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Detering Interpersonal Conflict to Enhance Productivity

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Millard MacAdam

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While interpersonal conflict is inevitable in any type and size of organization, there are choices all stakeholders can be encouraged to make regarding how it's best dealt with. When handled constructively, conflict can create a healthier awareness and better relationships.

Conflict rarely gets better with time. If allowed to fester by avoidance or grow by ongoing aggression, the feuding parties become more entrenched in their positions and arriving at resolution becomes more difficult. Resolution is most easily achieved early on. Here are the steps to getting it done:

SPEAK DIRECTLY - Speaking directly with the person with whom you have the problem, assuming that there is no threat of violence, will usually resolve the issue. Meet in person or talk over the phone to explain your concern in a positive, respectful way. (Anonymous letters, banging on the wall or complaining to others does not qualify.)

PLAN YOUR APPROACH - Think about what you want to say in advance. Talk about the problem as you see it and how it affects you. Help the other party understand that a problem exists and invite them to help you find a solution that you can both live with.

CHOOSE A GOOD TIME - Consider a time when you think the other person will be most receptive. A quiet place where you won't be easily disturbed, perhaps with a cup of coffee, can make it easier to talk and listen. Avoid cocktail hour.

COMMUNICATE OPENLY AND HONESTLY - Express a positive attitude about working together to find solutions. Blaming the other person makes it harder for him to hear and understand your concerns. Remain open to a different perspective than your own and try to understand it.

LISTEN - Give the other person a chance to explain their view, concerns and feelings. Summarize what you hear and ask questions to clarify your understanding. Understanding doesn't mean that you agree. But just echoing another's thoughts goes along way toward compromise.

OPEN UP - Get the issues and feelings out in the open. Don't ignore the part that seems too "difficult" or "minor." Your resolution will be durable if the issues are considered and addressed.

CONSIDER OPTIONS - Be creative and offer solutions that you both think might work. Cooperating to find a solution is much more effective than one person demanding that the other change.

BE SMART - SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely. For

example, "Beginning tomorrow, I'll hear you out by allowing you to finish your statements and not interrupt you when you are speaking. If I forget, please let me know."

KEEP THE DOOR OPEN - Agree to revisit the issue to make sure your agreement is working. Communicate immediately if the solutions are not having the desired effect. Congratulate yourselves on working together to resolve the problem.

Building a lasting resolution from conflict can not only solve an immediate problem, but opens the door to better understanding and even, possibly, a lasting friendship. Don't preclude the latter. Build on your success and miracles can happen.

If you need help in mastering and implementing any of the skills and tactics mentioned, I'm here for you! Please visit the Call-A-Coach section of my web site for more information.

About the author:

Dr. Mac shares with business owners the practical knowledge and insights he gained as a small company CEO. He founded Sycamore Ranch, Inc. when 27 and as CEO led his partners and a staff of 100 for 16 years in developing and operating the 50 acre recreational facility. Years later, he integrated what he learned from his Doctoral program at USC with his practical business experiences and began consulting. For four decades Mac's coached business owners in mastering and applying "how to" leadership and managerial skills for: Hiring and retaining only the top ten percent producers; Optimally deploying and supervising staff to maximize their personal motivation; Developing high integrity leadership teams; Facilitating mutual performance accountability and peer coaching processes; and, Integrating his Intentional Business Integrity Process into their company operations. Mac has served leaders in manufacturing and high tech companies; accounting, banking and insurance enterprises; medical and health care organizations; service and retail oriented businesses; as well as educational, governmental and non profit organizations. Q&A ProActive Leadership 888-648-5552 or MacAdam@PALConsulting

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