CONFLICT SOLUTIONS

Fixing Interpersonal Conflict at Work

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The Conflict Resolver**

Fix Conflict with Two Words

Valerie lost power and squandered an opportunity to resolve the conflict when she replied, "That's a bad idea, Paul; I can't agree to it." What she should have said was, "I agree, Paul, people feel excluded from the decision making process. But I don't agree that every step in the project has to be reached through consensus." Metaphorically, Valerie could have disagreed with a handshake, rather than a fist, thereby converting Paul into a fellow problem solver rather than continuing to treat him as an adversary.

To compound the tragedy, Valerie not only chose the less effective response, she chose the less honest one. It became clear - after I asked her – that Valerie actually shared Paul's core concern about the inclusion of employees in project decisions. But she was so fixated on the part with which she disagreed – and her overall power tussle with Paul - that she leapt straight to battle, forgetting that it's easier to get what you want from a partner than from an enemy. Only Euripides could have written a sadder story line.

My straight-forward advice is when you respond - even when you disagree with key aspects of the other person's proposals or ideas – think first about what you agree on. This will readily come to mind because you've been genuinely listening to the other person's point of view (hint, hint).

Then say "I agree", followed by whatever rings true. Once you've built a bridge to the other side with that brief, two-word phrase, your task of arriving at a solution that meets your needs and best interests will be more attainable. Just saying it once, however, won't be sufficient. You must repeat the pattern by recycling the phrase, "I agree". Relentlessly search for things about which you can agree and share this with the other person before advocating your ideas. Here's another illustration:

Paul: "Our department has the right to make its own decisions about how we allocate our training budget, so stop dictating to us."

Valerie: "I agree departmental autonomy is important in employee development decisions. That's always been one of our strengths. I'm suggesting that the new company-wide, customer service policy merits a more uniform approach."

As an organizational leader, you can upgrade your employees' skills in this arena with three steps.

Can't figure it out?

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First, observe their current behavior in meetings and notice the naysayers. Then, coach these employees to try the "I agree" script. Finally, check back to see how it's working for them. As an extra bonus you'll find that your team meetings are more pleasant.

Having helped thousands of people negotiate through fierce disagreements, I've found that being initially agreeable is among the top behaviors that distinguish winning conflict resolvers from ineffective ones. After you try it, perhaps you'll agree.

Your Event Here

Chris Sheesley is available for luncheons and presentations on all things "workplace conflict". See sample video at
inaccordnw.com/keynote-speaking

Perspective

1,000 earths could fit within Jupiter.