

Reducing Conflict 72 When Conflict Boils Over

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Sometimes routine conflict boils over and becomes a major problem in an organization or family. A certain amount of stress is going to be present in any group of people. Most of the time you can operate normally while this routine conflict is going on.

What causes Conflict to boil over?

There are many different causes for conflict to reach an acute stage. The typical reason is that the routine level of conflict is not being addressed, so it escalates. The ensuing blow-up can be dangerous to the people involved and result in sabotage or even homicide.

Get professional help

It is common for supervisors or managers to attempt to calm down angry people on their teams. Mediation is a critical skill for any manager. When things get to a certain level of rancor, it is time to call in professional help to separate the parties and restore order.

In fact, the supervisor may be the root cause of the problem getting out of control. When the symptoms of conflict are ignored or pushed aside, that is when individuals get a sense of hopelessness. That condition leads certain individuals to take things into their own hands.

The tricky part is determining when to call in extra help. That's because each individual has a different boiling point. It is not obvious when a person has reached the limit. It may not even be obvious to the individuals involved to tell when they are out of control.

Similar to a cooking disaster

Anger and its consequences have a way of sneaking up on people. This condition is similar to a pot of water on a stove. You may observe the water boiling fast and think it will be all right. The next second there is water all over the place.

Experience teaches us to intervene before the water level starts to rise. We need to get the pot off the heat and stir the liquid to keep it from boiling over. In order to do that, we need to be paying attention. If we are distracted during the process, even only briefly, we can be in for a rude awakening.

Managers need to pay attention too

The phenomenon with people boiling over is the same thing. If the manager is occupied elsewhere and does not see the water rising, an accident is about to happen. That is why it is imperative for managers to know their people.

If you recognize that one person has a lower boiling point than others in the group, it is possible to intervene in time. Let's look at a few common examples of conflict and discuss the warning signs managers need to watch for.

Social loafing

When some people feel they are doing more than their fair share of the work, trouble is brewing. This phenomenon is called social loafing, and it is one of the most common sources of conflict. One person feels abused because others are causing him to do more than is fair. Resentment builds up until it reaches the breaking point. The antidote is to listen to all people carefully. Be alert for the word "unfair," and investigate thoroughly when you hear it.

Hogging resources

In the workplace, resources are spread thin to be as cost effective as possible. Resources allow the work to be performed easier. People are always hungry for more resources. If someone grabs a couple extra pairs of gloves, it can cause other people to blow up. Make sure when you provide access to any kind of resource, you are doing it fairly.

Conclusion

These are just a few of the typical sources of conflict. The best antidote is to be alert for the signs of a struggle. Take corrective action early, before the pot boils over. Most people have a constant stream of tension going on at work and at home. Usually, the tension is manageable, but sometimes it will flare up. The job of the manager is to intervene early enough to avoid an explosion.

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