DEVELOPING CONFLICT COMPETENCY: MOVING FROM AVOIDANCE TO OPPORTUNITY

ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP FORUM
FEBRUARY 9, 2022
Conflict is commonly perceived as unpleasant and unwelcome.

As a result, we avoid or ignore it.

Unfortunately, unaddressed conflict rarely disappears.
CONFLICT CAN BE COSTLY

Research shows that even low levels of disruptive behavior in the workplace impact performance:

- 38% intentionally decreased work quality
- 47% intentionally decreased time at work
- 48% intentionally decreased work effort
- 66% said their performance declined
- 78% said that their commitment to the organization declined
- 80% lost time worrying about the issue.

*Managing Difficult Employees and Disruptive Behaviors*, Teresa A. Daniel, SHRM Online (April 2012).
WHAT CAUSES CONFLICT

In a word, DIFFERENCES.

But not necessarily substantive differences. Differences in values, interests, perception, and communication style can all contribute to conflict. Layer on differences in lived experience, social identities, cultural affinities, and personal abilities, and we have an environment in which conflict is inescapable.
AND THEN THERE’S EMAIL…

- Use of communication technologies is associated with reduced adherence to social norms.
  - Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior, 7*, 321–326. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1089/1094931041291295](http://dx.doi.org/10.1089/1094931041291295)

- Emails or texts also provide fewer nonverbal cues and no instant feedback to assist the reader.
The tension of difference is a necessary part of human interaction. Accepting conflict as a functional part of our relationships allows us to better see our differences as an opportunity for growth and learning, rather than the source of discomfort and awkwardness.
COMMON SOURCES OF WORKPLACE CONFLICT

- Stress
- Excessive Workload
- Differences in VIPS
- Scarce Resources
- Personality Clashes
- Hurtful Humor/Sarcasm
- Poor Communication
- Fear of Change
- Disrespectful Behavior
- Gossip
- Poor Performance
- Passive Aggression
- Ingrained Behaviors
- Lack of Recognition
- Inadequate Training
- Cultural Differences
- Ineffective Leadership
- Inconsistency
- Non-Constructive Criticism
WHAT STOPS US FROM ADDRESSING CONFLICT EFFECTIVELY?

- Discomfort with difficult conversations
- Lack of training/preparation
- Role modeling/workplace norms
- Our own needs/motivations/self-confidence
- The perception that it is not “our” responsibility
- Fear
  - Not being taken seriously
  - Being blamed for “making trouble”
  - Hurting someone’s feelings
  - Retaliation
DECONSTRUCTING CONFLICT

See & Hear
Narrative
Feeling
Action
EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO CONFLICT

- Active Listening/Perspective Taking
- Reflective Thinking
- Delayed Response
- Respectful Language
- Expressing and Recognizing Emotions
- Assertive/Non-Reactive Statements
- Creating Solutions
A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO ADDRESSING CONFLICT

- Ask yourself:
  1. What really happened? Am I seeing the situation objectively?
  2. What was my role in what happened?
  3. Is it worth my attention?
  4. What is the impact on my work/our work?
  5. What is my goal in the conversation?
  6. Am I prepared? When would be the best time and place? What is my attitude?
  7. Should I seek assistance before addressing?
ASSERTIVE, NON-REACTIVE STATEMENTS

• I see, I feel, I hope & expect, I will….

• When you…I feel…because….
  In the future, it would be great if….
  I wish that….
  I will/will not….

• I notice that…and I assume that…. Is that true?

• Why v. What, But v. And
  You should v. I would like you to….
As Department Head, you recently received a visit from Assistant Professor Jaafar, who is relatively new to the University. She seemed nervous, but said she felt it was important to share with you a concern regarding a colleague in the department. This full professor, according to Professor Jaafar, has often made disrespectful comments to her in the presence of other faculty and interrupts her with sarcastic comments when she speaks in faculty meetings. Professor Jaafar says some other faculty have told her to ignore it; “it’s just the way he is.” She is approaching you as she wants the behavior to stop, but she is clear that she wants you to keep her report confidential. What steps might you take?


THANK YOU

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