<u>CONFLICT MANAGEMENT</u>

<u>Introduction</u>
Webster's Dictionary defines conflict as "a battle, contest of opposing forces, discord, antagonism existing between primitive desires, instincts and moral, religious, or ethical ideals." Conflict occurs when two or more people or organizations disagree because their needs, wants, goals, or values are different. Hurt feelings, anger, bruised egos, and poor communication are all the precursors to conflict. However, conflict is NOT the end of the world, or your team or group. Some tools have been developed that will help us all recognize conflict and deal with it so that our group or team can move on, stronger than before.

<u>Lesson Objectives</u>
By the end of the lesson a learner should be able to:
1. Discuss red flags of conflict
2. Talk about why conflict can be both positive and negative
3. Discuss conflict management styles
4. Talk about the ways that individuals analyze conflict
5. Discuss ways that an individual can positive deal with difficult people while managing conflict.

<u>Lesson Content</u>
Most all of us have been in a conflict at some point in our lives. But did we know that conflict was coming? Could we have seen it, and "headed it off at the pass"? The National School Board Association has developed a *Toolkit for Educational Leadership* (http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/Conflict.html) that talks about conflict and what might be some "red flags" to look out for.

Red Flags of Conflict
- Body language
- Disagreements, regardless of issue
- Withholding bad news
- Surprises
- Strong public statements
- Airing disagreements through media
- Conflicts in value systems
- Desire for power
- Increasing lack of support
- Open disagreement
- Lack of candor on budget problems or other sensitive issues
- Lack of clear goals
- No discussion of progress, failed goals, and inability to evaluate leaders fairly, thoroughly, or at all.

Many people think of conflict as negative. But conflict can be both negative AND positive. The National School Board Association in their *Toolkit for Educational Leadership* (http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/Conflict.html) tells us that . . .

Conflict is negative when it…
- Takes attention away from other activities
- Damages the spirit of the team or an individual
- Divides people and groups, and makes cooperation difficult
- Makes people or group focus on their differences
- Leads to harmful behavior, like fighting or name-calling

But it can be positive or constructive when it…
- Clears up important problems or issues
- Brings about solutions to problems
- Gets everyone involved in solving issues
- Causes real communication
- Release emotion, anxiety, and stress in a positive way
- Helps people learn more about each other and cooperate
- Develops understanding and skills

While the definition of conflict and our feelings about it tend to be negative, conflict itself does not need to be negative! How we manage our conflict can sway the outcome, our feelings about the way it was handled, and the people involved conflict.

What is CONFLICT MANAGEMENT?

Conflict management is what we're doing when we identify and deal with conflict in a reasonable manner. To manage conflict the United States Department of Agriculture (http://www.usda.gov/cprc/understand.htm) says we must develop and use skills like effective communication, problem solving, and negotiating. When we resolve issues, we need to focus on the things we need or desire as a group, and not things needed or wanted by individuals. This promotes working with each other instead of against each other. There are some proven strategies that you can use to help resolve conflicts within your groups. The Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management (http://disputeresolution.ohio.gov/schools/contentpages/styles.htm) describes five popular styles.

- **Style 1- Collaborating**
    - **Why should I collaborate?:** Cooperation will help everyone achieve their goals and keep relationships healthy.
    - **A Collaborator's Attitude:** Talking through the conflict will help us find creative ways to solve our problems where everyone is satisfied in the end.
    - **When should I collaborate?:**
        - Everyone trust each other
        - No one wants total decision or resolution power
        - Everyone needs to have a part in the decision
        - Everyone involved will change their thinking as more information is available
        - People need to work through personal hurts and disappointments
    - **When should I choose another method?:**

- When you need a resolution that won't take a lot of time and money
- When some may take advantage of others' trust

- **STYLE 2-COMPROMISING**
  - **Why should I compromise?:** Winning something while losing a little is sometimes okay.
  - **A Compromiser's Attitude:** We should all meet halfway to do what is best for the group and each of us can still get part of what we want.
  - **When should I compromise?:**
    - No one at the table has more position or power than anyone else and everyone is equally committed to the group's goals.
    - Time can be saved by agreeing on a situation that works for everyone "for now"
    - Achieving all of your goals are only somewhat important
  - **When should I choose another method?:**
    - Things that are important to you may be lost in the fray
    - Someone's demands are too great for the rest of the table

- **STYLE 3-ACCOMODATING**
  - **Why should I accommodate?:** Our commonalities are more important than other issues and facing differences may hurt relationships.
  - **An accommodator's attitude:** I will please others by playing down how important the issue or conflict is in order to protect relationships.
  - **When should I accommodate?:**
    - Issues not as important to you as it is to others
    - You know you can't win
    - Everyone agreeing is the most important thing
    - The things people have in common are more important than their differences
  - **When should I choose another method?:**
    - Some ideas don't get attention
    - Credibility and influence can be lost

- **STYLE 4-COMPETING**
  - **Why should I compete?:** Resolving a conflict is associated with competition and winning.
  - **A competitor's attitude:** I must use all of my power to win the conflict.
  - **When should I compete?:**
    - You know you're right
    - A quick decision is necessary
    - Strong personalities are overshadowing other people
    - Defending your rights or position
  - **When should I choose another method?:**
    - Can make conflict worse
    - Those on the losing end may attempt to get back at the winners

- **STYLE 5-AVOIDING**
  - **Why should I avoid?:** Not the right time or place to address this issue.

- o **An avoider's attitude:** I avoid conflict by leaving, avoid, or putting off discussions.
- o **When should I avoid?:**
  - Conflict is small and the future of a relationships is at stake
  - There is no time to devote to conflict resolution
  - Other issues are more important than the conflict
  - There is no chance of getting your concerns heard
  - One party is too emotionally involved and others can better resolve the conflict
  - More information is needed
- o **When should I choose another method?:**
  - Decisions may be made by default
  - Putting off or avoiding issues may make matters worse

Dealing with People While Managing Conflict

Some people aren't willing to admit that they may not be the best at conflict management, but that doesn't mean that they aren't sometimes involved in the management process. You can't change the way that people behave or approach conflict, but you can arm yourself with some tools to help you successfully navigate conflict when not everyone is on the same page. Don Wallace and Scott McMurry talk about some of those tools using Robert Bramson's book *Coping with Difficult People* in an article titled <u>How to Disagree without Being Disagreeable</u> in the November 1995 issue of Fast Company Magazine (http://pf.fastcompany.com/online/01/disagree.html).

- **Sherman Tanks-** These intimidators get "in your face" to argue and state opinions as facts.
  1. Get their attention by using their first name to begin a sentence.
  2. Maintain eye contact; give them time to wind down.
  3. Stand up to them without fighting; don't worry about being polite.
  4. Suggest you sit down to continue discussions.

- **Snipers-** These individuals take potshots in meetings but avoid one-on-one confrontations.
  1. Expose the attack; draw them out in public and don't let social convention stop you.
  2. Get other opinions--don't give in to the sniper's views.
  3. Provide the sniper with alternatives to a direct contest.

- **Chronic Complainers-** These people find faults with everyone-except themselves.
  1. Politely interrupt and get control of the situation.
  2. Quickly sum up the facts.
  3. Ask for their complaints in writing.

- **Negativists-** These individuals know that nothing new will work; they'll disrupt group brainstorming sessions.
  1. Acknowledge their valid points.
  2. Describe past successes.
  3. Avoid "you're wrong, I'm right" arguments.

- **Exploders-** These individuals throw tantrums that quickly escalate.
  1. Give them time to regain self control.

2. If they don't, shout a neutral phrase such as "STOP!"
3. Take a time-out or have a private meeting with them.

Steps to Analyzing Conflict

How can you manage conflict and disagreements in ways that strengthen instead of damage personal and professional relationships? These five steps from the Watershed information Network at Purdue University (http://www.ctic.purdue.edu/KYW/Brochures/ManageConflict.html) could help you out…

- **STEP 1: ANALYZE THE CONFLICT**
  Don't be afraid to ask questions of everyone involved. Take in answers from a variety of sources, and gain as much information as you can.

- **STEP 2: DETERMINE YOUR MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**
  When you understand the basis of the conflict and everyone involved, you will need to develop a plan to manage the conflict. There are many plans to choose from, so you can pick the one that is most appropriate for your situation.

- **STEP 3: PRE-NEGOTIATION**
  Steps must be taken for discussion to begin. This to think about include:
  - Someone has to start the conversation! If neither party is willing to do so, bring in an outsider who will remain neutral to begin discussions.
  - Everyone must be ready to come to the table, to work together, and resolve the issues.
  - The group must agree on rules for the discussion. Some ideas of things to include are: ways we'll communicate and how we'll make the final decision.
  - BE ORGANIZED! Location, time, place and materials must all be in order for conflict management to work.
  - Everyone at the table must agree on what information is put on the table, relevant to the conflict, and how the group will get answers to questions.

- **STEP 4: NEGOTIATION**
  Negotiations should be discussions that include:
  - Reasons, needs, concerns and motivations for differing positions
  - Current options
  - Evaluation of all the current options
  - Written agreement that documents what everyone understands
  - Everyone must be confident that all parties will follow through with their parts of the agreement. Make sure everyone is on the same page and understands the expectations.

- **STEP 5: POST-NEGOTIATION**
  Once negotiation is complete, the group should take the actions they decided upon.
  - Individuals should get support from outside parties who may have been involved in some way. Outsiders must be on board with the terms of the agreements reached during Step 4.

- Communication and working together should continue throughout this process.

Reflection

☐ Identify a time when you've been in a conflict. How did you behave? Did you escalate or de-escalate the situation? If you could replay the situation, what would you do differently?

☐ Identify times when you have behaved like one of the "conflict problem people" listed in the brochure. How can we keep ourselves in check so that we don't repeat past mistakes?

☐ How can you implement the strategies contained in this lesson in your club or group?

Resources

National School Board Association. *Toolkit for Educational Leadership.* Retrieved electronically from http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/Conflict.html on October 5, 2003.

Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management. *Choosing a Conflict Management Style.* Retrieved electronically from http://disputeresolution.ohio.gov/schools/contentpages/styles.htm on October 5, 2003.

United States Department of Agriculture. *Understanding conflict management and ADR.* Retrieved electronically from http://www.usda.gov/cprc/understand.htm on October 5, 2003.

Wallace, D. & McMurry S. (1995) How to Disagree without Being Disagreeable . *Fast Company Magazine* . Retrieved electronically from http://pf.fastcompany.com/online/01/disagree.html on October 5, 2003.

Watershed Information Network at Purdue University. Managing Conflict. Retrieved electronically from http://www.ctic.purdue.edu/KYW/Brochures/ManageConflict.html on October 5, 2003.