

THE CONFLICT EXTINGUISHER

Fixing Interpersonal Conflict at Work

911 for Solutions to Workplace Discord

Summer 2014



Chris Sheesley, MA
The Conflict Resolver

IN-ACCORD
Fixing Interpersonal Conflict at Work

1327 SE Tacoma St. #132
Portland, OR 97202
503-723-9982
info@inaccordnw.com
www.inaccordnw.com

Bold Moves

This was conflict resolution blasphemy. As my client shared her story - for the fourth time - about how a colleague had mistreated her, I realized it wouldn't be helpful to continue to actively listen. Blasphemous because the sustained attention and feedback I usually employ pays high dividends. But in the late stages of this complex case I noticed my impatience as she again recited other people's wrongs and touted her innocence. My focus, it seemed, threatened to reinforce her victim-perpetrator version of a two-sided dispute.

It was time for a dramatic shift to reawaken my attention and, more importantly, break an impasse. What I was about to ask was risky and precious. "Risky" because I'd have to take a withdrawal from the trust I'd built with her. "Precious" because what I asked for was among the few things that might be accepted by her nemesis.

This rare gem was her reflective answer to the question: "What bold, unexpected offer can you make to resolve this?". I was asking her to actively, consciously overturn the well-worn dynamics of this years-long conflict. Let's unbundle the question to give you another tool to guide employees to resolution.

Bold: It was too late for weakling comments like, "I'm sorry you felt upset when I called you lazy." This was a situation to place real value at

the feet of her coworker; the newly cliché "go big or go home" fits here. It was time for, "I've reflected on your reaction to my behavior and how it affected you. It's inexcusable I called you lazy because you're not. I'm sorry and I promise not to insult you again."


Unexpected: Conflict is often a ping pong game in which the ball is tethered to a zip line. Person A says "X", Person B responds "Y". Back and forth it goes along a predictable route. So there's real power in asking disputing employees to surprise each other by intentionally straying from the path. Think of it as constructive shock and awe.

Offer: An effective litmus test is whether it's known in advance that the other person will happily accept the offer. Is it something he's been asking for all along? In this case an important piece of her offer was to be fully receptive, rather than defensive, to his feedback.

It worked. She delivered a four-point offer in the next In-Accord facilitated, face to face meeting. As the ping pong ball dropped into an unexpected place there emerged acceptance, meaningful two-way negotiation and resolution.

Training Offer

"Resolving Employee Conflict"
This hands-on, half- or full- day training helps supervisors build competency in managing discord among staff.



**It's time to get the team moving
in the same direction.**

Our Guarantee

We pledge not to waste your time, resources or hopes. Therefore, if at any point in the process we no longer believe there's a reasonable chance of a positive outcome through our facilitated negotiation and dialogue services, we'll discontinue the intervention, inform participants and suggest alternative options.

"In-Accord's professionalism and responsiveness is refreshing. They really took the time to understand our needs and the needs of the parties involved in the dispute, and their straightforward approach really helped move the process along."

*Eric King, City Manager
City of Bend*

Upcoming In-Accord Events

Jul 2

Presenting "Resolving Employee Conflict". Chemeketa Community College. July 2, 2014 from 2:00pm-4:00pm. Salem, Oregon. *CCC management only.*

Sept 19

Presenting "Fixing Conflict in Project Management". Portland Chapter of the Project Management Institute. September 19, 2014. DoubleTree Hotel, Lloyd Center. *Open to conference registrants.*

Perspective

**The sun converts
51.8 trillion tons
of matter into energy every day.**

**The atomic bomb converted the
equivalent of a paperclip.**