

Reducing Conflict 5 The Power of Flights

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Sometimes a simple airplane flight can allow two teams working remotely to make more progress than dozens of Zoom calls.

When working on large projects, managers often split up the work so one group works on one part while another group, typically located in another city or country, works on a different part. If you are the overall manager for the effort, keep a close eye on

the level of silo thinking between these two groups.

Often the allegiance to the part Group 1 is working on will make communication with Group 2 more difficult. This is especially true if both parts must function equally well for the whole project to be successful and the entire system not working well.

Group 1 will typically blame Group 2 for the problems and vice versa. You can waste a lot of time and energy, even if the people involved are really trying to work well together and communicating frequently by phone or video conference.

There comes a point where it is worth it to get the groups together physically in the same room to brainstorm the best solution. I ran into a classic example of this phenomenon late in my career. The story is contained in the three-minute video below.

The tricky part is to be able to sense when the “we versus they” feelings are getting in the way of viewing a problem objectively. You do this by observing the phrases used when the teams are interfacing. For example, you might read an email that says, “**We** wanted to accelerate the testing but **they** thought the original schedule was better.”

Often the “we versus they” attitudes are hidden in the body language when teams interface virtually. Look for eyes rolling or side glances among the team members to pick up on areas of disagreement. When these kinds of signals are slowing up the progress of the entire project, it really helps to co-locate the teams for a while until they come up with a breakthrough.

In the example I share below, we were struggling for weeks and getting nowhere. I insisted that the groups get together, and a solution became evident after only a few hours of working together.

Free Bonus Video

Here is a video that contains a true story of how this dynamic works.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QETek1SjPA>

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of four books: 1. The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals (2003), 2. Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online (2006), 3. Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind (2009), and 4. Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change (2014). In addition, he has authored over 1000 articles and videos on various topics in leadership and trust. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.

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