

Embracing the OPPORTUNITY in Conflict

By Neville Knowles

Conflict in organizational relationships is common given individual differences in life experiences, beliefs, personality and behavioral styles. We all don't see the world, its issues and challenges in the same way nor do we react in the same way.

Repressing one's own sense of conflict inevitably manifests itself in some negative way, usually one that has a disruptive impact on the relationship and workplace. It's just a matter of time.

Repression also adds to workplace anxiety and stress directly and indirectly. Repressed anxiety and stress inevitably ends up going home with the conflicted creating yet another environmental challenge.

Having coached successfully clients beyond their experiences of conflict I've come to appreciate the inherent opportunity existent in conflict resolution done well, in creating greater understanding, trust, and respect in relationship. Conflict resolution done well can actually be a powerful tool for strengthening relationships, one's leadership capacity and currency.

How to get started?

Evaluate the situation as soon after an incident as possible identifying:

- 1) WHAT was said, inferred or done in the relationship or work environment to violated it?
- 2) What was the IMPACT? And HOW you and/or others were made to feel as a outcome of the behavior?
- 3) How alternatively would like you or others wish to be dealt with under similar circumstances in the future?
- 4) Write your answers down and then form a tight concise clearing statement as reflected in step d) below.

How necessary is it to clear the conflict?

One must determine for themselves whether the incident warrants clearing attention.

After reviewing the steps above with clients I usually recommend they sleep on the matter and wake up the next day with the right answer for them.

Certainly recurrent orientations of relationship conflict require attention as does out of the blue experiences of conflict.

When one avoids addressing conflict it doesn't help the other person nor does it help you in relationship.

What if the avoidance of clearing experiences of conflict is an avocation of personal responsibility and accountability in relationship?

All are well intended in their day to day interactions however few are fully conscious of the impact they might be having on others in the work place. Your stepping up helps them see the impact their behavior is having on you. It also serves others who might be likewise experiencing similar issues of conflict with the individual.

Leading from where you are and as you are is vital in all relationships, teams and organizations!!!

Steps in Clearing Conflict:

- a) One must be **intentional** that the outcome they are trying to achieve in clearing their internal sense of conflict is **to help** themselves, the other person and the environment in creating greater understanding, trust and respect in relationship.

This process will not work if you attempt it from a place of anxiety, frustration, hurt, resentment or anger towards the other person. Most of the time conflict resolution fails for this reason and thus the fear associated with clearing issues of conflict.

People react to how we feel towards them verses what we say to them. Be aware that in messaging 55% is physical, 35 is tonality and 10% is in the words. What we put out will get mirrored back to us. **Thus, we create our own realities.**

Clearing conflict from a **demeanor of caring surrendered humility** can be very powerful.

- b) Conflict clearing should always be attempted in a neutral location and as public as possible. Not in either of your offices but in a coffee shop, Cafeteria, in the car while driving, during a walk, etc. You always clear interpersonal conflict in person never through e-mail or by phone.
- c) Framing the need to clear e.g." Tom, would you have 10 minutes, there's

something I need chat with you about?... If not, what might be a good time for you latter today?.... Let's get a coffee...>" Go to the neutral location.

d) Situation: The department had visitors from another company touring the building.

Joe the Manager was giving them a tour and explaining function and processes of Tom's area of operations. Tom was a supervisor and direct report of Joe's. In passing Joe made an off handed comment that Tom found inappropriate however he went on with his tour making note to explore the matter further latter.

Clearing Conflict Statement”Tom you'll recall the other day in front of my tour group when we were touring your area of operations and you made that comment about TTTTTTT? Well I experienced your comments as dismissive, disrespectful and off handed. In the future I'd ask that if your troubled by something that you'd come talk to me about it rather than acting out as you did before others.” “Yes, no problem Joe, I'm sorry”, said Tom.

What gets in the way of effective clearing of conflict?

Lingering anger, resentment, self-justification and blaming.

Feeling COMPELLED to respond or clear should be a “STOP” sign.

You have to be totally free of lingering feelings and be focused on helping make right what isn't in the relationship. You have to be intentional in creating greater relationship understanding, trust and mutual respect and there-in lies the OPPORTUNITY.

The best of the best LEADERS are relationship builders.

Where to practice conflict resolution?

Start with minor incidents of conflict and progressively take on larger orientations. A good place to start is with your significant other, adolescent or adult children.

A lifelong commitment to moving beyond feelings of conflict can be very empowering and allows one a greater sense of freedom and ease in relationships. It also serves to expand one's leadership currency and value within the organization.