

# Dealing with Difficult People

Occasionally we find ourselves in a difficult situation, needing to handle opposing viewpoints or direct competition between people. The first things to remember are:

## **Do Not:**

- Interrupt
- Blame
- Think of what we are going to say while the other is talking
- Change the subject
- Minimize the situation
- Ignore
- Jump to conclusions



## **Common problems can often be avoided if PTA leaders take the following steps:**

- Be knowledgeable about PTA, its purposes, programs, legislative policies and the organization.
- Be familiar with bylaws and refer to them when conducting PTA business. Have copies distributed to all board members and available to any member who wants a copy. Bylaws are a protection and ensure the democratic process.
- Follow all PTA policies and procedures.
- Be informed about the issues.
- Respect the rights of members. Allow ample time in meetings for discussion of issues. Encourage speaking and voting.
- Focus on issues, not people or personalities. Leaders must develop skills to work with all types of people. Respect the opinions of others.
- Cooperate and communicate with each other and the principal.

## In problem solving and conflict resolution, focus on the following:

- **Issues and Facts -**

Understand the main issues and facts from the other person's perspective.

- **Perceptions -**

As people express their viewpoints or their perceptions, it is important to realize that their perceptions *are their reality*.

Allow people to identify and express their perceptions of the events surrounding the conflict situation.

- **Values -**

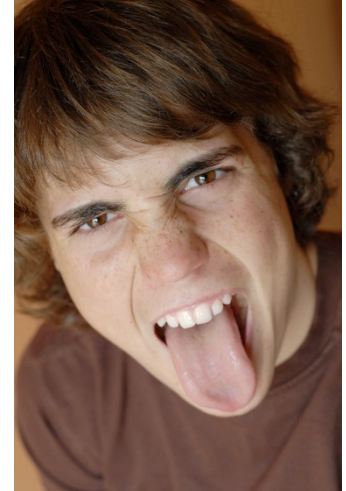
Peoples' reactions, sensitivities and tolerances are often heavily dependent on their values. The listener should ask questions and listen for information that defines key values and identifies the aspects of the conflict that are most significant.

- **Assumptions and Suspicions -**

Identify the basic assumptions. Determine what the other person assumes to be true and valid. Discover what suspicions people may have about why a specific situation is occurring, or perhaps why a person is behaving in a particular way.

- **Feelings -**

It is valuable to identify feelings, not simply to provide for venting, but to ensure an opportunity to acknowledge the specific feelings that have prevented the conflict from being resolved.



- **Intentions -**

Many people in conflict feel terribly misunderstood. Misunderstanding intentions is often a major contributor to conflict escalation. The listener must ask questions and provide opportunities that allow parties to present and clarify their intentions.

In many instances, as people present their issues, they are describing their needs. Appropriate questions will allow the parties to identify their needs.

## Use language to encourage compromise:

- **Right and Wrong –** Move away from the “I’m right, you’re wrong” wording. Due to their moral connotation, “right/wrong” discussions tend to escalate, deepening the conflict, thus making it harder for either side to soften positions and compromise.

- **What Works and What Doesn’t Work -** Help the situation by talking about “what works” and “what doesn’t work” instead. “This doesn’t work for me.” “This doesn’t work in our PTA.” This type of “what works” language is neutral and free of any moral undertones.

**The goal is finding appropriate options, alternative solutions, and good choices that "work for all of us".**