**Antecedents of Conflict**

Conflict is typically managed, directly or indirectly, before it has a chance to become disruptive, or even noticed by others. However, under conditions of prolonged or repeated uncertainty and stress, conflicts are likely to emerge more abruptly, dramatically and frequently.

In resolving the issue, these contextual factors need to be acknowledged and may even need to be addressed if the situation is to improve.

* Incompatible personalities or value systems.
* Overlapping or unclear job boundaries.
* Competition for limited resources.
* Interdepartmental/intergroup competition.
* Inadequate communication.
* Interdependent tasks (e.g. one person cannot complete his or her assignment until others have completed their work.)
* Organizational complexity (conflict tends to increase as the number of hierarchical layers and specialized tasks increase.)
* Unreasonable or unclear policies, standards or rules.
* Unreasonable deadlines or extreme time pressure.
* Collective decision making (the greater the number of people participating in a decision, the greater the potential for conflict.)
* Decision making by consensus.
* Unmet expectations (employee who have unrealistic expectation about job assignment, pay, or promotions are more prone to conflict.)
* Unresolved or suppressed conflicts.

**KEY QUESTIONS FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT**

1. What is the problematic behavior?
2. What is the impact of the behavior (Why do you care?)
3. What do you want the person to do differently?
4. What might *you* do to improve the situation?

**Steps in Approaching Conflict**

1. Acknowledge the conflict to yourself.
* Deal with your own feelings.
* Focus on issues and behaviors, not personalities.
* Confront a person only if you care about resolving the conflict. It is important to keep the other person’s interest in mind.
1. Define the problem.
* Identify the behavior that is problematic.
* Identify the impact of the behavior.
* What do you want the person to do differently?
* Recognize your inability to control others.
* What might you do to improve the situation?
1. Make a choice.
* Decide if you want to address the conflict. When?
* Decide if you are ready to listen to the other party.
* Seek to understand not necessarily to agreement. A significant hindrance to positive conflict resolution is having too many preconceived notions going into the conversation.
1. Create the environment for good communication.
* Find the right time.
* Find the right place: calm and private.
* Avoid crowds or time pressures.
* Be conscious of your tone, pacing, pauses, non-verbal’s.
* Appreciate cultural differences.
* State what the problem is for you as well as what you would like to be different.
* Describe your perceptions. Stay away from conclusions or statements about the other person’s motives. State what you think, what you see and describe the problem you think it’s causing.
* Tell how this makes you feel. Express it clearly and without accusation.
* Explain why this is important to you. Many times when a person finds out that something is a priority to you, which is enough to make him/her want to change.
* Be ready to listen. Maintain an open, attentive posture. Encouraging a response helps you better understand the problem.
1. Agree on an Action Plan.

Focusing on an action plan lets you focus on the future and take positive action for resolution.

* Clear identification of the issue.
* Agreement to solve the issue.
* Concrete steps that demonstrate the issue has been solved.
* An accountability structure, such as a time line and responsible parties.
* A commitment by all parties to put the issue in the past once resolved.
* Put the work in writing. Then you can always go back to the document if resolution doesn’t go as planned.
1. Follow up on your agreements.
* Acknowledge any positive effort and results.
* Address lingering concerns (go back to Step 1.)