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# Culture Change in Practice

## Conflict resolution

Posted by Steph Kilen at 11:15 AM

Friday, January 12, 2007



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When people disagree or someone acts inappropriately, emotions kick in pretty quickly. Before we know it we have stormed off, hung up the phone or called the other person a name or verbally attacked them, sometimes with something that has nothing to do with the conflict. "You think everybody loves those lemon bars that you bring in but we throw them away when you're not looking" GASP!

Now, don't get me wrong. Conflict is essential for growth and it is normal for people to disagree. However, how we deal with it means the difference between strengthening relationships and communication and letting the conflict fester so that not only has the original conflict gotten blown out of proportion, but the tension it has created has ended up affecting not only those directly involved in the conflict, but also those around them.

A common accelerant of conflict is bringing in preconceptions of the other person's intentions or motivations. You've decided she is bossy, or lazy or doesn't know a bedpan from her ear and you see whatever she says through that lens. Maybe she's sarcastic or speaks crudely and you react to that instead of the content of her words. Maybe it is the other way around. But, we're talking about conflict here and not personality and that knowledge is the first step to working through conflict (Unless, of course, the conflict is about specific personality traits, but we'll save that for another day.)

### **NAME THE PROBLEM**

Together you and the person with whom you are having conflict must work to get on the same page. (This is a reason everyone on the team should do this training together so they all have common tools and knowledge, but it can be done if just one party in the disagreement knows the technique. Just lead with it.) You must first agree on what the actual problem is because often conflict comes to the

surface as a sarcastic remark, a dirty look or a snub. So one person must be brave and approach the other person and say "It seems you are unhappy with me for some reason because of your hostility toward me. What are you unhappy about?"

### **UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM**

The two of you will explain your feelings and position to each other. "When you leave a mess like that at the table I feel you are taking me for granted." After person A speaks, person B should mirror back to person A what he or she heard: "You are upset that I left a mess for you to clean up and you feel unappreciated." If person B does not quite get it right, person A will further explain and then person B will try again. Then it goes the other way. You will go at it like this until both parties have a mutual understanding of the problem at hand.

### **TAKE ACTION**

Next, you will discuss what action is needed to resolve the problem. Together you will decide on an action and how and when it will happen. Person B could say something like, "I will not assume you have time to clean the table and I will either do it myself, or ask if you have time to do it. I do appreciate what you do and I will try to be better about showing it." Of course, the scenario I've presented here is ideal, but at least you can see what you are shooting for.

This sort of conflict resolution is about creating greater understanding between two people not about "winning" the fight or sticking it to someone. You'll find that when you take the fighting and personal attacks out of the process, it goes much more smoothly. It may be that there isn't an agreeable solution, but at least the cause of the disagreement has been identified so it doesn't leak into other areas of the relationship.