

Notes from Leadership Training Session

July 9, 2018

Managing Conflict

The workshop was facilitated by Tamara Ogle, Purdue Extension. Thanks to Tamara for an excellent, thought-provoking session.

Workshop Objectives:

- Understand what conflict is and how it escalates
- Identify our own responses to conflict
- Learn constructive responses to a conflict situation
- Apply what we learn to community organizations

After a brief introduction, participants described a conflict situation in which they had been involved.

Discussion followed on what words come to mind when we think about conflict:

tension	misunderstanding	four letter words	division
anger	stubbornness	attachment	accusation
communication	miscommunication	self-inflicted	

The above are all negative words. What about positive words that come to mind?

resolution	opportunity	intimacy	empathy
consultation	respect	compromise	bonding
apology	solution	4 agreements	

We are all imperfect communicators who look at each situation through our own lens. This can lead to conflict. The levels of conflict identified by Runde and Flanagan (Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader) include:

- Differences – discover, explore, learn, appreciate
- Misunderstanding – looking with our filter, different perspectives, values, beliefs (don't feel in conflict yet; at this point it is still about the issue; prevent escalation)
- Disagreement – problems to be solved, debate, emotions begin entering; can be healthy if solution focused and maintaining control of emotions
- Discord – no longer just about the issue; becomes more about the person
- Polarization – “this means war”; no longer about the issues, sides have been chosen

As we move from 'differences' to 'polarization', our emotions increase and we have a physiological response. Logic and reason decrease. How do we lower the levels of conflict?

Differences

Laugh, encourage, negotiate, compromise, deep breaths, accept, appreciate, communicate, provide distance, understand, listen, lay ground rules

Misunderstanding

Clarify and listen, slow down, observe, depersonalize, use humor, take temperature of situation, paraphrase, observe non-verbal clues

Disagreement

Maintain respect, create possible solutions, determine importance, take time out, remind yourself it's not personal, review facts, Namaste

Discord

Refocus on issue, relax and breathe, table until later (need to agree to revisit), consider mediation, pause and gather data

Polarization

Self-monitor, use restraint, separate, involve a 3rd party, release, enforce ground rules, use role reversal (better in personal conflict than group), ask what are the worst case scenarios, recognize the level and attempt to reduce

The group used Conflict Style Assessment (TKI – Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument) to determine our own conflict resolution styles. Examples were:

- Lion – competitor – uncomfortable with conflict; attempt to win people over, convince; assertive, activist
- Turtle – avoider – uncomfortable with conflict; not assertive
- Fox – compromiser – rational; focus on issue; ask what is solution; get to the solution
- Goose – collaborator – OK with conflict; often a facilitator – wants everyone at table; decision making takes more time, but are more cooperative; look for win/win for everyone involved
- Mouse – accommodator – not uncomfortable with conflict; sees from another perspective, often at their own detriment; not overly assertive/frequently give in

We all act differently depending on the situation and who we're with. We can only really manage ourselves, and our environment to some degree. We cannot control others.

Steps for Managing Conflict

1. Control emotions – control how we react to our feelings; control our facial expressions and body language; notice what we’re feeling and how we are displaying
2. Listen to understand – check your assumptions while someone is speaking; ensure you understand perspective and feelings; practice mirroring or paraphrasing
3. Speak thoughtfully – what are you trying to say; focus on the present; is it honest and direct
4. Ask questions – open-ended provide more information; “what do you need from me”, “how would you like this to be resolved”, “what would you like to see happen”
5. Identify areas of agreement – “why are we here”, “why are we in conflict”, “what are our common goals”; sift through the conversation that is happening; provide reminders of the focus; don’t simply discuss the problem but search for solutions
6. Brainstorm solutions – work together to think through situation; keep an open mind to all ideas, then narrow down to what will work
7. Continue steps 4 – 6 again
8. Do it for the right reasons – be honest and up front about the ability to make changes; work within the rules and framework; **you truly have to care what the other person thinks to solve conflict effectively**

Conflict can bring about needed changes and take relationships to a new level.