

Marilyn Manning and The Consulting Team's Leadership Tips



NOTE FROM THE CONSULTING TEAM

In the past year The Consulting Team has helped to resolve an increasing number of workplace conflicts. Due to the effects of the current economy, workers have become stretched. Their environment has become more stressful. Today's business environment presents many difficult challenges. Internal conflict does not have to be one of them.

In this issue of Leadership Tips, we focus on the types of conflict we have recently encountered. For our feature article this month, our newsletter editor, Elaine Schmitz, interviewed me about the sources and remedies for the conflicts we have recently resolved. We also provide information about resources available from The Consulting Team to assist work groups and organizations build conflict-resistant environments and to mitigate and resolve conflicts when they arise (p. 3).

We hope this helps you reduce stress in your organizations and focus your teams on realizing your business goals.

Our warm regards,
Marilyn Manning, Ph.D.
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Reconcilable Differences *Resolving Conflict in Tough Times*

Conflict often results from ongoing behavior patterns. When employees find the courage to report it, take them seriously. Resolve it quickly.
~ Marilyn Manning, The Consulting Team CEO

Here are Marilyn Manning's observations and insights on the current causes for conflict in today's work environment. She provides solutions to avoid, mitigate, and resolve them.



With the pressures of the current economy and reduced forces, how have the types of conflict you have mediated changed?

The majority of conflicts The Consulting Team has been asked to resolve are situations in which the work environment has become extremely stressful. The stress may be caused by fears of staff reduction or having to do more work with less personnel. Organizations seek to reduce stressors wherever possible. Managers feel more urgency to support employees by resolving conflicts quickly. Therefore, they are now paying more attention to conflicts that create stress.

What conditions in today's workplace lead to most of the conflicts you are asked to resolve?

As stress levels rise, more anger management issues arise. People have shorter fuses. They are not tolerating poor performance, behaviors, or attitudes from their peers. They want things to be fair, with everyone pulling their load. They won't accept anything less nor will they look the other way, as they might have when times were better. With so many pressures to perform they say, "I don't have time for this." They expect their bosses to follow-through and quickly remedy workplace issues.

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How does the rate of change and types of changes affect the levels of contention?

In this economy I've observed more change at a more rapid pace. As long as employers continue to make personnel and budget cuts, changes will continue to add pressure. Unclear direction or vision from organization leaders cause confusion, resistance, and contention. Pressed for time, leaders have not communicated enough information and the reasons for the changes. Many employees then perceive most changes as bad news, adding greater resistance and irritation to their environment.

What practices can managers and teams adopt to avoid conflicts caused by added stress, performance pressures, and rapid change?

Communication is the key to minimizing conflict. Clarify and communicate clear direction and vision for your workgroup's future. With your team's participation, explore and define your common purpose that the members can relate to.

Recently Leadership Tips shared the positive results from Appreciative Inquiry processes. We suggest you use AI's "Prouds" exercise from February 2012 Leadership Tips Application Issue. It is a good way to begin a meeting by raising energy and positive feelings. When you discuss work issues, focus on "what's working" - successful ideas that expand to improve results and solve problems.

Work with your team to create written agreements about how you will behave toward each other and your clients. Make sure these agreements are integrated into your team interactions, formal meetings, and performance expectations.

In your meetings pay attention to what kind of conflicts your team is having. There are **content** conflicts, such as disagreements about plans, policies, procedures, schedules and deadlines. These disagreements can typically be talked through and settled with logic and compromise. But there are also **process** conflicts.

This type of conflict erupts when teams have problems with role clarity or decision-making processes or confusing objectives. Stress will remain high and progress will falter until process conflicts are resolved. This requires that team members have defined direction, roles, agreements, and objectives.

What can leaders do to minimize conflict that does surface? What steps can they take to allow open discussion without emotional fallout?

In the past, many managers sidestepped an employee complaint about a contentious co-worker with a reaction like "Oh, that's just how he/she is." Or they might have told the bothered employee "Don't take it personally," or "Find a way to work with it."

Today benign neglect won't cut it. The first time you hear the about an unproductive behavior. Act on it immediately. If your subordinate worked up the courage to talk to you about it, the problem is probably a pattern that they have put up with for a while. Take the complaint seriously and work to resolve it quickly. Thank the messenger and give them a timeframe for your response.

What conditions should prompt a manager to seek outside facilitation for conflict mediation?

If your efforts haven't resolved the issue, consider a neutral facilitator. The neutral facilitator is also helpful when it's a highly charged emotional issue or if the parties fear their manager may be biased. Sometimes the parties involved in the conflict may feel their manager is part of the problem and will want an unbiased outsider to mediate the resolution.

Managers, inexperienced in conflict mediation, may want to shadow a skilled consultant through the process. They can thus learn and be coached in this skill. It is also advisable to seek a professional mediator if a grievance has been filed or if the resolution may involve someone being disciplined or terminated. An experienced consultant can ensure the process is done correctly and properly documented, as well as help you avoid potential legal issues.

What more can organizations do to minimize conflict?

Proactive organizations provide conflict management training to their managers and staffs. Even four hours of instruction will enable employees to recognize potential conflict, its sources, and to practice the skills to resolve it. Their increased capability can lead to more agreement, stability, productivity in the workplace and less unnecessary stress.

The Consulting Team's Leadership Development Resources

The Consulting Team provides workshops and services that facilitate change, leadership growth, and conflict management:

Conflict Mediation Services: Unresolved conflicts, grievances, miscommunications, and blame waste time and energy. With our conflict mediation services you begin the process of resolving differences that may be keeping your organization from thriving. We use easy principles to help resolve current conflicts and effectively manage future conflicts. We also help you to 1) build cooperation, 2) diffuse anger so people can communicate, 3) modify behaviors to avoid future problems, 4) surface the real issues and clear the air, and 5) create closure so everyone can move forward.

Conflict Resolution Workshop: Conflicts drive up costs through lost productivity, possible legal actions, and stressful work environments. In fast-paced, stressful, or competitive environments this is especially true. Conflict can decrease productivity and profits and increase stress. Discover how to save time, money, and energy by resolving conflicts early, when they are easiest to solve. Learn to recognize when you need to call in the pros for the most challenging situations.

Strategic Planning: Strategic planning aligns your team for purposeful, effective change. Clear direction, values, and role responsibilities resolve conflicting priorities and ineffective initiatives. Developed with your organization's input and collaboration, this process creates greater teamwork, focus, and productivity. We provide

planning guidance through facilitating meetings and workshops.

Appreciative Inquiry: This workshop offers a different approach to improve results. It assists groups to succeed by exploring what's working versus what's wrong. AI, with its positive perspective and processes, offers powerful techniques to managers and staff. Learn to apply AI to plan and support effective change, communications, and positive morale in challenging situations.

Leading Positive Change: This workshop helps you set realistic objectives, create strategies to overcome resistance, and implement initiatives for success. Learn how to gain buy-in and motivate others to change. Identify stressors, modify negative patterns, manage conflict and challenging situations, and maximize communications.

Leadership Tips is a periodic newsletter to help deal with the difficult issues in today's busy and hectic work environment. To see past **Leadership Tips** go to www.theconsultingteam.com and select Newsletters

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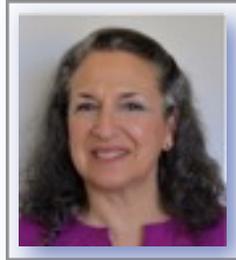


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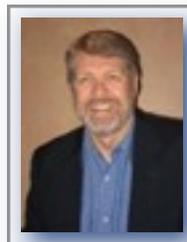
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For over 20 years the consultants of The Consulting Team have helped their clients solve difficult organizational and people problems. The Consulting Team, LLC was founded by international author, speaker, and certified management consultant Dr. Marilyn Manning. The Consulting Team is a recognized expert in many areas including communication, training, facilitation, coaching, leadership development, change, conflict mediation, strategic planning, and team building. Our success is evident in that 94% of our work is repeat business.

"Our ongoing relationship with the Consulting Team has given us the confidence that, come what may, we will be able to work it out and move forward. Rules of engagement developed in mediation sessions have changed how we behave individually and as a group."

~ Gail Lang, Director of Administration, Minami Tamaki, LLP, Attorneys of Law

"The Consulting Team's facilitation has done a lot to clear the air, surface and deal with issues biasing our communications, and gave us a renewed sense of mission. Executive staff meetings have never been so productive. There's a new spirit of cooperation."

~ David Thomas, former Executive Director, University of Missouri Physicians