

Conflict Management

Let's be honest...whenever you're in a group, conflicts arise. That's not a bad thing unless leaders fail to properly manage those issues. It's important for effective leaders to handle conflict well and mediate situations efficiently and appropriately. Conflicts which arise can potentially become destructive and jeopardize the group's dynamics. Being able to analyze the issues, explore the many facets of the problem, and neutralize the conflict is an important skill for all leaders to have. Whether in college or in the workplace, conflict management is especially important for all individuals to feel comfortable with. Don't run from conflict; keep in mind that many of the best organizations grow from difficult conflicts.

Styles of Conflict Management

- Competing—An individual pursues his/her own concerns at the other person's expense.
- Accommodating—The opposite of competing; an individual neglects his/her own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person.
- Avoiding—The individual does not immediately pursue his/her own concerns or those of the other person. He/she does not address the conflict.
- Compromising—The objective is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties.
- Collaborating—The opposite of avoiding; involves an attempt to work with the other person to find some solution which fully satisfies the concerns of both persons.

Conflict Resolution Methods

- Address the substance of the conflict.
- Address the procedures for dealing with the conflict (rules, policies, intervention strategies, etc.).
- Separate the relationships people have with the conflict from the conflict substance.
- Discuss perceptions of the conflict.
- Be sensitive to the emotions which may be stirred as a result of the conflict.
- Address the emotions and acknowledge them as legitimate.
- Listen actively.
- Focus on the interests, not positions.
- Look for compatible interests.
- Be hard on the conflict, soft on the people.
- Brainstorm your options to solve the conflict.
- Use equity and fairness in your standards & procedures.
- Reason and be open to reason.

Basic Confrontation Guidelines

- Be simple and direct as you speak, but proceed openly and smoothly.
- Know the basic facts of the behavior you are confronting, but don't try to come across as an expert.
- Be specific and clear in your confrontation.
- Confront behavior, not values. Pushing your values probably will not work.

- Care! At every available opportunity, communicate your interest in the person and ask him/her clarifying questions (i.e., How do you view your current behavior?)
- Show your feelings about the confrontation.
- Focus on the person's strengths rather than his/her weaknesses.
- Confront behavior in a positive and constructive manner.
- Attempt to make the confrontation objective in terms of specific observed behavior.
- Maintain the offensive. Don't let the individual put you on the defensive about your behavior.
- Stick to the issues. Don't let the person bring in a lot of outside circumstances and rationalities.
- Always avoid "I told you so" type comments.

Members of the Office of Student Engagement (OSE) staff are available to assist you with any questions you have regarding leadership issues. The OSE is open Monday through Friday 9 a.m.—5 p.m. For more information, please contact the office at 410.337.6124.