

Reducing Conflict 58 The Mediator Role

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When two people are in conflict, having someone play the mediator role is often very helpful. There is an important caveat that the mediator needs to do a good job or things can get worse. This article has some tips on how to mediate a conflict effectively.

Gain Control

The first order of business is to get the two parties to calm down and stop shouting at each other. Typically when two people are in extreme conflict they interrupt each other. They do not even hear the points being made by the other person.

The mediator should get the parties to sit down across from each other in a quiet room. She should speak in a low and calm voice. One helpful technique is to get the warring parties to agree on something. I like to get an agreement that both people would like some kind of resolution. That way they can go back to work feeling better.

By getting both parties to agree on something, you have established a platform that you can build on.

Objectives

It helps if the mediator has a few basic objectives in mind from the start:

1. You want to end up with both parties feeling better.
2. Each person needs to feel heard and understood.
3. There should be some form of agreement on department going forward.
4. Dispense with the idea of one party being right and the other being wrong.
5. Seek out areas on which both parties already agree.
6. State the area of disagreement as clearly as possible. Get to the root of the issue.
7. Rule out any uncivil language or gestures. Keep it constructive.

Keep deliberations conversational

Keeping both parties calm and civil is a top priority. If they regress to shouting or other inappropriate actions, stop the process and regain control. It is essential that both parties feel heard and respected along the way. You are seeking to facilitate

understanding first before the agreement. It is a good idea to ask for cooperation in the dialog. If they forget, remind them of their intent to help.

Take notes

It helps to document areas of agreement so there is a list of things both parties agree upon. That list forms the basis for forward progress during the session. It also contains evidence that both parties can refer to later.

Sometimes Reversing roles is helpful

If each party cannot see the logic in the other person's argument, getting them to reverse roles can help. By taking the side of the other person, then there is at least a full understanding. That can represent progress toward an agreement.

A resolution can be to agree to disagree

Sometimes full agreement is not possible. It does not prevent the two people from working well together in the future. Make allowance for there being two legitimate ways of viewing a topic and move forward with that understanding.

Before adjourning get both parties to verbalize any agreement

It is important for both people to say what was accomplished in the conversation. Full agreement was not possible. At least the rancor is now resolved and both parties can part ways feeling better.

Summary

Playing the role of the mediator is a tricky assignment. You can be more successful if you follow the ideas listed above.

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