Don't Let Conflict Keep You From Success

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Anytime you are making ground and moving toward success, there will inevitably be the opportunity for conflict. That is just a fact of life. You put two people or more in a group and there is potential for conflict – and conflict, improperly handled, can destroy your ability to continue on and achieve your goals.

This is true in many areas of life, from the boardroom to the schoolroom. It can happen in marriage and it can happen between friends and business associates. And when conflict goes bad, success doesn't happen. The good news is that conflict can be healthy and can actually move you closer to success. Success is based on relationships and relationships offer the chance of conflict, so to get success, you must master conflict. So with that in mind, here are some ideas for handling conflict.

WHEN YOU ARE THE ONE WHO IS CONFRONTING THE PROBLEM WITH SOMEONE ELSE:

1. Don't assume. Don't assume the worst. Don't assume that they meant what you think they did. Don't assume they know any better. Don't assume they did it on purpose. The fact is that most of the time our assumptions are incorrect and all our assumptions do is cause us to get out of a deeper hole.

2. Ask questions. Since you can't assume anything, you must begin your confrontation by finding out the facts as that person sees them. Here are some questions to ask: What was your intention in saying or doing that (Maybe they had good but misguided intentions)? What were the thoughts behind those words or actions (Maybe they actually have a well thought out position that you hadn't thought of)? Are you aware of how that might have been perceived (Maybe they just missed how that would be seen. Everybody is entitled to blow it)?

3. Tell them how you perceive things, or how you feel, rather than what they did. It is never good to start out with telling somebody, "You did this!" Instead, you can say something like, "I feel like your action may have been better if you would have…" Or, "I think that the way that came across may have been…"

4. Deal with one issue at a time. If they battle back a bit, you may be tempted to say, "Well, that isn't all! As a matter of fact, a number of us here think that you also need to work on…" If there is another issue, then deal with it at a separate time. Too many conflicts go around and around and don't end up solving the original issue. Stick to one point and see it through to understanding.

WHEN SOMEONE IS CONFRONTING YOU:

1. Don't take it personally. Worst-case scenario, you blew it. But that doesn't make you a bad person. So don't act like they have accused your character (unless they have, in which case you should try to get the conversation back to the facts). When we take things personally we become even more protective and we tend to become defensive and in the end escalate the conflict even more.

2. Don't counterattack. This gets back to dealing with one issue at a time. Don't

try to justify or hide from the conflict the person has with you by showing him or her their problems. If they have a problem, great, talk about it later. Don't muddy the waters with debate about who is better, or as the case may be, less guilty. As hard as it may be, let the conversation run its course until it is solved.

3. Ask for some time to give it objective reflection. One way to stop conflict from escalating is simply to ask for time to consider it. Most of the time when people confront us, we had no idea it was coming. Our natural tendency is to fight out of reaction. If we go and think about it, we can be objective and approach the situation objectively, or at least more so.

4. Set a time to get back with them and discuss the issue. Let the person know that you take their concern seriously and that you want to deal with it in a timely manner. Set a time, no more than three days away, to get back together. You will keep from reacting, and they may even find that they had confronted too soon themselves.

EITHER WAY:

1. Keep your eye on the big picture. Is this the hill you want to die on? Determine how important this issue really is. Most things simply aren't worth getting too upset about, or so upset that the relationship breaks down. Is a productive business relationship worth sacrificing over the fact that your partner wears too much cologne or their spouse talks loudly at parties? Of course not, but some people go to war over those things. Is your husband worth giving up on because he leaves his underwear on the floor? Now, for the sake of argument, the reverse is true: The other person could wear less cologne or pick up their underwear, be-cause that is an easy way to make the other person happy. Ask yourself if this is really a big deal. If it is, proceed.

2. Always respect the other person as a person. No matter what they have done, they are a person of value and deserve to be treated that way. They are not summed up and defined by their mistake. They have hopes and dreams, fears and worries, strengths and weaknesses. Take some time to picture them outside the office, playing with their kids or doing something fun. This will personalize your issue and keep you from going overboard.

3. Be solution oriented. Whatever you do, don't focus on the problem. Ask yourself and the other person to approach the issue with the idea that you are both working for a solution that will be mutually beneficial. Rather than ask, "Why in the world did you do that stupid thing? What were you thinking?" Ask, "Okay, what is done is done – what can we do to fix this again?" That is much more productive. The goal is to get things going again, not continually punish the other person.

Conflict doesn't have to end in a bad way. In fact, it can cause you to develop a deeper and more trusting relationship with the person you have had conflict with. So the next time you have to confront, or you are being confronted, follow the advice above and you will be much further along toward getting through your conflict in a positive way.

You are made for Success,
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