

Service Team Resource Resolving Conflict



"If it wasn't hard, everyone would do it. It's the hard that makes it great."

-- Tom Hanks, A League of Their Own

What is Conflict?

Conflict between people is inevitable. The real issue is how we deal with it.

Before we can determine the RIGHT way to deal with conflict, we must clearly identify what is happening and why.

Key Messages:

- There are some situations that we erroneously label as “conflict” which do not fit the true definition of what conflict *really is*. Sometimes it is just indecision, emotional distress, or perhaps even a difference of opinion.
- To know the difference between what needs to be solved and what does not, we need to understand the **elements** of conflict, its **structure** and the **root cause**. This requires **analysis**.
- Conflict is not necessarily bad. It can yield either positive or negative effects. The impact of unresolved negative conflict can be high in both monetary and intangible costs.
- There are only three ways to work it out:
 1. *Power Contest* – to the winner go the spoils
 2. *Rights Contest* – let the judge decide
 3. *Interest Reconciliation* – let’s work this out together

What is Conflict?

Let's do a warm up. Think you have a clear idea of what conflict is? Read the below scenarios. Circle YES or No if you believe this is a conflict situation.

Situation:	Is This Conflict?
<p>Scenario 1:</p> <p>Two Service Unit administrative team members are discussing where to hold a spring Service Unit camp out. One wants to go to Whispering Cedars because it is a shorter driving distance. She feels that the high cost of gas will prevent some troops from attending if the campout is more than one hour's drive away. The other wants to go to Big Bend State Park and <i>really get the girls into the out of doors to experience what a true camp out looks like and feels like</i>. They argue back and forth, each teammate adding more information to support her position. Each one considers the other's perspective, but they continue to see the situation differently.</p>	<p>YES NO</p>
<p>Scenario 2:</p> <p>A parent is very upset about a front page ad in their local newspaper advertising cookie booth sales for one troop in their area. They say this is very unfair & want council to address the troop that took out this advertisement. As soon as they saw the paper, they immediately called council to complain but they have not talked to anyone else about this issue.</p>	<p>YES NO</p>
<p>Scenario 3:</p> <p>Assistant Leader Jessica has called a Membership Specialist to say she is suspicious of how Troop Leader Sarah is handling the troop finances. Jessica says that she has tried to talk to Sarah about it, and even offered to act in the role of troop Treasurer. She says Sarah won't provide any of the financial documents. She also adds that some parents have become suspicious and are asking her questions which she cannot answer. Jessica adds that Sarah told another parent that she - Jessica - was a "nut case with control issues". Now Sarah isn't returning Jessica's emails or phone calls. The troop meetings have become stressful for her. They no longer plan meetings together; they just each show up and do their own thing. Jessica is considering whether splitting off and forming her own troop is a good idea.</p>	<p>YES NO</p>

Defining Conflict:

A condition between or among people who are:

- 1) interdependent
- 2) feel angry
- 3) perceive the other(s) as being at fault
- 4) act in ways that result in a negative influence upon the group or

By this definition... is Scenario 1 truly conflict?

NO. The Service Unit team members disagree, but they are not in conflict. Their conflict is the absence of agreement about where to go for a camp out they share responsibility in planning. They are communicating well, but haven't yet arrived at a shared view of the problem. They need to **use good problem solving tools** to prevent this from escalating into conflict. If they continue to disagree, they may become frustrated and may begin to view the other as stubborn, stupid, or controlling. Once their disagreement is personalized in this way and the blame game begins, the odds of negatively impacting the group dramatically increase and they will cross the border into the land of conflict.

By this definition... is Scenario 2 truly conflict?

NO. While the parent may feel angry and perceive the other party as being at fault, it is because they believe that the other troop has an unfair advantage over their own daughter's troop. This parent and the other troop are not interdependent upon each other for their own troops to function in a healthy way. The parent has not confronted the other troop in a public setting and caused a scene, nor have they targeted the other leader with malicious gossip so their actions have not resulted in a negative influence upon the environment. What you have here is emotional distress over the perception of fairness and anxiety about a troop's ability to compete in terms of sales. Because the advertising troop has committed a policy and procedures violation, this is an issue that will have to be addressed separately from the complaining parent. **Use good communication tools** to address the parent's concerns.

By this definition... is Scenario 3 truly conflict?

YES. Jessica and Sarah are interdependent upon each other. To run the business of the troop and maintain harmony with the parents, as partners, they need to work together cooperatively. They blame each other and are vulnerable to the words and actions of the other. Jessica finds fault with Sarah. Sarah finds fault with Jessica. They are angry, and in this situation is in danger of escalating and crossing over into the parents. This is a conflict.

To be correctly understood as a conflict, a situation must contain each of the four elements of our definition. To know how to correctly address and resolve conflict, we first need to know what conflict is. Otherwise, we may attempt to use an excellent tool to fix the *wrong* problem.

Conflict Management Styles Quiz

We each have our own way of dealing with conflict. The techniques we use are based on many variables such as our basic underlying temperament, our personality, our environment, and where we are in our professional development. However, by and large there are five major styles of conflict management techniques in our tool box. In order to address conflict we draw from a collaborating, competing, avoiding, harmonizing or compromising style of management. None of these strategies is superior in and of itself. How effective they are depends on the context in which they are used.

Each statement below provides a strategy for dealing with a conflict. Rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 4 indicating how likely you are to use this strategy. Be sure to answer the questions indicating how you would actually behave, rather than how you think you should behave.

1 = Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Often 4 = Always

1. I explore issues with others so as to find solutions that meet everyone's needs. _____
2. I try to negotiate and adopt a give-and-take approach to problem situations. _____
3. I try to meet the expectations of others. _____
4. I would argue my case and insist on the merits of my point of view. _____
5. When there is a disagreement, I gather as much information as I can and keep the lines of communication open. _____
6. When I find myself in an argument, I usually say very little and try to leave as soon as possible. _____
7. I try to see conflicts from both sides: What do I need? What does the other person need? What are the issues involved? _____
8. I prefer to compromise when solving problems and just move on. _____
9. I find conflicts challenging and exhilarating; I enjoy the battle of wits that usually follows. _____
10. Being at odds with other people makes me feel uncomfortable and anxious. _____
11. I try to accommodate the wishes of my friends and family. _____
12. I can figure out what needs to be done and I am usually right. _____
13. To break deadlocks, I would meet people halfway. _____
14. I may not get what I want but it's a small price to pay for keeping the peace. _____
15. I avoid hard feelings by keeping my disagreements with others to myself. _____

How to score the Conflict Management Styles Quiz:

As stated, the 15 statements correspond to the five conflict resolution styles. To find your most preferred style, total the points in the respective categories. The one with the highest score indicates your most commonly used strategy. The one with the lowest score indicates your least preferred strategy. However, if you are a leader who must deal with conflict on a regular basis, you may find your style to be a blend of styles.

<u>Style:</u>	<u>Questions:</u>	<u>Totals:</u>
Collaborating	1, 5, 7	_____
Competing	4, 9, 12	_____
Avoiding	6, 10, 15	_____
Harmonizing/ Accommodating	3, 11, 14	_____
Compromising	2, 8, 13	_____

Reginald (Reg) Adkins, PhD, Elemental Truths
<http://elementaltruths.blogspot.com/2006/11/conflict-management-quiz.html>

Conflict Management Style Overview

Collaborating

I win, you win: Problems are solved in ways in which an optimum result is provided for all involved.

Fundamental premise: Teamwork and cooperation help everyone achieve their goals, while also maintaining relationships

Strategic philosophy: The process of working through differences will lead to creative solutions that will satisfy both parties' concerns

Competing

I win, you lose: Authoritarian approach

Fundamental premise: Associates "winning" a conflict with competition

Strategic philosophy: When goals are extremely important, one must sometimes use power to win

Avoiding

No winners, no losers: The non-confrontational approach

Fundamental premise: This isn't the right time or place to address this issue

Strategic philosophy: Avoids conflict by withdrawing, sidestepping, or postponing

Harmonizing/Accommodating

I lose, you win: Giving in to maintain relationships

Fundamental premise: Working toward a common purpose is more important than any of the peripheral concerns; the trauma of confronting differences may damage fragile relationships

Strategic philosophy: Appease others by downplaying conflict, thus protecting the relationship

Compromising

You bend, I bend: The middle ground approach.

Fundamental premise: Winning something while losing a little is OK

Strategic philosophy: Both ends are placed against the middle in an attempt to serve the "common good" while ensuring each person can maintain something of their original position

Conflict Management Styles



Collaborating

I win, you win: Problems are solved in ways in which an optimum result is provided for all involved.

Symbol: Owl

Fundamental premise: Teamwork and cooperation help everyone achieve their goals while also maintaining relationships

Strategic philosophy: The process of working through differences will lead to creative solutions that will satisfy both parties' concerns

When to use:

- When there is a high level of trust
- When you don't want to have full responsibility
- When you want others to also have "ownership" of solutions
- When the people involved are willing to change their thinking as more information is found and new options are suggested
- When you need to work through animosity and hard feelings

Benefits:

- Creates mutual trust; maintains positive relationships
- Builds commitments

Drawbacks:

- The process takes lots of time and energy
- Some may take advantage of other people's trust and openness



Competing

I win, you lose: Authoritarian approach

Symbol: Shark

Fundamental premise: Associates "winning" a conflict with competition

Strategic philosophy: When goals are extremely important, one must sometimes use power to win

When to use:

- When you know you are right
- When time is short and a quick decision is needed
- When a strong personality is trying to steamroller you and you don't want to be taken advantage of
- When you need to stand up for your rights

Benefits:

- Goal oriented
- Quick

Drawbacks:

- May breed hostility
- Can escalate conflict
- Losers may retaliate



Avoiding

No winners, no losers: The non-confrontational approach

Symbol: Turtle

Fundamental premise: This isn't the right time or place to address this issue

Strategic philosophy: Avoids conflict by withdrawing, sidestepping, or postponing

When to use:

- When the conflict is small and relationships are at stake
- When you're counting to ten to cool off
- When more important issues are pressing and you feel you don't have time to deal with this particular one
- When you have no power and you see no chance of getting your concerns met
- When you are too emotionally involved and others around you can solve the conflict more successfully
- When more information is needed

Benefits:

- Does not escalate conflict
- Postpones difficulty

Drawbacks:

- Unaddressed problems
- Postpones difficulty
Important decisions may be made by default
- Postponing may make matters worse



Harmonizing/Accommodating

I lose, you win: Giving in to maintain relationships

Symbol: Teddy Bear

Fundamental premise: Working toward a common purpose is more important than any of the peripheral concerns; the trauma of confronting differences may damage fragile relationships

Strategic philosophy: Appease others by downplaying conflict, thus protecting the relationship

When to use:

- When an issue is not as important to you as it is to the other person
- When you realize you are wrong
- When you are willing to let others learn by mistake
- When you know you cannot win
- When it is not the right time and you would prefer to simply build credit for the future
- When harmony is extremely important
- When what the parties have in common is a good deal more important than their differences

Benefits:

- Minimizes injury when we are outmatched
- Relationships are maintained

Drawbacks:

- Breeds resentment
- Exploits the weak
- One's own ideas don't get attention
- Credibility and influence can be lost



Compromising

You bend, I bend: The middle ground approach.

Symbol: Fox

Fundamental premise: Winning something while losing a little is OK

Strategic philosophy: Both ends are placed against the middle in an attempt to serve the "common good" while ensuring each person can maintain something of their original position

When to use:

- When people of equal status are equally committed to goals
- When time can be saved by reaching intermediate settlements on individual parts of complex issues
- When goals are moderately important

Benefits:

- Useful in complex issues without simple solutions
- All parties are equal in power

Drawbacks:

- No one is ever really satisfied
- Less than optimal solutions get implemented
- Important values and long-term objectives can be derailed in the process
- May not work if initial demands are too great
- Can spawn cynicism, especially if there's no commitment to honor the compromise solutions

STP Conflict Resolution Method Situation, Target, Proposal

Situation = Describe the problem in detail.

Target = Describe what it would look like if the problem were solved.

Proposal = What are potential solutions to the problem?

The STP method helps people look at a problem from a constructive perspective. Doing so helps to zero in on potential solutions. Once potential solutions are identified, then it is easier to come up with a final proposal.

Example:

Situation: The same people always talk in our leader meetings, never allowing others to share their thoughts.

Target: In our service unit, all leaders are given the opportunity to speak.

Proposal: During discussion, ample time is allowed to invite all interested parties to speak on a given issue. A discussion moderator is employed to help spread around opportunities for shared discussion among members.

Let's practice!...

Situation	
Target	
Proposal	

Authentic Listening

Authentic listening is the first step in communicating with integrity.

What is "authentic listening"?

Authentic listening occurs when you respond to the speaker in ways which indicate to her that you care about what she's saying and give her every opportunity to complete her train of thought. Authentic and empathic listening are wrapped in the same cloak. The idea is to let the speaker know without a doubt that you are focusing your attention on her words and feelings with the specific intent to understand her point.

Learning to listen authentically will literally change your life. How?

- You will become more attractive to others and they, in turn, will be attracted to you
- You will learn much about the human condition
- You will glean important information about a person that others may miss
- You will appear thoughtful and intelligent
- You will be practicing self-control and self-discipline, which are always good things
- You will substantially improve your relationship with every person in your life, whether business, familial, or friends
- You will be more confident and have more control of yourself in conflict settings
- You will develop greater self esteem



Authentic listening is...

The ability to **listen**
With **personal detachment**
Within a context
In such a way
That others **feel**
They are being **heard**

How Do You Listen Authentically?

1. There are specific strategies that are regularly employed in authentic listening. Do not underestimate the simplicity, the significance and the excellence of these techniques.
2. Close your mouth. Authentic listening and talking are mutually exclusive.
3. Don't predict or judge the outcome, or argue with the speaker mentally. Get out of your head and get into the speaker's.
4. Watch your body language: does your posture indicate you're interested in the speaker? Are you maintaining eye contact with her/him? Are you nodding when appropriate, smiling or otherwise physically communicating your attention to what she/he is saying?
5. Ask questions when you do not understand something or need clarification.
6. Put on her/his shoes. Put yourself in the other person's place mentally so that you can better relate to her/his point(s) of view.
7. Control your emotions. Better yet, leave them behind. Your worries, fears, problems and emotions prevent you from listening authentically.
8. Listen to what is not being said. When you are listening authentically, you have the wonderful opportunity to "fill in the blanks" in the speaker's communication. Often times what is not stated by the speaker is more important than what she/he has said.
9. Listen to how something is said. Inflection, intonation and strength of the speaker's voice may tell you more about the speaker's personality and values than mere words.
10. React to the ideas, not to the speaker, specifically. This technique is especially helpful when you don't particularly like the speaker. Remember, you don't have to like someone to learn from them. But you cannot learn from them without listening to them authentically.
11. Be consistent. Practice these techniques in every communication. Ask the speaker if she/he felt that you had "heard" what he was trying to communicate.

http://www.conflictresolution.com/conflict_resolution_strategies.html

What I hear you saying is...

Authentic Listening Blocks

Reactive Listening

- The filters through which we hear and see everything
- An automatic reaction

Judging

- Labeling people negatively before you have heard and evaluated what they have said
- Prejudice prevents listening

Comparing

- Trying to assess who is more skilled, more competent, or smarter – the person you are listening to or yourself
- Worrying, “Do I measure up?”

Rehearsing

- Crafting your response before the other person is done speaking

Mind Reading

- Trying to figure out what the other person is really thinking or feeling
- Based on distrust, misgivings, hunches, or intuition

Being Right

- Going to any lengths to avoid being wrong
- Can't accept criticism or suggestions that you change, so you won't repeat your mistakes
- There is only one point of view and it is yours
- Discounting others' collaborative work

Placating

- Insincere agreement and support, with the selfish intention of having people like you
- Being “nice” provides an illusion of safety, which is disastrous in the long run

Ghosts of the Past

- Whatever you hear reminds you of something from your past experience, or a story to tell
- Reliving your past, rather than being present

Advising

- Jumping in with uninvited help and suggestions

Day Dreaming

- Half listening, catching bits and pieces
- Lost in your own thoughts

Communication Strategies

Praising or Validating

Providing positive feedback:

“Thank you for always being willing to share your thoughts so honestly...”

Paraphrasing

Re-stating the situation to clarify the message:

“What I’m hearing is...”

“It sounds like you are saying...”

Framing

Providing a concrete context to assist:

“Let’s apply the Girl Scout Law to this situation”

Reframing

Asking challenging questions to change the way a thought is presented:

“What would you like to have happened?”

Refocusing

Taking a step back to define parameters:

“So, should we talk about how this might affect our plan for next year?”

Identifying direction

Inviting the participant to state her/his goals:

“What do you think a good solution might look like?”

Questioning

Asking clarifying questions:

“What do you mean when you say...?”

“Is this what you mean?...”

Reflection time

Taking time to think:

“Let’s stop and take a moment to gather our thoughts”

25 Specific Solutions for Difficult Behaviors

1. Create physical space.
2. Establish emotional boundaries (standards of behavior).
3. Invite critical feedback.
4. Consider your response to rights vs. needs vs. wants.
5. Develop respectful responses to disrespectful behavior.
6. Do not shoulder the blame for criticisms that are not yours to own.
7. Listen with respect and respond with care.
8. Stick to issues and behaviors.
9. Choose and use a level of assertion; especially try empathetic.
10. Initiate contact with, "Specifically, how can I be helpful to you?"
11. Maintain your focus on, "We can work this out."
12. Expect respect. ("We can work this out when you stop yelling.")
13. Say what you mean in specific terms (we can't read minds).
14. Use fair humor (quips, toys, stickers, etc.).
15. Keep congruent – words, tone actions.
16. Avoid debate.
17. Use sure signals for confidence. (Head up, face forward, eye contact, shoulders back, steady stance, posture straight, no leaning)
18. Count to 10. Use silence to increase your calm. It's valuable to "leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment."
19. Speak from the "same side of the table."
20. Tangible reminders to respond appropriately. (notes, touchstone, cues from a colleague)
21. Document facts of behaviors and situation.
22. Build your credibility with your language and actions.
23. Give people a way out. Establish choices.
24. Refuse the win-lose perspective.
25. Breathe. Fully breathe for calm and for conveying steadiness and confidence.



Humor as a Negotiating Strategy to Mitigate Conflict

Most of us would probably agree that a key to alleviating unnecessary conflict is honest, effective communication. Honest, effective communication is achieved by a number of strategies, and what is important to remember is this: you bring yourself into every conversation, classroom, career, relationship, situation. And sometimes "who you are", i.e., your emotions, political views, educational level, personality, etc., can skew your attempts to really listen to another and empathize with her position.

Humor has a way of uniting even the most diverse of people. It is extraordinary in its way of producing paradigm shifts. Used wisely, there really is no better way to illustrate a point in your quest for honest and effective communication.

"The human race has one really effective weapon, and that is laughter."

-- Mark Twain

Managing Mediation

As a Service Team member, there will be times when you must mediate conflict between people. So what are your options?

- **Ignore** – Sometimes conflicts go away if you ignore them, but often they fester and get worse.
- **Threaten** – Sometimes people will “go along to get along”, and sometimes they defy threats and become even less cooperative.
- **Separate** – Sometimes the amount of required interaction between disputing parties can be reduced by physically separating them or restricting their duties without impacting productivity. More often, however, efficiency and performance suffer when work is organized around people instead of people being organized around the work.
- **Terminate** – Getting rid of feuding volunteers removes the conflict, but it is not easy to fire a volunteer and can have unintended side effects. There is also the factor of lost troop leaders for girls.
- **Counsel** – Sometimes coaching volunteers individually can guide them out of the conflict. Occasionally, the well-meaning SU Team member gets drawn into the problem by *appearing* to take one person’s side, even if she intends to stay neutral and becomes a target of conflict herself.
- **Managerial Mediation** - If the situation is a true conflict and the circumstance warrants, A Service Unit Manager/Team Member or Membership and Community Development Specialist might act as an impartial third party to help parties in conflict find a way to work together that they can accept and that also meets the needs of the organization.

Managerial Mediation

The purpose of Managerial Mediation is to reach and record an agreement that defines each person’s future behavior in regard to the issue caused by their conflict.

This agreement must be:

- 1) *Balanced*
- 2) *Behaviorally specific*
- 3) *Mutually acceptable*

Let's look at the steps to Managerial Mediation

Step 1) Decide whether to mediate or not. Does the tool fit the problem?

Using mediation for the wrong purpose ensures failure and risks "killing the patient with the cure."

What are some wrong purposes?

- *To establish innocence and guilt.* The appropriate process for finding out who is at fault for doing something wrong is investigation, not mediation.
- *To discipline or punish.* Using mediation for disciplinary or punitive reasons sends the wrong message. If an individual has violated legal or ethical policies, then discipline may well be called for – not mediation.
- *To decide who is right and who is wrong.* That is a rights contest, not mediation. The purpose of mediation is to seek consensual solutions that both parties work out themselves. It is not about assigning blame in the past, rather it is a tool used to guide behavior in the future.

Other circumstances such as substandard individual job performance in a role might require additional training. Personal home life problem such as a difficult divorce or substance abuse problems which are affecting one's ability to fulfill the obligations of their role might call for a private conversation and a referral to additional counseling services. Mediation might be helpful in addition to or after the fact to help repair any broken relationships between that person and the team.

Who Defines the Problem?

You do. As Team Leader or Manager, listen to the conflicting parties' ideas about the situation, but don't leave it to them to define the problem to be solved by mediation. If it's unclear what the problem is...ask yourself, "*Why does their behavior matter to me?*" Your answer is probably a pretty good statement of the organizational problem caused by their conflict.

Step 2) Hold Preliminary Conversations

Either in person or by phone schedule & hold a private conversation with each party separately. In each of these two preliminary meetings your aim is to accomplish these four things:

- 1) *To hear each person's side of the story.* You might open with a statement such as "*I understand that you and Jessica have not been getting along lately and it is affecting your ability to co-lead the troop together. I'm concerned that your tension is spilling over to the parents in the troop. Tell me about the problem as you see it.*"

You must listen to each person's version of the situation, taking care not to agree or disagree with any criticisms either one may make about the other. You should draw out more details with open ended questions like "*So, why do you think that is?*" "*Can you tell me more about that?*" and "*How does that affect you?*"

The manager is not asking these questions to gather information to be used to solve the problem; rather it will be the aggrieved parties' responsibility to come up with a solution. However, in the course of the mediation discussion, they may not be good listeners and become frustrated by the other person's refusal to accept their views (frames) of the problem. In their frustration, they may appeal to the mediator to take sides. By giving both parties an opportunity to fully tell their side of the story in advance and by conveying that you understand – not necessarily agree with – their opinions and views, you will lay the groundwork for a fruitful three-way meeting. Feeling fully heard helps prepare them for the meeting.

- 2) ***To define the problem to be solved.*** Recall that the manager-as-mediator decides what is to be solved; the disputants decide how to solve it. Unless you provide a clear definition of the organization problem that makes the meeting necessary, the conflicting parties may try to solve the wrong problem. Be careful not to criticize either party on a personal level, nor make any judgment about who is at fault. Rather, put the focus on their relational performance.
- 3) ***To explain key information about the three-way meeting.*** Our human nature doesn't make it easy to grasp the idea that people with authority can be impartial and nonjudgmental. We naturally expect leaders to act as judges or arbiters who impose solutions, not as unbiased neutrals. It's important that you describe your neutral role as someone who will help guide the process by helping them talk to each other, but that you will leave it up to them to solve the problem. You will ask each of them to make arrangements to spend enough time to talk to each other about the problem and how to solve it and to plan to prevent interruptions such as cell phone, pagers, and children while this is happening.
- 4) ***To secure their agreement they will attend.*** Remember the avoidance approach to conflict? Distancing can cause a volunteer to avoid a face to face conversation with a detested person. They might tell you that the other person is the entire problem and that you should sit *THEM* down and talk sense into them.

We established earlier that managerial mediation is "a business meeting to solve a business problem" – it's not a personal service to the volunteers. So really, the conflicting volunteers don't have the choice to participate or not when you have determined that this **is** a relational problem. Both parties in the relationship must be involved in solving it. You might reply "*I understand your reluctance about this, but since you are part of the problem, you've got to be part of the solution. I'd like for you to join us when we lock down the time and location.*"

Step 3) Plan the Meeting

Now that you have laid the groundwork and scheduled a three way meeting, you must prepare the environment – the “context” for that meeting. Do you remember how we earlier defined the “essential process of mediation”?

The Essential Process of Mediation

1. Dialogue is directly between disputants - Without dialogue there can be no consensual, common interest based solution. Solutions that result when one party imposes their will upon the other or when one or both parties withdraw from the relationship are not healthy for the individuals or the organization, and they incur costs and risk of more conflict down the road. This must be the kind of dialogue that produces consensual solutions.
2. Rules – the dialogue must be protected. Interruptions, distractions, and intrusions must be prevented. Participants must agree to stay in the essential process – no walk-aways. They must also agree not to impose one-sided solutions – no power plays.
3. Structure – the dialogue must be facilitated by someone who performs the behavior and tasks of a mediator.
4. Time – the dialogue process must be given enough time to unfold to a satisfactory resolution.

To protect the dialogue, you will want the location to be neutral and private so that no other people will be watching, listening, or walking into the meeting.

You will also decide upon seating and physical surroundings. Having the participants sit across the table from each other will help them keep eye contact and speak directly to each other. A mediator might sit at the end of the table to show them that they are impartial yet in charge of the meeting.

Although you are delegating to them the authority to decide the solution, you remain in authority over the process of *how* the solution is decided. If the participants take offense with each other and attempt to attack or withdraw, you will remind them of the ground rules and that they must keep going until they find a solution.

You might also think about other aspects of the physical setting such as closing drapes, room temperature, comfortable seating, and providing a pitcher of water and glasses. You will also put care and thought into selecting the day of the week and time of day.

Ground Rules

We agree that:

- 1) **We will talk directly with each other.**
- 2) **We can own and express our emotions without resorting to personal attacks.**
- 3) **We will stick with it until resolution – no walk-aways.**
- 4) **The resolution must be mutually acceptable**

Step 4) Hold a 3 Way Meeting

Here is a checklist for starting the opening remarks at the meeting:

In the role of mediator... here's what you must do to produce the breakthrough...

- 1. Keep the participants engaged in the essential process.**
- 2. Support conciliatory gestures**
- 3. Wait. Stay neutral.**

- Express appreciation for their attendance and restate the issue as a business problem that is impacting the team or organization.
- Check for agreement that the parties have cleared their calendars and have made arrangements not to be interrupted. Thank them for their effort.
- Explain your role as a neutral facilitator of the process and your delegation to them the responsibility for reaching a consensual solution.
- Ask for their commitment to stay with the discussion until the consensual solution is reached, even if it gets frustrating.
- Remind them that we are not here to find fault, even though they may have strong feelings about this matter. Ask them to agree to express them openly and in a professional and respectful way. The Girl Scout Law applies. You are here to help them remain on that path.
- Ask if there are any questions about the process. If so, clarify. If not, ask who would like to start?

It is time to sit back in your chair and listen and watch. Listen and watch for what? Sharpen your antennae for these two signals:

1) Departures from the essential process

- Do they stay on the topic of the business problem which is how their interaction is impacting others, or do they lapse into an argument?
- Do they talk about safe but irrelevant subjects?
- Do they become hopeless about the likelihood of success in the meeting, hoping instead to be excused from this unpleasant and stressful situation?
- Do they stop talking entirely, lapsing into obstinate silence?
- Do they try to get the mediator to take sides by persuading her to agree with their opinions?

When as a mediator you see that the participants are trying to disengage from the essential process, you should gently and firmly nudge them back to it. You might respond with comments like the following:

"How is what you are talking about related to the problem we're here to solve?"

"I see that you're discouraged about this meeting. But let's keep talking."

"Please talk to her, not to me."

"My opinion doesn't matter here. You two need to find a solution that you both agree to."

2) Conciliatory Gestures

These are verbal statements or parts of statements made during mediation that are affirming of the other person and as such expose the speaker's vulnerability to exploitation by the other. Because of this, they are **often nested within a long defensive, combative statement** which can cause them to go unnoticed. Our *fears* cause us to protect ourselves against the other from winning one on us and not giving anything back. Ironically, these are powerful levers that affect the course of an adversarial argument, despite being so small and seemingly insignificant.

Here is list of kinds of conciliatory gestures to watch for:

- Apologizing
- Owning responsibility
- Conceding
- Self-disclosing
- Expressing positive feelings for the other
- Initiating a "win / win" approach to the problem.

How to use them as a mediator:

Because conciliatory gestures can be bookended by insults you will have to be alert for them, and interrupt the argument when you hear one. It might sound something like this...

"You know, Jessica really are a snake! You're organized and great at planning, but when you talk about me behind my back with the other parents I really have no use for you."

Did you hear it? Within that insult is a conciliatory gesture. Because simply complimenting Jessica on her planning and organization skills would make Sarah feel vulnerable to Jessica, she felt compelled to disguise it with a hefty dose of hostility. Doing so protected her from the possibility that Jessica would take her compliment without giving anything in return. That would mean she "won one" on her mental scorecard.

You might say...

"Sarah, a moment ago you said that Jessica was great at organizing & planning. Can you say more about that?"

By inviting Sarah to say more about that and pointing out the unnoticed conciliatory gesture, the mediator hopes to spark a reciprocal gesture from Jessica. It didn't work this time; they kept arguing. Often mediators must wait patiently for several conciliatory gestures, responding supportively to each one, before an exchange of gestures happens. When there are reciprocal conciliatory gestures, we have reached the moment of "breakthrough".

Now what? Keep at it.

As a mediator, you must be attentive to these two signals – departures from the essential process and signs of conciliation. They are two of the three primary tasks of the mediator. It's the third primary task that is often the most challenging part of mediating. The third task is to *be quiet!* That is, to refrain from saying and doing any of the many things that common sense may lead us to think would be helpful:

- Don't give advice or suggestions
- Don't propose ideas for solutions
- Don't probe with "why" questions
- Don't give your own opinions, even if the participants ask for them.
- Don't take "cool off" breaks.

What else do you think might be helpful? Don't do it? While managerial mediation is simple to understand, it may be difficult to do because it requires us to stifle some strong impulses.

Simply put, the manager-as-mediator keeps two questions in mind:

1. Are the participants in the essential process? If yes, do nothing. If not, guide them back to it.
2. Did either participant make a conciliatory gesture that the other ignored? If no, do nothing. If yes, give it your attention by pointing to the comment (because even the person who made it may not be aware of doing so) and asking the person who made the gesture to say more about it.

Focus on both of these two things and do nothing else. It's necessary for the essential process to work. Eventually, this will lead to a breakthrough, which opens a window of opportunity for solving the business problem. Remember: solving the business problem is the easy part. Getting the participants ready to solve it, by shifting their attitudes from adversarial to cooperative, is the hard part – at least the part that takes patience.

Let's Make a Deal

When that window of opportunity opens the mediator seized the opportunity to help the participants make a deal. Their deal describes how they will interact in the future to prevent the problems of the past from recurring. So, what's a deal? What do you want to take away from the mediation table?

A Good Deal – an agreement describing how the parties will interact in the future that is:

- *Balanced* – each person must see a personal benefit from making the deal work, even though they may have had to make concessions or accommodations to the other. It must pass the WIIFM test – “what’s in it for me?”
- *Behaviorally Specific* – it defines in clear detail who is to do what, by when, for how long, under what conditions, with what assistance, etc. Vague agreements like “We’ll try to get along better” are unlikely to stick.
- *Written* – notes are taken about the details of the deal. Ordinarily these notes are written by the mediator, who then confirms with the participants that the deal accurately captures what they’ve agreed to.

Step 5) Follow Up

Once both parties have accepted the deal, they are expected to comply with it. They are not free to abandon the deal if they don't feel like doing what they have agreed to because, after all, the organization has invested time and other resources in working out this problem and can expect its volunteers to follow through responsibly.

Before adjourning the meeting, propose a time to meet again in a week or two. Clarify that the purpose of this follow-up is not to have another meeting of the same kind as you've just completed. Rather, it is to review the deal and check on how it's working. You are in essence *supervising their relational performance*.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

- Most Service Unit Managers and Membership Specialists already have the behavioral skills needed to mediate, but may not know how and when to use them. Managerial Mediation is a template within which you can apply your current skills, once you understand the tool.
- Managerial mediation is conceptually simple, but may be hard *in practice* because we must stifle our own impulses and overcome some misdirected common sense about how to help people in conflict come to agreement. *Sometimes it's hard not to tell people what to do.*

Conflict Resolution Tips

Conflict in a relationship is virtually inevitable. In itself, conflict isn't a problem; how it's handled, however, can bring people together or tear them apart. Poor communication skills, disagreements and misunderstandings can be a source of anger and distance, or a springboard to a stronger relationship and happier future. Next time you're dealing with conflict, keep these tips on effective communication skills in mind and you can create a more positive outcome.

- **Stay Focused:** Sometimes it's tempting to bring up past seemingly related conflicts when dealing with current ones. Unfortunately, this often clouds the issue and makes finding mutual understanding and a solution to *the current issue* less likely, and makes the whole discussion more taxing and even confusing. Try not to bring up past hurts or other topics. Stay focused on the present, your feelings, understanding one another and finding a solution.
- **Listen Carefully:** People often *think* they're listening, but are really thinking about what they're going to say next when the other person stops talking. Truly effective communication goes both ways. While it might be difficult, try really listening to what the other is saying. Don't interrupt. Don't get defensive. Just hear them and reflect back what they're saying so they know you've heard. Then you'll understand them better and they'll be more willing to listen to you.
- **Try To See Their Point of View:** In a conflict, most of us primarily want to feel heard and understood. We talk a lot about our point of view to get the other person to see things our way. Ironically, if we all do this all the time, there's little focus on the other person's point of view, and nobody feels understood. Try to really see the other side, and then you can better explain yours. (If you don't 'get it', ask more questions until you do.) Others will more likely be willing to listen if they feel heard.
- **Respond to Criticism with Empathy:** When someone comes at you with criticism, it's easy to feel that they're wrong, and get defensive. While criticism is hard to hear, and often exaggerated or colored by the other person's emotions, it's important to listen for the other person's pain and respond with empathy for their feelings. Also, look for what's true in what they're saying; that can be valuable information for you.
- **Own What's Yours:** Realize that personal responsibility is a strength, not a weakness. Effective communication involves admitting when you're wrong. If you both share some responsibility in a conflict (which is usually the case), look for and admit to what's yours. It diffuses the situation, sets a good example, and shows maturity. It also often inspires the other person to respond in kind, leading you both closer to mutual understanding and a solution.
- **Use "I" Messages:** Rather than saying things like, "You really messed up here," begin statements with "I", and make them about yourself and your feelings, like, "I feel frustrated when this happens." It's less accusatory, sparks less defensiveness, and helps the other person understand your point of view rather than feeling attacked.

- **Look for Compromise** Instead of trying to 'win' the argument, look for solutions that meet everybody's needs. Either through compromise, or a new solution that gives you both what you want most, this focus is much more effective than one person getting what they want at the other's expense. Healthy communication involves finding a resolution that both sides can be happy with.
- **Take a Time-Out:** Sometimes tempers get heated and it's just too difficult to continue a discussion without it becoming an argument or a fight. If you feel yourself or the other starting to get too angry to be constructive, or showing some destructive communication patterns, it's okay to take a break from the discussion until you both cool off. Sometimes good communication means knowing when to take a break.
- **Don't Give Up:** While taking a break from the discussion is sometimes a good idea, always come back to it. If you both approach the situation with a constructive attitude, mutual respect, and a willingness to see the other's point of view or at least find a solution, you can make progress toward the goal of a resolution to the conflict. Unless it's time to give up on the relationship, don't give up on communication.
- **Ask For Help If You Need It:** If one or both of you has trouble staying respectful during conflict, or if you've tried resolving conflict on your own and the situation just doesn't seem to be improving, you might benefit from assistance from someone else.
- **And...**
Remember that the goal of effective communication skills should be mutual understanding and finding a solution that pleases both parties, not 'winning' the argument or 'being right'. Keep in mind that it's important to remain respectful of the other person, even if you don't like their actions.