Problem Solving - Dealing with Conflict and Confrontation

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Conflict

- Conflict is inevitable
- Change causes conflict, not good or bad
- Can be disruptive and destructive
- Is a dangerous opportunity
- Prevents stagnation
- Stimulates interest
- Fosters creativity
- Can’t totally eliminate conflict but it can be averted by prevention and control methods

Conflict Prevention

- Use Fewer Roadblocks
  - (ordering, threatening, judging, name-calling)
- Use Reflective (active) listening
- Use assertion skills when needed to prevent build up of emotions
- Be aware of behaviors (triggers) likely to start conflicts
- Increase emotional support
Conflict Management Strategies
One you choose depends on:
• your short term and long term goals
• your emotional state
• assessment of the situation
• the power ratio involved
• your communication competence
• personality - assertive, passive, aggressive

Handling Emotions of Conflict
• Conflict has emotions and substance
• Focus on emotions first
• Rules of Conflict Resolution
  – Treat the other person with respect
  – Experience the “other side”
  – State your views, needs and feelings

One view...
the “zero-sum game”
Another view…
creating “win-win” solutions

Model of Conflict Resolution

- Approach (be available)
- Define the Conflict (content issues)
- Gather Data (without judgments)
- Generate Possible Solutions
- Follow Through

Conflict Scenario

- Two four-year old children run to get a yellow hula-hoop. They reach it simultaneously and start pulling on it, yelling “MINE!” One child starts stepping in front of the other child to block them from the hoop. OK teacher, how do you handle this teachable moment?
Approach:
- Close enough to intervene if necessary
- You've signaled your awareness and availability
- At this point we hope the children will be able to resolve the situation to their mutual satisfaction. If there is no further conflict, if the children are able to resolve the issue themselves, no further action is necessary. If the children are not able to reach a mutually acceptable solution, it may be necessary to help them understand their feelings. Give them the tools to articulate what they are going through...

Define the Problem:
- Describe the scene
  - “It looks like you both want the yellow hoop.”
- Reflect what the children have said
  - “I see you are yelling at each other and are angry.”
- NO JUDGMENTS, NO VALUES, NO SOLUTIONS
- If the children are not able to reach a mutually acceptable solution, it may be necessary to ask more questions in order to help them get to the root of the problem and to understand their emotions...

Gather Data:
- Not directed toward pinpointing blame or fault.
- Drawing out details, defining problems.
- Help children communicate vs. slugging it out:
  - “How did this happen?”
  - “What do you want to tell her?”
  - “How could you solve this problem?”
  - “How could you use it without fighting?”
- If the children are still involved in conflict, it may be necessary to provide a little direction without solving the problem for them...
Generate Alternatives:

• ASK QUESTIONS - Give children the job of thinking and figuring out how they are going to solve their problem.
  - “How are we going to solve this problem?”
• Agree on a solution:
  - For example, they might say
    - “We could take turns.”
    - “That’s not fair, we wanted both... I will use a red hoop.”
    - “We could both do flips.”
    - “We could both do something else.”
    - “We can just use it.”
• Some of the things the children come up with would never occur to us but will work well for them.
• If there is still no resolution, if the children have not been able to solve their own problem, it may require that the teacher become more actively involved...

Follow Through

• Model appropriate behavior.
• Narrate the model behavior.
• BOTTOM LINE GOAL is to resolve the social conflict with as little “third-party” involvement as possible.
• Last resort is to solve the problem if they can’t:
  - “It looks like this is too hard for you two to figure out. This is what we’ll do...”

Implementation tools

• Ground rules
• Agreements (informal)
• Contracts (formal)
• Plans
• Rules, resolutions, policies, procedures (policymaking instruments)
• Use of “neutrals”
• Organizational arrangements
• Periodic review/monitoring
Model of Staff Conflict Resolution

- Address the emotions first
- Define the content issues
  - identify the content issues and the underlying relationship issues
  - who will pick up the mats vs whose time is more valuable
  - in specific terms “you are cold and unfeeling vs you don’t support the rest of the staff”
  - see it from other person's point of view
  - don’t assume

Model of Staff Conflict Resolution

- Examine Possible Solutions
  - identify as many solutions as possible
  - look for win-win
  - avoid win-lose
  - weigh cost and rewards
- Test the Solution
  - mentally
  - how does it feel, how will it feel tomorrow
  - would you all be comfortable with it
  - test in practice
  - put solution into operation

Examples of “Positions” vs. “Interests”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My position is…</th>
<th>My interest is…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I won’t pay a penny over $300 a month for team fees!”</td>
<td>I need to have money left over in case I need food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“$5,000 per month salary is my bottom line”</td>
<td>I can’t make any less and pay my bills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“$5,000 per month salary is my bottom line”</td>
<td>It’s only fair that I receive what the other coaches are receiving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This policy is not in the best interests of the community.”</td>
<td>It will take more manpower than what we can afford. We don’t see how it will produce results.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Conflict Resolution Skills

- Set up fair and orderly discussion
- Invite expression of others feelings, summarize, express your feelings
- Give uninterrupted time to talk and listen
- Give and request feedback
- Brainstorm resolutions evaluate options
- Agree to clear specific plan, timetable, evaluation method

Conflict Resolution Skills

- Reflective (Active) listening
- I - messages
- Competent communication
- Reframing - think of conflict as positive not just negative; put it in a positive light
- Address observable facts - issues relevant to conflict and your feelings.
- Ask to discuss issue

What NOT to do

- Avoidance, flight, denial
- Force (physically violent)
- Blame
- Give the silent treatment
- Guerilla warfare (passively aggressive)
- Fighting below the belt
- Verbal abuse
Model of Staff Conflict Resolution

• Evaluate the Solution
  – will it help resolve the conflict
  – will the situation be better or worse
  – share perception
  – might other solutions be more effective
• Accept or Reject the Solution
  – if accepted… put in permanently
  – if rejected… keep looking for solution

Recap

• The “outcome” should...
  – Be the product of a fair process
  – Be the result of a creative process
  – Be reached efficiently
  – Be as nearly self-enforcing as possible

Resources

• Susskind, Using Assisted Negotiation to Resolve Land Use Disputes. Lincoln Land Institute, 1998.
• Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In by Fisher and Ury
• Social Conflict: Resolution, Stalemate, and Settlement by Ruben, Pruitt, and Kim
• The Harvard Program on Negotiation: http://www.pon.org
• Crucial Conversations by Joseph Grenny