

Dealing With Conflict As A Leader: Recognizing Different Personalities



Frogs have it easy; they can eat what bugs them.

Washington State
PTA
every child, one voice

What Do We Mean By “Difficult Person?”

- Are we referring to someone's personality?
- No, our reference to a “difficult person” focuses on behavior
- Behavior is something we can change, whereas personality is not

Understanding Difficult People

- People have different motivations
- People have different needs
- People communicate difficult issues differently
- People have different fears

DIFFICULT

Differences

Importance of time:

Means nothing **OR** obsessively prompt

Physical proximity (personal space):

Two inches **OR** two feet

Time of day when you do your best work:

Early dawn **OR** dark of night

Tolerance for ambiguity:

Detailed plans **OR** go with the flow

Preferred size of work group:

Whole organization/world **OR** alone

Different Types of Behavior

- The Sherman Tank
- The Controller
- The Expert
- The Clown
- The Complainer
- The Indecisive
- The Clam
- The Wet Blanket



The Sherman Tank

Hostile, Aggressive

Recognizing:

- They attack
- They are abusive
- They intimidate
- They are contemptuous



The Sherman Tank

Hostile, Aggressive



Strategies for coping with;

- Stand up to them, but don't get into right or wrong
- Use phrases like: "I guess we see it differently. Now what's our next step?"
- Use their names when speaking
- Say "_____, you interrupted me."
- Be ready to be friendly – Sherman tanks back down when you earn their respect

The Controller



Recognizing:

- Decisive actions and decisions
- Needs freedom to manage her/himself and others
- Cool; keeps emotions to her/himself
- Competitive, independent
- Believes in "time and place" for personal problems
- Efficient, competent

Controller's Style

- Motivated by time, gets immediate results and is normally task-oriented
- Causes action, solves problems and accepts challenges
- Makes quick decisions
- Questions status quo
- Takes authority/control of situations
- Often perceived as rude; fears being take advantage of

The Expert/Know-It-All

Recognizing:

- Always has the right answer
- Likes to feel important/powerful
- Doesn't need others



The Expert/Know-It-All

Remember to :

- Know your stuff – be prepared
- Question firmly
- Present options politely
- Use plural pronouns
- Acknowledge her/his competency

Suggested strategies:

- "Where did you get your data for that opinion?"
- "We would value your opinion on the following idea."

The Clown



Remember to:

- Remove distractions
- Assign seats, if necessary
- Rules of meeting are reviewed

Suggested Strategies:

- "How does that relate to the subject?"
- "We needed a good laugh; now let's get back on topic."
- "Would that help us deal with this problem?"

The Complainer



Remember to:

- Listen
- Prepare to interrupt – Don't agree!
- Acknowledge the complaint
- Get specifics
- Use limited responses
- Move to problem solving

Suggested Strategies:

- "How do you suggest we fix this?"
- "What is the source of your information?"

The Indecisive



Remember to:

- Help them voice concerns
- Take cues from what is not said
- Provide face-to-face support, when possible
- Reduce alternatives
- Keep the action step
- Watch behavior- don't push too far

Suggested Strategies:

- "We need a decision."
- "Do you need more information to help you make a decision?"
- "We really want your input on this issue."
- "What can you personally do to contribute?"

Other Behaviors To Watch For

The Clam

- Tend to be silent - a grunt or quick yes or no

The Wet Blanket

- Responds with a quick negative response - "It won't work!"

Watch Out For:



- Put downs
- Impatience
- Sarcasm and complaining
- Jargon
- Explaining too much
- Ignoring other board members' comments
- Avoiding responsibility or blaming others
- Body language

The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand.
We listen to reply.

Caring Communication

- Acknowledging
- Appreciating
- Assuring
- Passive listening
- Reflecting
- Paraphrasing
- A positive close



Elements For Working Effectively With People

- Keep conversations neutral
- Accept the reality of who they are
- Know what's under your control
- Create healthier patterns
- See the best in people
- Remember who you're dealing with
- Reach out for support
- Know when to step away



Behavior Vs. Intent

"Be careful how you judge others.... As Scottish author J.M. Barrie said, 'Never ascribe to an opponent motives meaner than your own....' We tend to judge others based on their behavior, and ourselves based on our intent. In almost all situations, we would do well to recognize the possibility – even probability – of good intent in others ...sometimes despite their observable behavior."

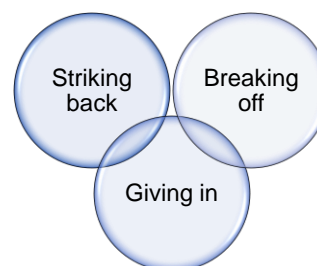
~Stephen M.R. Covey

What Is Conflict

Conflict can be defined as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests or concerns.



Three Natural Reactions To Conflict



Conflict Can Be Positive When

- People change and grow personally from the conflict
- The conflict results in a solution that has group buy-in
- The involvement of everyone affected by the conflict increases
- Cohesiveness builds among the members of a team

Conflict Can Be Negative When

- It diverts energy from more important activities or issues the PTA needs to be working on
- It destroys the morale of teams or individual board members
- It polarizes or divides a board of directors or group of people

Symptoms Of Conflict



- Subsurface tension
- Blatant conflict
- “Private” calls
- Ownership
- Lack of turnover
- Resignations or threats
- Lack of leadership

Causes



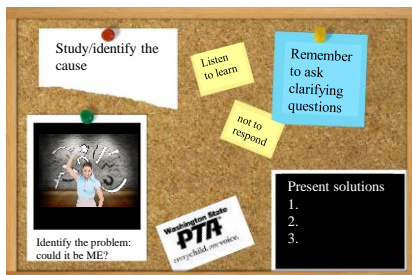
Prevention

- Communication (center of it all)
- Job responsibilities
- Money
- Different personalities
- Change
- School administration
- PTA elections
- Lack of training



Conflict Resolution Meeting

Being Prepared- Develop A Toolkit



Who? Me?

Coping with difficult people is always a problem, especially if the difficult person happens to be you.



Conflict Resolution

- Listen for what is felt as well as said
- Make conflict resolution the priority rather than winning or "being right"
- Focus on the present
- Pick your battles
- Be willing to forgive
- Know when to let something go

Bargaining Styles

- Be hard on the people and the problem
- Be soft on the people and the problems
- Be soft on the people and hard on the problems



Case Study

Audience Participation

*What issues do you see?
How do you tell them to proceed?*

In the middle of last year, an Art Docent chair quit her position due to personal issues. For this school year, the elementary school PTA asked a past chair of this program to return and run the program. The board also changed the Art Docent program somewhat for this year. Together with a new principal and new librarian, the PTA board decided to take a year off from offering a museum art program that is held in the library for several weeks.

The prior chair of the Art Docent program told the new Art Docent chair that she wanted to take back over the program. She independently contacted the museum to reinstate the museum art program.

One day, during pickup time, this prior chairperson had a disagreement with a board member in front of the school. The disagreement escalated to the point where someone called the police. The board member felt that she had been attacked and bullied. After reviewing the situation, the principal revoked the district volunteer status of the prior chairperson. This person then began a campaign of text messages, email, and Facebook posts that described her poor treatment by the board of directors, accusing them of excluding her from participating in PTA. Finally, she threatened board members that she would gather her friends, come to a board meeting, and vote them all out of office.

Conflict Support

- Region director
- Service delivery team
- Council leaders

Conflict Resources

- www.wastatepta.org
- Leadership packet
- www.pta.org
- National PTA online classes