

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION INFORMATION

### *Communication Skills*

Here are some tips on how to listen and communicate in conflict resolution situations:

#### **Do**

Listen actively

Show empathy

Confront difficult situations early

Be clear and continually reinforce your message

Make eye contact

Be open-minded and impartial

Try to come to a compromise

#### **Don't**

Settle for less than all the information

Disregard the concerns of either party

Contradict yourself

Give in to avoid additional conflict

Use negative body language (folded arms)

Take sides

Give unsolicited advice

- 1) Know how to keep a discussion general when necessary, rather than specific and personal. Many discussions evolve into becoming personal, with accusations or even name-calling. Don't be afraid to remind the speakers that the major goal of problem-solving is to analyze *what* is wrong, rather than *who* is wrong.
- 2) Know how to deal with errors in statement of fact. It is common for people to "shoot from the hip" in an effort to support their own personal agendas or to elicit an emotional response. Before you react, be sure to ask where the information has come from. Gently challenge them if you feel suspicious of the validity of their statements. If you later find the information is erroneous, patiently remind the speaker that factual errors can lead to poor decision-making or lost opportunities. If you find that an individual *routinely* communicates lies or errors in a deliberate manner, it is time to sternly remind her of her ethical responsibilities.
- 3) Know how to relate action to discussion. An old motto states that, "When all is said and done, much more will be said than is ever done". Make sure that you end meetings with action items. Give assignments to various individuals and deadlines for action items to be achieved. Discussion is a valuable asset, but it must be translated into action in order to achieve real results.
- 4) Know how to stimulate discussion among individuals who are shy or not articulate. Some people are not comfortable speaking in groups. This may be the result of personality, lack of self-esteem, or fear from past negative experiences. Yet, these individuals often have much to contribute in sound ideas and comments. Make an effort to help them feel comfortable by creating an environment that respects and values their comments. Allow them to write down their comments in the form of a report if they prefer. Ask open ended questions that require some explanation from them rather than a simple "yes or no" answer.
- 5) Know how and when to summarize. There comes a point in a discussion where all the valid and necessary information has been exchanged. Beyond this point, it can simply become rehashing everything that has already been discussed. This can quickly develop into the proverbial "beating the

dead horse.” When you sense this occurring, it is time to summarize. Take the major ideas expressed and encapsulate them into a brief and logical outline. There comes a point in all communication when it is time to move on.

- 6) Know how to control the discussion monopolizer. Almost every club has at least one individual who attempts to monopolize all discussion. When this occurs it is time to take action. Go around the room and say, “I would like everyone individually to comment on this.” If the monopolizer interrupts, patiently ask them not to do so and go back to the person who was speaking. If the interruptions continue, use humor to get the monopolizer to see the need of allowing others to speak. If necessary, talk to them privately and ask them to respect the ability of others to also express their views.

### ***Active Listening***

In our active world of communication, one cannot afford to exclude the art of listening. As a leader you must listen to your members in order to be effective. Active listening differs from hearing. Hearing is the passive act of perceiving audible sounds with the ear. Listening, on the other hand, is the *active* pursuit of understanding what the other person is saying and feeling.

In active listening, the receiver tries to understand what the sender is feeling and what the message means. The listener puts her understanding into her own words and feeds it back to the sender for verification. It is important to feed back only what the listener feels the sender’s message meant—nothing more, nothing less. This creates an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding in which the sender can explore the problem and determine a solution.

To listen actively is not a simple activity. The following are important characteristics of a good active listener.

#### **Be There**

- Be present with the person in heart, mind, and spirit.
- Begin with a clear intention to understand the other person before you seek to have her understand you. You need to hear what she has to say first. If you don’t have the time or don’t want to listen, wait until you do.
- Display the proper attitude with open body language. It is important to keep a consistent, level tempo and tone no matter how excited or confrontational the person to whom you are listening may get.

#### **Listen Carefully**

- Don’t plan what you are going to say while the other person is talking.
- Don’t think of how you can interrupt.
- Don’t think of how to solve the problem, how to admonish, how to console, or what she “should” do.

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- Don't think or struggle to react; just listen. Also, watch for what will never be said out loud. Read the nonverbal signals of others.

### **Accept the Person and Her Feelings**

- Accept the person and her feelings without judgment or reservation. Don't stereotype even though she may be very different from you.
- Accept whatever her feelings may be or how they may differ from what you think someone "should" feel. Don't be afraid that just because the feeling is expressed that she will always feel that way.
- Remember that feelings are neither right nor wrong; they just exist, and can change, too.

### **Stay With Her Point of View Without Becoming Her**

- Put yourself in her shoes at her point of reference. Don't become her, but understand what she is feeling, saying, or thinking.
- For clarification, try translating what she is saying into your own words without being repetitive.
- Stay separate enough to be objective, but involved enough to help.

### **Trust Her Enough to Keep Out of It**

- Trust her ability to handle her own feelings, work through them, and find solutions to her own problems.
- Stay objective. Refrain from offering solutions in order to keep yourself removed.
- Don't intrude on what she is trying to say.

Active listening allows the leader to understand what messages the members are sending her, and is also the foundation for returning feedback effectively to members.