

Achieving Results

A Black Diamond Associates Publication

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Conflict – Productive or Poisonous?

As the clock ticks down on the August 2nd deadline for our nation's leaders to raise the debt ceiling or incur default, the drama that is playing out in Washington may resemble what is happening in companies across the country. Conflict, which at one point generated creative ideas and solutions, has become divisive and destructive. Leaving politics aside, as a business leader the question for you to consider is whether the conflict in your organization is productive or poisonous.



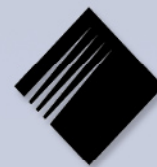
Conflict in any organization is unavoidable. Whenever there are two or more people coming together to create a team, department, company or community, varying perspectives and opinions will inevitably lead to disagreement. In the right environment different perspectives is a positive influence that leads to better decisions. However in toxic environments, conflict poisons and progress is halted. The difference between these two environments can be found in the leadership. Where do you stand?

Is your organization prosperous?

In a prosperous organization, the people share a strong sense of mutual purpose. As a result, their achievements are synergistic and together they accomplish what they could never do alone. People grow just by being a part of the team. Others, including competitors are inspired by the achievements of the prosperous organization. When conflict arises, creativity is sparked and problems become opportunities. Innovation and process improvement is rewarded.

Is your team poisonous?

At the other end of the spectrum is the poisonous organization. With visionless leadership, the organization is marked with low



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IConflict comes in all shapes and sizes. It exists in all organizations at the individual, team, and department level. Sometimes, conflict is the spark that lights the fire of innovation. Other times, it can be the flame that consumes and destroys.

If conflict in your organization is holding you back, Black Diamond Associates can help. We work with organizations to develop leaders who inspire success. Give us a call.

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morale, territorial behavior and a “me first” spirit. Conflict is destructive and blaming is the standard approach to problem solving. When customers are disappointed, they become the enemy. Poisonous teams become a drag on the larger community to which they belong.

Are you just getting by?

Somewhere in the middle of these two extremes is the purposeless organization. There is an absence of a team spirit as the activities become repetitive and routine. The purposeless organization lacks a passion to be together or achieve because they lack a clear sense of purpose. As a result, their achievements are modest, sporadic or at least below their potential. Conflict in the purposeless organization is trivial, constant and people are drained by the experience.

The role of the leader

In larger organizations, it is possible to find all three types of teams operating. The difference is in the leadership. Leaders of prosperous organizations set a clear vision that unites the team with passion for moving forward. They understand that they are responsible for continuously keeping the team focused on the goal. When conflict arises about what to do, this leader makes sure everyone keeps their sights on where they are going. Decision making becomes a function of the best approach to achieve that common goal.

You may not be able to directly influence negotiations in Washington, but you can have an impact on your organization. If you’re in charge, you’re responsible.

Four Ways to Get Employees to Address Conflict

By Angela Baca

Employees can enjoy a more productive working environment if they will bring sources of conflict out into the open. Leaving conflict unaddressed is not healthy for professional working relationships. That’s because conflict is a barrier to effective communication. This barrier is easily removed when a manager is not afraid to get employees to talk about conflict. Here are four ways to get employees to begin discussing issues they have with each other in the workplace:

Direct Confrontation

Some people prefer to approach conflict by confronting a person or group. They believe that getting differences out in the open is a task to be accomplished at any time. However, confrontation can actually make conflicts between colleagues worse. Some coworkers do not like being confronted.

If you have decided to address conflict head-on, you should respect another person’s right to participate in this kind of discussion at an appropriate time. Use a common managerial technique—schedule a meeting to discuss the problem instead of putting someone on the spot.

Question and Test

You can also discuss a problem in a group using the question and test method. Someone in a group must be willing to ask the question of what the conflict seems to be. If you are the person who asks the question, continue by describing what you think the problem is. Then

ask other members of the group to respond. In their responses, other group members might agree with you, modify your assessment, deny there is a problem, or suggest an entirely different problem. When you open the dialogue, ask a question, and test your idea, you employ a non-threatening approach. Encourage people to discuss differences without any person being able to claim he is being attacked in the discussion.

Bring in a Facilitator

Get things out in the open by bringing in a facilitator, such as an HR person trained in conflict resolution. This person should have no bias or preference toward any member of the group. Group members need to feel safe before they will share their differences. If you don’t use a facilitator and you are the person in charge of the workplace or team, you will have to use a more direct approach to discussing conflict.

Place an Issue on the Team Agenda

In a work team, a conflict between two or more people can prevent team success. The team leader can put a sensitive issue or conflict on the agenda for the next team meeting. Team members deserve to receive advance notification of the meeting agenda. When the meeting takes place, if several team members are not present, you should table the topic. All team members should attend when a conflict will be discussed.

As a leader, use whatever strategies you can to get the members of a workplace, or a small work team, to discuss conflict. Your efforts will help your coworkers to establish more harmony in the workplace.