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Five Habits of Highly Effective Conflict Resolvers

By Dina Beach Lynch, Esq.

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FIVE HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE CONFLICT RESOLVERS

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Steven Covey had the right idea. There are discreet skills and attitudes, habits if you will, that can elevate your conflict practice to a new level. This article shares a selection of habits and attitudes that can transform a good conflict resolver into a highly effective one. By that I mean someone who facilitates productive, meaningful discussion between others that results in deeper self-awareness, mutual understanding and workable solutions.

I have used the term 'conflict resolver' intentionally to reinforce the idea that human resource professionals and managers are instrumental in ending disputes, regardless of whether they are also mediators. These conflict management techniques are life skills that are useful in whatever setting you find yourself. With these skills, you can create environments that are respectful, collaborative and conducive to problem-solving. And, you'll teach your employees to be proactive, by modeling successful conflict management behaviors.

1. UNDERSTAND THE EMPLOYEE'S NEEDS

Since you're the 'go to person' in your organization, it's natural for you to jump right in to handle conflict. When an employee visits you to discuss a personality conflict, you assess a situation, determine the next steps and proceed until the problem is solved. But is that helpful?

When you take charge, the employee is relieved of his or her responsibility to find a solution. That leaves you to do the work around finding alternatives. And while you want to do what's best for this person (and the organization), it's important to ask what the employee wants first— whether it's to vent, brainstorm solutions or get some coaching. Understand what the person entering your door wants by asking questions:

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- How can I be most helpful to you?
- What are you hoping I will do?
- What do you see my role as in this matter?

2.ENGAGE IN COLLABORATIVE LISTENING

By now everyone has taken at least one active listening course so I won't address the basic skills. Collaborative Listening takes those attending and discerning skills one step further. It recognizes that in listening each person has a job that supports the work of the other. The speaker's job is to clearly express his or her thoughts, feelings and goals. The listener's job is facilitating clarity; understanding and make the employee feel heard.

So what's the difference? The distinction is acknowledgement. Your role is to help the employee gain a deeper understanding of her own interests and needs; to define concepts and words in a way that expresses her values (i.e. respect means something different to each one of us); and to make her feel acknowledged—someone sees things from her point of view.

Making an acknowledgement is tricky in corporate settings. Understandably, you want to help the employee but are mindful of the issues of corporate liability. You can acknowledge the employee even while safeguarding your company.

Simply put, acknowledgement does not mean agreement. It means letting the employee know that you can see how he got to his truth. It doesn't mean taking sides with the employee or abandoning your corporate responsibilities. Acknowledgement can be the bridge across misperceptions. Engage in Collaborative Listening by:

- Help the employee to explore and be clear about his interests and goals
- Acknowledge her perspective

oI can see how you might see it that way.
oThat must be difficult for you.
oI understand that you feel _____ about this.

- Ask questions that probe for deeper understanding on both your parts:
 - oWhen you said x, what did you mean by that?
 - oIf y happens, what's significant about that for you?
 - oWhat am I missing in understanding this from your perspective?

3.BE A GOOD TRANSMITTER

Messages transmitted from one person to the next are very powerful. Sometimes people have to hear it `from the horse's mouth'. Other times, you'll have to be the transmitter of good thoughts and feelings. Pick up those `gems', those positive messages that flow when employees feel safe and heard in mediation, and present them to the other employee. Your progress will improve.

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We're all human. You know how easy it is to hold a grudge, or assign blame. Sharing gems appropriately can help each employee begin to shift their perceptions of the situation, and more importantly, of each other. To deliver polished gems, try to:

- Act soon after hearing the gem
- Paraphrase accurately so the words aren't distorted
- Ask the listener if this is new information and if changes her stance
- Avoid expecting the employees to visibly demonstrate a 'shift in stance' (it happens internally and on their timetable, not ours)

4.RECOGNIZE POWER

Power is a dominant factor in mediation that raises many questions: What is it? Who has it? How to do you balance power? Assumptions about who is the 'powerful one' are easy to make and sometimes wrong. Skillful conflict resolvers recognize power dynamics in conflicts and are mindful about how to

authentically manage them. You can recognize power by being aware that:

- Power is fluid and exchangeable
- Employees possess power over the content and their process (think of employees concerns as the water flowing into and being held by the container)
- Resolvers possess power over the mediation process (their knowledge, wisdom, experience, and commitment form the container)
- Your roles as an HR professional and resolver will have a significant impact on power dynamics

5.BE OPTIMISTIC & RESILIENT

Agreeing to participate in mediation is an act of courage and hope. By participating, employees are conveying their belief in value of the relationship. They are also expressing their trust in you to be responsive to and supportive of our efforts. Employees may first communicate their anger, frustration, suffering, righteousness, regret, not their best hopes. You can inspire them to continue by being optimistic:

- Be positive about your experiences with mediation
- Hold their best wishes and hopes for the future
- Encourage them to work towards their hopes

Be Resilient. Remember the last time you were stuck in a conflict? You probably replayed the conversation in your mind over and over, thinking about different endings and scolding yourself. Employees get stuck, too. In fact, employees can become so worn down and apathetic about their conflict, especially a long-standing dispute; they'd do anything to end it. Yes, even agree with each other prematurely. Don't let them settle. Mediation is about each employee getting their interest met. Be resilient:

- Be prepared to move yourself and the employees though productive and less productive cycles of the

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mediation

- Help the employees see their movement and progress
- Be mindful and appreciative of the hard work you all are doing

Hopefully, you've discovered that these are your own habits in one form or another and that your organization is benefiting from your knowledge. You can learn more about workplace mediation and mediation in general from these books and websites:

The Power of Mediation

Bringing Peace into the Room

Difficult Conversation: How to Say What Matters Most

www.ne-acr.org (The New England Association of Conflict Resolvers)

www.mediate.com (mediation portal site)

www.workwelltogether.com (conflict management toolkit)

"Mediation is based on a belief in the fundamental honesty of human beings. Which is another way of saying we all want to be treated justly – that is according to our unique situation and viewpoint on the world. And we cannot expect to be treated justly if we do not honestly reveal ourselves." ~ the Honourable Neville Chamberlain, British Prime Minister 1937

Dina Beach Lynch, Esq. is a mediator and conflict coach who launched WorkWellTogether.com Formerly Dina was Ombuds for Fleet Bank where she assisted 48,000 employees to resolve work tensions. Dina can be reached at Dina@workwelltogether.com

Does Your Theme Contain Character, Conflict, Resolution?

By Nick Vernon

Creative Writing Tips -

For a theme to work and the story, which will revolve around the theme, it has to contain three things...
Character Conflict Resolution

What's the reason for this?

If your theme doesn't contain these three essential elements, then you won't be writing a proper short story. It might turn out to be an essay instead.

Because without...

1)Characters

You can't achieve emotional depth. Readers become engrossed in stories because of the characters in

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them. They either become the character (sympathize), or read about an interesting person (empathize).

Emotional depth is achieved when readers use their imagination and senses and/or experiences to live the story through the characters.

2)Conflict

Your story will be boring. Why? Without conflict, something to stir things up, nothing happens. And a story, in which nothing happens, is one not worth writing about.

Your characters don't lead carefree lives. Well, not in the instance you are writing about them. In that part of their lives they are faced with a problem. They want something and can't get it because of the conflict, which is preventing them to do so.

And it's that conflict and the struggle the characters has to undergo that keeps us readers interested and in suspense. Will the character succeed or won't he? And when is this all going to happen? And how is it all going to happen?

3)Resolution

Something that starts has to finish, one way or another.

Once you have created great characters, which the reader will come to care about, and you have placed them in conflict, that conflict at the end of your story has to be resolved. The characters will achieve their goals or they won't.

That doesn't matter.

You can end your story as you please and as it suits your story - but you have to end it. Ending the story means resolving the conflict.

Does your theme contain character, conflict, resolution?

Besides his passion for writing, Nick Vernon runs an online gift site where you will find gift information, articles and readers' funny stories. Visit

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