Managing Conflict on Your Team



Conflict among members of any group is inevitable. While you might prefer to avoid conflict by ignoring it, you do so at great peril. Avoiding conflict instead of managing it will contaminate the team's functioning. That's why effective leaders harness the creative power of difference and manage conflict.

How do you resolve a conflict and limit the damage to the organization? By identifying the conflict early and providing an immediate resolution process. If you are far enough removed from the problem, you can manage that process. Otherwise, someone more objective should step in.

Begin by examining your possible role in the conflict. Have you communicated clearly with the people involved, without ambiguity, in a timely manner, addressing the priority issues that need addressing? Second, have your actions been consistent with your words? If the answer in either case is no, then you are contributing to the conflict.

Of course, you aren't the only, or most frequent, cause of conflict within the team. Conflict often arises among the individuals of the team because they have values, behaviors, and goals that may conflict with someone else's.

As a manager, you must take an active approach to conflict resolution. No matter how serious the problem appears on the surface, bring the parties together and make them aware of the need for resolution. If the root of the problem is minor, quick attention should ensure that it stays minor. A little attention may even cause it to resolve itself in the routine of a busy work schedule. If, however, you feel the conflict is serious enough to interfere with that routine, take immediate steps to resolve it.

Get all parties together. Schedule a time and place for discussion, inviting all those who are part of the conflict or directly affected by it to participate.

Talk it through. Get input from all parties about their needs, fears, problems, issues, and so on – anything that may contribute to the conflict, even indirectly. No matter how well you maintain objectivity, you may be seen as playing favorites. If you think this situation is likely to arise, get help from a third party outside the team. This individual should be someone neutral who will help people stay on track and allow everyone to be heard.

Create a diagram. List the various elements that are contributing to the conflict and

create a diagram to display the competing needs, feelings, goals and concerns. The purpose is to illustrate how these items relate to one another and how much each issue matters to each party. Use three colors in creating the diagram:

- RED for issues that are extremely important to someone or some group;
- ORANGE for issues that are moderately important – negotiable to some degree; and
- BLUE for issues that are of minor concern, in which participants have little emotional investment. The contrasting colors help you to see the degree of interest or energy in the various positions.

Identify and implement the best-fit solution. Have the participants identify the most mutually acceptable position by plotting on the diagram a “best fit” line. This line is determined by finding the path among the issues that satisfies the most serious needs of the parties without doing harm to any of them.

Your leadership will determine whether differences in your team become divisive liabilities, or creative assets.

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John is an accomplished sales person and manager with over 17 years sales and sales management experience. Beginning in sales in 1990 as a sales representative, he progressed to territory manager, sales manager, division manager and national sales and marketing manager roles throughout his career.

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Successful in accelerating growth through strategic leadership, John knows first hand the value of a sales training approach that follows a learning philosophy of ongoing reinforcement. He is experienced in driving the behaviours, attitudes and techniques required of an effective sales team.

Sandler Training is offered on a regular basis from training centers in Kelowna and Kamloops and through innovative distance learning programs to the rest of the BC Interior.

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