

Reducing Conflict 67 Taking Steps

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Not enough organizations are taking steps to make a significant reduction in conflict. We are all too familiar with the inevitable conflict when people are working together. In this article, I will explore some of the main causes and describe some preventive techniques. These ideas will not eliminate all conflict, but they can make it much less debilitating for your organization.

Lessons from my leadership class

In my training program for leaders, I ask why we have so much conflict between people. In one session we did a brainstorm and came up with over 50 questions about why conflict occurs. Here is a list of some of the questions:

Is it because other people are morons?

Is it because other people can't see your point?

Is it because other people don't care what you think?

Is it because other people lie?

Is it because management is clueless?

Is it because other people are greedy?

Is it because other people are lazy?

Is it because other people gossip?

Is it because other people are suck ups?

Is it because other people are immature?

We could go on forever, but the point here is pretty obvious. The focus in people's minds is on what **other people "have to fix."** The real reason there is conflict is that other people aren't you!

Taking steps toward less conflict

The first realization is that we are all imperfect. We can see very clearly the things that others need to do to shape up. Our view of our own imperfections is far less accurate.

The first step is to internalize one of my favorite quotes. *Observing people at work, it is obvious that human beings have a remarkable ability to drive each other crazy.*

Work toward alignment

We may think we are all rowing in the same direction, but when you look closely you find parochial agendas. Many people are actually pulling in opposite directions. The first step is to verify that each person on the team understands the values, mission, vision, behaviors, and goals of the team.

You accomplish the above not just by publishing the strategy. You must involve the entire team in creating the vision and constantly test for understanding. Beyond understanding is true commitment. There is an old saying about the difference between involvement and commitment. It is as simple as bacon and eggs. In the case of the eggs, the chicken was involved. In the case of the bacon, the pig was committed.

In addition to commitment, you need specific skills for taking steps

The reason I am writing this series of articles is to get groups busy taking steps on their own to reduce conflict. This is article number 67 in the series. You may wish to review some of the former articles because each one is a little nugget or technique that can help reduce conflict between people.

Another resource is a series of short videos I did on the topic. The title of that program is [“Surviving the Corporate Jungle.”](#) You may wish to spot-check some of the ideas in this program.

Conclusion

Do not overlook conflict reduction in your program of organizational improvement. The cost of conflict is great, so there is a high ROI for taking steps to reduce the problem.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.