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(2nd Edition)



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Importance of Conflict Management & Fostering Team Spirit

Webster's dictionary describes conflict as "A state of opposition between persons or ideas or interests" If you are alive, you have been in a situation of conflict! You have had to manage conflict unless of course you are the sort of person who ignores such situations, pretends they don't exist and lets them blow away with the wind. Conflict lies at the heart of human evolution. Its immediate meaning stirs a negative image but to manage conflict successfully is the central principal of growth.

As a parent, you manage conflicts in a parent-child relationship. As a child, you manage conflicts with other kids your age. As a young adult, you manage several conflicts, both deeply personal and professional such as how you think your peers perceive you or what you believe your place in the world ought to be. And then, you join the workforce. As you enter, you are full of hope and possibilities, and are largely untainted by the paralysis of cynicism. However, no matter how great your work environment, you will still face conflicts on a daily basis. You could have a boss from Hell. Your inner voice tells you to turn your back and walk away. But your 'trained' inner voice tells you that you can and most importantly, must manage your boss for your own professional longevity and yes, also for that paycheck. You have colleagues who say something but mean nothing. You have other colleagues whose forte is head butting for no apparent reason. You may encounter none of the above, but

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may still encounter a conflict of strategy, management style, speed and urgency of execution, or even resource management. Many of us have been through situations where we have no reason to suspect the goodness of our colleagues or bosses but we cannot see eye-to-eye with them simply because their road to success and ours is radically different.

Conflict management is inextricably linked to your own personal human 'style'. Who you are as a person determines how you will manage conflict. One style of resolving conflict is by avoiding it altogether. It is my opinion that even the 'avoiders' among us have a sense that there is a conflict upon them. It is not as if they do not recognise its existence. What they do not recognize is the need to acknowledge it and resolve it. Conflicts do not go away; they have to be made to go away by concerted thought and actions. If you believe in a 'top down' authoritative approach for conflict resolution, you may both accept a boss's diktat without question as well as force your own on those who work under you. Such a way of forcing formal authority is often without concern for the individual(s)/ concepts you are in conflict with. It may

work with recalcitrant subordinates but in general this is bound to make you a highly polarizing figure. No man or woman can hope to become a leader at home or work by pushing authority down someone's throat. An exact opposite to this approach is that of being accommodating. You accept the other side's views without much protest, often with the clear intention of maintaining status quo and not upsetting the applecart. Your own personal views are often the collateral damage in such situations. The belief that as long as everyone is happy you are in a good spot, is paramount for such people. Such an approach may give you the title of 'Mr. Nice Guy'. Bear in mind, it will also give you other titles such as 'Pushover' or 'Spineless'. Buying peace at all costs, at all times is not the hallmark of a leader. Consider the role of compromise in managing or overcoming conflict. Compromise is a satisfactory state for both conflicting parties. However, there is 'temporariness' to compromise which arises out of somewhat satisfactory solutions for both parties but with a feeling

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that the conflict needs to be revisited for complete resolution and closure. At best, a compromise solution is for the here and the now and lacks longevity. In the opinion of most experts, a collaborative style is the best for managing conflict. Those with this style look at long lasting, mutually satisfactory, symbiotic solutions to conflict management. This ensures that both sides have expressed their reservations, points of view and solutions, and the best and most appropriate one amongst all discussed is chosen. Such a method of resolving conflict usually has the backing of all parties and most importantly the outcome has several owners who will ensure the success of the collaboration to begin with.

So, how do you solve conflict besides tapping into your own 'behavioural type' and experience? You use teamwork and team spirit. Conflict takes at least two – at least two ideas, at least two perceptions, at least two ambitions. Teams bring together a balance and mix of skills, ideas and knowledge. It is not necessary for team members to like each other or to agree to everything that others in the team say. However, it is important for teams to work well together. As long as there is a shared and common goal and purpose, well knit, motivated and collaborative teams are able to achieve personal and professional goals, and solve conflicts better than teams that do not have these traits and skills.

Imagine your extended family. We all have stories of how the 'family' has an opinion on where you should live, what career you should choose and even who you should choose as a spouse? Just as in these families, work spaces are also full of teams. While the former is bonded by blood, the latter is joined together with a professional goal. Just as in the former's case, many of the best and long standing decisions were often taken by several members, so also in the case of the latter; the team must hold it together and weather conflicts bravely in the interest of goals, ambitions and simply, happiness at work. ■

