



Office of Student Leadership & Service



“Leadership Lifesavers To-Go” Series

Leadership Lifesavers To-Go is an ongoing outreach effort to students at Emory University from the Office of Student Leadership & Service and is a supplement to our ongoing leadership development series. These brief & informative “tid-bits” are intended to serve as guides and are not intended to be all-inclusive.

“PLAYING NICELY IN THE SANDBOX” WORKING THROUGH CONFLICTS

Conflict is inevitable in any interpersonal relationship or among members of any group. While we encounter conflict in many of our life situations, we often lack confidence or a vision of what's appropriate to do. Most students find the conflict in their personal relationships already quite stressful; thus, conflict in their organizations can become an even greater problem. Those who have a lower tolerance level for anxiety often choose to leave the organization. Why do we shy away from dealing with conflict? It is because many of us were raised to believe that conflict is something to be avoided, an experience of failure. However, conflict doesn't have to lead to failure, defeat, separation, or termination of a relationship. We all come to see the world in different ways, and we have different ideas about what is best for us and what is best for our group. Recognizing this can help free us from the negative conclusion that conflict is a signal of failure. Addressing an area of conflict will involve: preparation, active listening & problem solving and compromise.

Before you speak, PREPARE!

A. DIAGNOSIS- Determine the nature of the conflict.

- Is the issue a value conflict?
 - It is extremely difficult to negotiate when conflict is in the philosophical arena.
 - An Example: a dispute over whether alcohol should be prohibited in a fund-raising dance.
- Is the issue a difference of expectations of each other?
 - Understanding this type of conflict lies in the fact that each of us has different expectations, which grow out of our experiences with the organization. Therefore, when we interact with others whose expectations have grown out of their own unique experiences with the organization, conflict arises.
- Focus on the actions that are causing you discomfort, not the individual.
- What do you want, overall? An example: “Mike, I want to address X (the issue) so that we can have a more effective recruitment campaign for new members.”

B. ACTIVE LISTENING- Negotiators must be capable of hearing the others point of view.

- While listening, do not think about what to reply in order to persuade.
- Argument-provoking replies should be avoided.

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- Active listening involves paraphrasing or restating what the other says. Idea or content should be considered, as well as feelings.

C. PROBLEM SOLVING & COMPROMISE- Before you speak to the person, be ready to....

- To talk about what is needed/wanted. **BE CLEAR ON FACTS AND INFORMATION.**
- Generate a list of possible solutions. While doing this, let go of the solutions that you thought you had. Be creative! The best negotiator makes the other side feel good. Start by thinking, "How can I make the other side happy?"
- Follow up reviewing the solution after a specified period of time. Collaboration is highly recommended for dealing with conflict in student organizations. It has the most promise of resulting in something satisfactory to both parties.
- Decide together on the best solution acceptable to all parties. Use consensus decision-making skills. Don't try to persuade or coerce.
- Rehearse how you'd like to see this conversation evolve. In other words, practice!

Now you are ready to speak directly to the individual(s) involved in this situation!

Resolving Personal Conflict Without Becoming Destructive

Below are guidelines to follow when dealing with a personal conflict with someone in your organization.

1. Talk about yourself. Do not place blame on or judge the other person.
 - Talk about your feelings, not the other person's faults. Send "I" messages: "I need", or "I feel". Avoid "you" messages: "You never" or "You always".
 - Name the action(s) observed, if possible, rather than make a judgment about the other person. Use the message "I feel (name the emotion) when you (name what you are reacting to)".
 - Describe what you thought.
 - Explain what you want overall and how this specific issue relates.
 - Explain any consequences to the group or you if this issue is not addressed.
2. Deal with **one issue**. Do not drag in past sins or other people. Stick with the event at hand and clearly identify the issue.
3. Allow the other person to respond.
4. Be direct and truthful.
5. Encourage openness and trust.
6. Find out how the other person sees and values the issue.
7. Summarize and check out understandings, agreements and decisions. A good question to ask after the person has had a chance to respond to you is, "How can we change this?"

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