



ECSU Student Center and Student Activities Office *Co-curricular education for student organizational leadership*

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Are you familiar with any of the following situations?

- ◆ the roommate who eats your food and uses your desk
- ◆ the sister who still hasn't learned to mind her own business
- ◆ the boss who refuses to allow you professional space and responsibility
- ◆ the executive board member who refuses to pull his own weight



Sound familiar? We all find conflict in everyday life. It is but one consequence of the human individuality we all treasure. Dealing with it in a constructive and non-threatening manner is an art. It involves a little thought, a lot of fortitude, and even a prayer now and then. No one likes to confront people, but conflict resolution does not have to involve stressful confrontation if both parties are willing to work toward an acceptable conclusion. The key is negotiation.

BARRIERS TO COOPERATION

Before you get to the bargaining table, there are a few obstacles which need to be addressed. It is all too easy to be drawn into an emotional battle of rigid positions. If you truly wish to resolve the conflict, anger and blame need to be set aside. When trying to resolve a conflict, the following items need to be accounted for:

- ◆ your reaction
- ◆ their emotion
- ◆ their position
- ◆ their dissatisfaction
- ◆ their power



DEALING WITH EMOTIONAL DYNAMICS

Once you have identified each of these dynamics, you are prepared to confront each one on its own terms. You must consider these before you join the negotiating circle. Preparation is worth its weight in gold, and you are not prepared until you have accounted for the emotional dynamics of the confrontation.

How do you deal with the emotional dynamics? Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ **Suspend your reaction.** One's first instinct is to strike back when someone tells us no. Realize that you may feel the urge to snap at the other person or storm out on them. Resist the impulse. Take a deep breath or do whatever you may need to do, but understand that they are not rejecting you; they are rejecting the proposal.

- ◆ **Defuse the emotional tension.** Remember that your counterpart will be just as emotionally charged as you. Do not act as an adversary; that is probably what they expect. Instead, listen to them, acknowledge their points, and show them respect.
- ◆ **Accept and reframe.** Accept their position as a possible solution, but then reframe it to incorporate your views. Find out why they want what they want and work from there. How do their wishes differ from your proposal?
- ◆ **Bridge the gap.** Find a common ground where both parties feel victorious and both viewpoints are accounted for. This involves giving up ground on both sides and compromising a little.

STEPS THROUGH CONFRONTATION

Once you are involved in a conflict, there are some very basic steps through the confrontation. If you have prepared yourself, you will have a much easier time getting through these steps successfully.

- ◆ Explain the situation as you see it.
- ◆ Describe how it is effecting performance (yours, the organization's, the individual's you are speaking with)
- ◆ Ask for the other viewpoint to be explained.
- ◆ Find some common ground with the other person. Agree on the problem.
- ◆ Explore and discuss possible solutions. Listen; leave your mind open for opinions differing from yours.
- ◆ Agree on what each person will do to solve the problem.
- ◆ Set a date for follow-up.

HELPFUL HINTS

Getting through the confrontation involves negotiation. Negotiating is a skill. It involves preparation and practice. No one is an ace negotiator without time and failure. Just remember these hints and do not be afraid to assert yourself.

- ◆ Lack of preparation is lethal. At the very least, you may miss an opportunity to benefit both parties.
- ◆ Examine the problem and your own motivations and views. Know how you feel, what you feel, and why you feel that way. This will help you to argue and defend your position.
- ◆ Map out a variety of acceptable solutions ahead of time. Having several options at your fingertips feeds flexibility.
- ◆ Research and examine their position to determine what they might be willing to compromise on and what they are standing tough on.

REFERENCE

Adapted from: St. Norbert College, Department of Leadership, Service & Involvement

*Additional resource handouts are available as well as consultation services.
For more information, contact the Student Activities Office in the Student Center at 465-4450.*