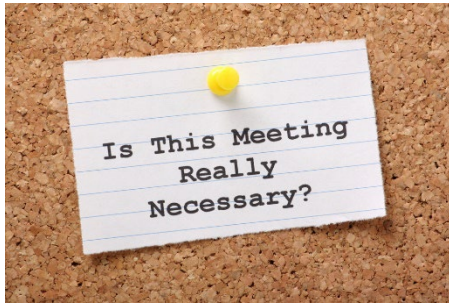


Reducing Conflict 83 Wasting Time

By Bob Whipple MBA CPTD



Does wasting time cause conflict? In my leadership classes, I have the participants brainstorm the most significant sources of interpersonal conflict. Invariably, the group comes up with “wasting my time” as one of the highest contributors to conflict.

It stands to reason because time is the most precious commodity we have. Two conditions make something precious: 1) how important it is, and 2)

how scarce it is. Time is precious because it is all we really have. Scarcity is there because we cannot get more than 24x7.

Why wasting time creates conflict

I was having a brainstorm with my team years ago and we got on the topic of time. To a person, they decided that the time spent in routine meetings was the most significant source of frustration. It did not matter if the meeting was in-person or virtual. The frustration came from sitting there and wishing you could be doing something else.

Let's do something about wasting time

As we discussed the situation, I pointed out that we are in control of how our time is used. We have the power to make significant inroads in our use of time together. After some discussion, we decided to use the “time out” hand signal from sports as a tool.

If a person in the group felt we were wasting time, they could make the “time out” sign. That action would call the question. It was then up to the leader of the meeting to inquire if others felt the same way. If enough people agreed, then the group would move on to another topic.

Why it worked

I set a rule that we would **not put down anyone** for using the time out signal. That rule set the expectation of safety where people could make their thoughts known. It was critical that I handle each use of the tool with respect.

At first, there was some testing within the group. If someone would snicker at the gesture, I would remind them of the rule. It did not take long for the rule to become commonplace and part of the culture.

Establishing a new group norm

Eventually, people were able to anticipate the gesture and move ahead automatically. Also, it was a good team building exercise to respect others' opinions. We even got to the point where we adopted other signals to call a different question.

Another example

As a team, we agreed that we would not make jokes at the expense of others. That is a bad habit in many teams. The jokes are in jest, but they do damage at some level. We agreed to never make a joke at the expense of an individual on the team.

That idea happened to be the third rule we considered. We elected to show three fingers of one hand if there was a violation.

As we used the rule, the group became more respectful of the other individuals.

Conclusion

It is up to the leader of any team to establish the ground rules. Do not overlook the concept of a simple hand gesture as a way to communicate. In my team, it led to more efficient meetings, which ultimately resulted in less conflict.

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