

Conflict Resolution

Conflict is an unavoidable part of life and this is especially true when working with organizations. Conflicts can arise between students, with the College, with outside sources, and with advisors. Effective advisors and student leaders must have a good understanding of conflict and ways to resolve them. Below are some examples of how to effectively handle conflict in your organization.

Six Helpful Hints for Conflict Mediation

1. Do not take sides. When necessary, ask questions for clarification or feedback of your perceptions (don't devalue their position, help make them aware of how others perceive them).
2. Employ a win-win strategy when possible so that each person can walk away feeling understood and feeling as if they won part of the conflict.
3. Help assure that each person's personal integrity is maintained and that individuals do not feel humiliated or put down.
4. Get the conflicts out in the open where they can be discussed among the individuals.
5. Be aware of barriers to conflict resolution (i.e. defensiveness, judgmental reactions, etc.).
6. Do not heighten the conflict by bringing in more people than necessary.

Collaborative Approach to Conflict Resolution

1. Diagnose the problem. It is important that you start out with a clear understanding of what the true conflict is. Is it philosophical, personal, cultural? Is it about different expectations they might have of each other? To determine the problem, it's important that you really listen to what everyone is saying.
2. Initiate a discussion. Bring the conflicting parties together and state the problem simply and nondefensively. Remind everyone to listen to and respect each other and try to "respond" rather than "react". Paraphrase what others are saying in order to be sure everyone is being understood.
3. Problem solve. As a group, generate as many solutions as you possibly can. Make sure everyone understands this is just brainstorming, there are no good or bad answers. Don't judge other people. When it seems that there are no more ideas for alternative solutions, it's time to move on to discuss what you have come up with. Let everyone have a say, but be careful to control the way things are said. Don't let anyone coerce others in the group into agreeing with them. Try to reach a consensus and then implement the solution. This might include assigning people to certain tasks.
4. Evaluation. It's important to follow up a little bit later and see how everyone feels about the solution that was reached and whether or not it has been successful. Also evaluate the process that was used and find out how the group members felt about themselves and the group during the process.

7-Step Plan for Confrontation

Step One: Initiate Contact

Understandably, first you must make contact with the person to be confronted in an appropriate setting. It is best to pick a private place where both individuals do not feel threatened. Also, it is advisable to not "gang-up" on the individual during the initial confrontation. A confrontation team of two or more should only be used for a re-confrontation or for individuals who are perceived to be very resistant to change and only responsive to group opinion or pressure.

Step Two: Establish Rapport

Your second step is to establish a positive rapport with the person. This means the creation of a sense of mutual trust - a sense that both people present really care about each other. Attempts to create an artificial rapport will fail as people are usually more sensitive than we might believe.

Step Three: Identify Issue/Problem

Working with the person, identify the issue or problem that prompted you to seek him or her out. He/she must agree that there is a problem. If not, you must return to Step Two. During the problem identification process, it is important that you not ask the question "Why?" If you do, you will be told why - and that becomes the reason or excuse for the behavior, the justification - at least in the eyes of the other individual. You may ask "What?" but don't let the person's excuse trap you.

Step Four: Problem is Agreed Upon

The individual being confronted must agree that a problem does, in fact, exist. Otherwise, the person will not buy-in to the following steps - they will lack the necessary motivation. If they do not agree that a problem exists, you must return to either Step Two or Step Three.

Step Five: Obtain Attainable Commitment

After the person agrees that a problem exists, you must mutually agree upon an attainable commitment on his/her part. It must be a commitment which the person has the potential to fulfill. You must provide the person with an opportunity to win, to succeed.

Step Six: Keep Commitment

On a mutually predetermined date and time, get together again with the individual to determine whether or not he/she has been able to keep the commitment. If so, move to Step Seven. If not, return to Step Five and re-determine what is an attainable commitment from the person.

Step Seven: Praise Success

When a success is realized, offer praise and positive feedback. Then obtain a commitment for further changes by returning to Step Five and extending what was an attainable commitment. If the individual has not been successful, without being negative, again return to Step Five and reassess what might be an attainable commitment.