Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution

Introduction

- It is better to prevent conflict in the first place and manage it as it occurs, rather than try and resolve it after it has occurred.
    - The key to conflict prevention and management is good communication
    - Conflict prevention and management takes courage

- Conflict should not be viewed as bad, but rather as an important step in creating new and better things.

- The challenge of conflict is to transfer it into creative, positive outcomes rather than into more conflict.

Three types of disagreements

1. **Misunderstandings**
    - This is the cause of 90% of all disagreements
        - People simply misunderstand each other
    - The key to preventing, managing, and resolving this type of conflict is to invest in Understanding First!
        - Make sure you understand a situation before judging about it
        - Be open minded, ask questions, consider what things are like from the other's perspective, ask more questions.
    - Tips to understanding
        - Careful and active listening
            - Listen to and tell stories – each from one's own perspective.
            - Listening is the pipeline of information that leads to understanding.
            - Listen within – what is in your own heart?
        - Don't go on hearsay
            - Get the story straight from the source
        - Be always open minded
            - Don't get locked into a specific "position"
            - Changing your mind is okay

2. **Differing Values**
    - A small percent of conflicts are due to differing values……core values

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        - Examples: One person believes in limited government and another person believes in a large role for government. One person believes in hospital birth and another person believes in home birth. One person believes in the Red Sox and another person believes in the Yankees.
    - The key to preventing, managing, and resolving this type of conflict is to take stock of what you DO believe in together and tolerate the rest.
    - Tips for working together in spite of differing values:
        - Take stock of and appreciate your shared beliefs
            - Even though one might believe in the Yankees and one in the Red Sox, both believe in baseball.
            - If you can't agree on a particular step forward, remind each other of the last step you agreed on and try to take a smaller step from there.
        - Agree to disagree, with respect
            - Be nice to each other. Be respectful.
            - Don't hold a person's different values against them.
            - Don't treat anyone as "lesser than" in spite of their differing values.
        - Don't let your disagreement about one particular issue prevent you from working together on other issues.

3. **Outside Issues**
    - Some conflicts between people are due to an issue that has nothing to do with the issue at hand.
        - Examples: Some incident between the parties happened years ago and has never been dealt with. Someone has a mental illness such as an addiction which is affecting their judgment or behavior. Perhaps there's a simple misconception closely-held since childhood, or an unreasonable fear.
        - Outside issues are usually personal and often completely unrelated to the group's immediate business.
    - The key to preventing, managing, and resolving this type of conflict is encourage their resolution OUTSIDE the group; out of the office, for instance.
    - Tips for resolving outside issues:
        - Name it as an outside issue. Identify it as something that is unable to be solved by the group.
        - Encourage the parties to deal with it outside the group.
            - Perhaps therapy is called for, or mediation.
            - If they are unwilling or unable to resolve it outside the group, take a vote, hire an arbitrator, change their jobs, or somehow otherwise resolve the issue even over objection.
        - Losing is not always bad.
            - Sometimes it's the only thing that will allow some people to move forward.
            - It is better that one or two people lose a single issue than the group as a whole gets bogged down and unable to make progress.

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Basic Conflict Resolution Steps

1. **Pause – Breathe**
    - Step one is to remove yourself from the conflict
        - Don't risk saying or doing something you may regret
    - Take time for the tension to settle
    - Take time to consider your feelings, and the feelings of others, before reacting

2. **What are the stories?**
    - Each person in conflict should have a chance to tell their story.
        - How the conflict came about, from their perspective.
        - Why the conflict is a problem for them.
        - How the whole thing looks, from their perspective.
    - Each person in conflict should listen to the stories of others, without judgment.
        - Listen without judgment
            - Really try to put yourself in their shoes and imagine how it was/is for them
        - Acknowledge and validate what you are hearing
        - Imagine how the other person's experience could have led them toward thinking and acting as they did
    - Each person speaks for themselves
        - Use "I" statements
        - No "you should" statements
    - Oftentimes when the stories are told, understanding emerges and the conflict disappears at this stage.

3. **What are the feelings?**
    - If you are in conflict, share your feelings with another person. Tell them how you feel. If you are helping someone in conflict, encourage them to share their feelings.
    - Feelings are different than thoughts.
        - What we need to express and hear are real feelings.
        - Feelings have emotions bundled with them
        - "I feel that you need do x, y, z differently" is not a feeling. That's a thought.
        - Typical feelings are anger, sadness, joy, and fear.
    - No one can argue with your feelings
        - If you are able to express your true feelings, don't be concerned with how they will be received.
        - Speak your truth and let go of the outcome
    - Oftentimes when the true feelings are expressed, understanding emerges and the conflict disappears at this stage.

4. **What are the underlying interests?**

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- Each person in the conflict:
  - Identify your underlying interest. Ask yourself:
    - Why is this so important to me?
    - What is the need in me that resolving this conflict will satisfy?
    - What is my core interest here? Over the long run?
  - Hear and understand the underlying interests of others
- Identify common interests
  - Speak them out loud
  - Agree on a set of common interests
- Often, when the underlying interests are brought to light we see that they are very similar and the conflict shifts to coming up with solutions that meet the interests.
- Despite how things are, shared visions of how things could be hold us together and inspire us to work collaboratively

5. What are we going to do about it?

- Develop creative solutions that will meet all the interests
  - Brainstorm first – get all the wild ideas out on the table
  - Narrow ideas to a short list of solutions, perhaps even just one
- When discussing solutions, stick to "What am I going to do about it?"
  - Not what you think the other person should do
    - Focus on what YOU will do
    - Speak only for yourself
  - Name specific things that YOU are willing to do to make things better
- Summarize what each person says they will do
  - Make sure you have a common understanding of expectations going forward
  - It's often best if the specific "to-do's" are written. It could be: a letter, a memorandum of understanding, a written agreement, or a contract.
- "What each party is going to do about it" is a set of instructions for resolving the conflict.

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6. **Do it!**
    - The conflict will only be resolved if all the parties actually do what they said they would do, to the best of their ability.
    - Focus on doing YOUR part.

Note: Even if other parties in the conflict “leave the table” at any of the above stages, or if they refuse to do these steps at all, you can still do the steps yourself and that in itself will help resolve the conflict.

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