

RESOLVING CONFLICT

Introduction

As a leader you will undoubtedly face conflict. Conflict is not inherently bad but can be a means of finding positive solutions to issues that arise. The important thing is to handle conflict in a biblical manner.

Reasons for Disagreement

1. Information. The parties have been exposed to different information and thus have arrived at a different understanding of the issues and of what course of action makes the most sense.
2. Perception. Although the parties have been exposed to the same data, their past experience causes them to interpret it in different ways.
3. Goals. The parties have a different understanding of the end result to be achieved either due to a lack of clarification or because their roles are conflicting causing them to take different positions.
4. Methods. The parties disagree on the best way to achieve the desired result either from a practical standpoint or due to a difference in values.

Resolution Steps

1. Define the disagreement

- Is there a difference in information/facts?
- Is there a difference in interpretation of the facts?
- Are you on the same page regarding the goal to be achieved?
- Are you on the same page regarding the best way to achieve the desired result?

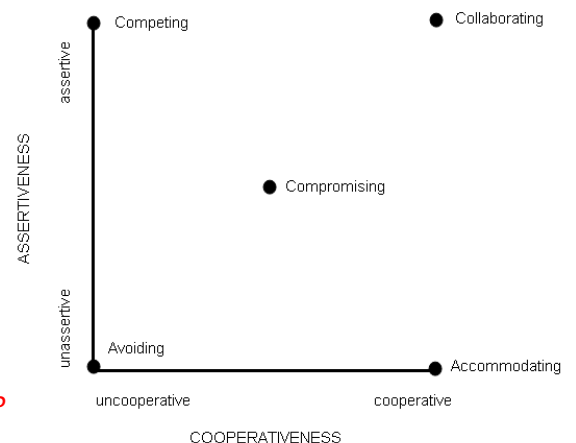
¹ *How can you determine the source/cause of a disagreement?*

² *How can you determine if a person's role is the cause for difference?*

2. Define the approach

- Seek to initiate **collaboration** whereby you work together to complete the task or achieve the goal. It involves discarding preconceived ideas and through investigation, communication and evaluation the parties increase the likelihood of a successful outcome by working together. Typically, the end result would be better than either one alone could have achieved. This is the preferred way to resolve a difference of opinion in dealing with a problem.

³ *What is necessary for collaboration to be effective?*



- **Compromise** can sometimes be the necessary approach when the parties can't agree and the process has reached a stalemate. They can identify all points that they do agree on to form the basis of a decision. Sometimes this is the only viable path to success but the conclusion must be truly acceptable to all parties. It is more desirable to an all-out win/lose struggle.
- **Accommodating** the other party by neglecting your concerns to let the other party achieve what is important to them is sometimes appropriate. This may be necessary when sensing the other party's passion and direct involvement whereas you are less concerned and not as directly involved and the issue isn't of critical importance.
⁴ *How does consensus decision making involve accommodating?*
- **Avoiding** makes sense when there seems little chance to resolve the conflict in a satisfactory way because the timing is wrong, you discern that you are outnumbered, or the issue isn't really critical.
⁵ *What should your behavior look like if you choose to avoid the conflict?*
- **Competing** is an all-out effort for you to win your objective at the other's expense. This tact should be reserved only for those cases where the outcome is more important than relationship.
⁶ *What are the downsides of competing to get your way?*

Attitude in Handling Conflict

The relationship between the parties is of fundamental importance unless the conflict is a win/lose situation over critically important issues. Even then, behavior and speech must be consistent with Biblical teaching. Not only should we be concerned with the quality of the decision or action to be taken but we should also be concerned with the condition of the conflicting parties and their relationship after decisions are made. The following character traits should be apparent.

- Love for one another. Our behavior and speech should reflect sacrificial love (*John 15:12-13; 1Pet 4:8; 1John 3:11-18; 4:19-21*).
- Humility toward others (*Rom 12:16; Eph 4:1-3; Phil 2:1-5; Col 3:12-13; 1Pet 3:8-9*).
- Gracious speech that builds up rather than tears down (*Eph 4:29-32; Jam 4:11; 5:9; 1Pet 3:8-9*).
- Patience with one another (*Eph 4:1-3; Col 3:12-15*).
- Giving importance and preference to the interests of others (*Rom 12:10; Phil 2:3; Col 3:13*).
- Being gentle and kind (*Matt 5:5; Eph 4:1-3; Col 3:12; Jam 3:13-18; 1Pet 3:8-9*).
- Preserving peace and harmony (*Matt 5:9; Rom 12:18; Eph 4:1-3; Col 3:12-15; Jam 3:17*).

The intent is to maintain unity, being of the same mind, and intent on the same purpose. More can be accomplished and the world can see our love knowing that we are followers of Jesus (*John 17:20-23; Rom 12:16; Eph 4:1-3; Phil 2:1-5; Col 3:12-15*).

Dealing with Negative Emotions

Emotions that sometimes rise during conflict bring disorder and make resolution difficult. These emotions can take the focus off the disagreement and center the attention on the individuals involved. Negative emotions should be dealt with because they can destroy relationships as well as prevent a solution to the original conflict. Negative emotions may include anger, frustration, jealousy, anxiety, or guilt. Such emotions should not be met with defensive behavior but rather by a soft and gentle demeanor that is compassionate and seeks peace through de-escalation. Seeking the underlying cause behind the emotion can sometimes bring clarity, diffuse the situation and restore the conflict resolution path.

⁷ *How can you create of climate where negative emotions are unlikely?*

APPENDIX

¹ *How can you determine the source/cause of a disagreement?*

Begin by asking questions to determine if the disagreement is about facts, interpretation of facts, or something else entirely. There may be a difference in opinion or confusion about the goal to be achieved or with the appropriate way to achieve the goal. All this can be determined by asking questions to open up a dialogue.

² *How can you determine if a person's role is the cause for difference?*

Leaders from different ministries within a church may disagree about resources or priorities. Their role as head of a ministry may cause them to selfishly ignore the needs of another ministry, or the church as a whole, in light of their own circumstances. Priorities should be openly discussed to help clarify the effect that role differences may be playing in the conflict.

³ *What is necessary for collaboration to be effective?*

Collaboration will not occur unless all parties agree to set aside their preconceived ideas and work together to evaluate facts and alternatives that will result in the best solution to the disagreement. Following this path will either provide positive resolution or it will bring to the surface underlying reasons behind the disagreement that have to be dealt with.

⁴ *How does consensus decision making involve accommodating?*

Consensus decisions don't mean that everyone is in agreement. There may be a small minority that disagrees but is agreeable to follow the will of the majority because they trust the group process and the other parties in the group. They accommodate their fellow group members and support the group decision.

⁵ *What should your behavior look like if you choose to avoid the conflict?*

If you choose to avoid the conflict you should do so graciously not creating tension or acting like a martyr. Your position should be that you will not make an issue with the situation or decision that has been made. The understanding is that other things are more important than pursuing conflict to a resolution. You may disagree with the other party but choose to avoid the conflict and the difficulty you know it would cause.

⁶ *What are the downsides of competing to get your way?*

A win/lose situation always ends in fractured relationships. In the end there is no real agreement and any conclusion is based on authority and the power of persuasion. Sometimes the conflict even extends beyond the direct parties resulting in continued pushback after a conclusion is reached. Direct competing should only be undertaken when the quality of the outcome is more important than the relationship between the parties. This approach should only be taken when all else fails.

⁷ *How can you create a climate where negative emotions are unlikely?*

Conflict is best handled in a climate of loving relationships where mutual trust and unity exist. Such a climate has to be cultivated through communication, fellowship and shared purpose. Emotions during disagreement may still exist but not to the point of dysfunction or breakdown of relationship. Learning to disagree peacefully is based on the loving relationship that have been established.