an actual conflict you know well . . .
“Pure waste, no value added”

Costs in illustration:

1. Wasted time $28,000
2. Reduced decision quality $0
3. Lost employees $50,400
4. Restructuring $0
5. Sabotage / theft / damage $0
6. Lowered job motivation $11,200
7. Lost work time $1,792
8. Health costs $1,200

Total cost of only one conflict: $92,592

1 Illustration makes conservative assumption that this factor did not incur cost.
2 Assume one of the $40k employees resigned; conflict played average role

What is Conflict?

• What is conflict to you?
• 3 words to describe
• What does it look like?
• What have you already learned about conflict in your life? Where did you learn it?
The Clash

Conflict Basics

• Conflict is inevitable in relationships

• Systems need variety in members thinking

• Attitude influences outcome: we’ve learned “messages” about conflict

• Conflict can be open or suppressed

• There are positive ways to manage conflict
The Incivility Spiral
(adapted from Andersson & Pearson, 1999)

Desire for reciprocation or revenge

Perception of Unfairness
Negative Feelings

Uncivil Behavior

“An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind”

~Mahatma Gandhi
The Incivility Continuum

Negative Behavior
- Rude comments
- Insensitive actions
- Unintentional slights
- Complaining
- Gossip/rumors
- Cultural bias
- Crude jokes
- Profanity

Verbal Aggression
- Yelling / loud voice
- Belittling comments
- Intimidation / threats
- Discriminatory comments
- Cursing at someone
- Humiliation

Physical/Sexual Aggression
- Assault / Battery
- Throwing objects
- Violent outbursts
- Inappropriate touching
- Harrassment

Electronic Incivility
- E-Mail, text, cell phones, & social media
- Inappropriate use of cell phones, poor boundaries at home and work
- Expectation of immediate reply = Stress
- Stress = Increased probability of conflict
- Indirect communication and gossip
- Use of posts, forums, to victimize
- Cyber-mobbing: many people against one
Two Areas of Conflict

• Personality Clashes
  – Differences in behavior styles, attitudes, beliefs, opinions

• Structure of Work
  – Overlapping responsibility, use of same equipment, conflicting priorities

Dynamics: Issues at the Heart of Conflict

• Trust

• Safety

• Respect
The Conflict Spectrum

Constructive

- Misunderstandings are clarified
- Open and ongoing communication
- Teamwork is strengthened
- **Opportunity** for positive adaptive change

Destructive

- Comments are taken as personal attacks
- Information exchange is restricted
- Individuals grow to mistrust each other
- Manipulative behaviors

What conflict styles do you see in the workplace?

- Avoiding (Win Lose)
- Directing (Power decides, efficient)
- Accommodating (Giving in, passive-aggressive, sacrifice for relationship)
- Compromising (quick fix, temporary)
- Collaborate (Win/Win Resolution takes time)
Top Reasons People Avoid Conflict

- Fear of harm
- Fear of rejection
- Fear of anger
- Fear of being seen as selfish
- Fear of saying the wrong thing
- Fear of intimacy
- Fear of failing
- Fear of hurting someone else
- Fear of looking foolish
- Fear of getting what you want
- Just plain **FEAR**

Managing Conflict Takes Knowledge and Skill
Management

• “We both have a piece of the truth. Let’s work it out.”

• Learn to listen to each other, to state their own needs, wants, and desires, and to really hear those of the other person.

• Commitment to stay in the struggle long enough to come out with a solution

Top Priority in Handling Conflict

• Avoid “triangles”, send the mail to the right address

• Engage the other party directly

• Your approach to dealing with the conflict drives the outcome

• Go to “the source” and coach others to do the same
Examine the “Link”

• Conflict Management
• Effective Communication Skills

Communication Challenges

• Not always easy
• Not always natural
• Some people speak your language
• We don’t always say what we mean
• Miss-understanding occurs
• What we intend is not what is heard
Communication Guidelines

• Balance In Participation
• Be Concise
• Own & Take Responsibility For Your Feelings
• Speak For Yourself (Use I statements)
• Avoid Blaming & Fault Finding
• Ask Clarifying Questions
• Positive, Constructive Attitude

Words that Promote Conflict

• “You must…”
• “You lied to me”
• “This is so typical of you…”
• “You always/you never”
• “The problem is…”
• “If you don’t do this, then…”
• “You’ll never change”
• “You’re being hysterical”
Defusing Anger

• Stay calm; curb your reactions
• Let them vent
• Deescalate – don’t climb the mountain of anger with them
• Collect the facts
• Clarify and repeat what you think you heard

Key Skills When Managing Conflicts

• Active Listening
• Validation: Letting a person know that you understand how they feel (does not = agreement)
• Paying Attention: Eye contact, voice tone, noticing when safety is at risk
• Not Jumping to Conclusions
• Allowing Time and Space
• Time Outs & Redirection
• Control the Environment
Crucial Conversations

- Start with Heart: Stay focused on what you really want
- Learn to Look: Notice when safety is at risk
- Make it Safe: Step out of the conversation
- Master My Stories: Go back to the facts
- State My Path: Speak persuasively, not abrasively
- Explore Others Path: Ask, be curious
- Move to Action: Who does what and when

Successful Conflict Conversations

- Find a Time to Talk
- Plan the Context
- Talk it Out
- Make a Deal
Successful Conflict Conversations

• Find a Time to Talk
  Have a conversation about having a conversation

Plan the Context

• Agree to the Ground Rules:
  No walk aways
  No power plays
Talk it Out

- State your Intentions
- Express appreciation, optimism
- Focus on listening
- *Stay* in the process
- Reward conciliatory gestures
- Notice when safety is at risk

Make a Deal

- Balance give and takes
- Specify behavior
- Plan for follow up
- Focus on prevention
Resources

• *Crucial Conversations*, by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler
• 24 hour access to EAP counselors: **(800) 327-4692**
• Short-term counseling/assessment, financial and legal consultations
• Web site access: [www.efr.org/myeap](http://www.efr.org/myeap)

Thank you!
Questions, comments

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