



The Howells Group, Inc.


Bringing Business to Life

Resolving Conflict

Friday, June 8, 2007

Last week I sat across the desk from someone thinking I was hearing an echo. One highly committed and competent employee, valued by her CEO, was complaining about issues with another highly committed and competent co-worker (also valued by her CEO). In two separate meetings they used the exact same words to describe the other: "she doesn't respect me, won't communicate, doesn't trust me, isn't collaborative, etc." They went on to use the same exact words to describe what they desired from their working relationship. Just like the movie Groundhog Day, it was the same scenario repeated daily across my client base and organizations in every time zone and market sector. What was going on? Ineffective choices in resolving conflict - a major morale and productivity buster in all human systems.

Knowing that this client (and others, too) needed some fast tips to resolve issues without me being there in person, I hopped on the Internet and searched my substantial library. Lots of hits - believe me. But truthfully - not much usable substance. Then I had to ask myself, "If I was there talking and walking them through this how would I coach them?" Just that weekend I had been forced up to bat in my personal life. A conflict needed addressing. I was tempted to react, blame and coerce. After some dearly needed reflection I realized I could choose to just blow off steam at someone else's expense for some short term release - like my clients often get sucked into - or make effective choices. Bottom line? It was hard. Making intentional choices vs. reacting takes more conscious effort. The results? Positive dialogue, healing in the relationship, some laughter and forward motion. Now that's what I call positive ROI.





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Karen's Tips for Addressing & Resolving Conflict:

Choose to be curious vs. fearful. What could I learn here? What am I missing here? What are the possibilities in working through this? Fear is closed. Curious is open. Fear protects. Curiosity embraces. And curious is more fun.

Share your intent. Be clear about what you are hoping to create in the conversation. Be clear about what you don't want. Be clear about what you think is possible – or not. And state it to the other party at the front end of the conversation. This is powerful, responsible and reduces the tendency for the other party to make faulty assumptions about your motivations and desires.

Listen carefully to your physical body – it is a feedback machine and informs you when you are getting into “reaction.” Is your breathing changing? Is your tone of voice changing? Is something somewhere (neck, stomach, shoulders) tightening? This is information for you to use! Learn to listen and observe the signals – they are reliable sources of truth for you.

Ask more than tell. Using questions shows your intent to learn. It also helps you control the tone and pacing of the conversation. Use open ended questions throughout the conversation, even writing a few down in advance to remind yourself to stay in listening mode.

Speak in “I” statements – and avoid sounding like your perceptions are a lock on the truth. “I can see how you would feel that way.” “I have experienced this situation in this way.” “I would like to see us handle this in a different way.” When you do____I feel_____.”

Make requests vs. demands. “Could we agree to approach this differently?” “I would like to request that in the future you_____.” Requests demonstrate respect. Demands intensify defensiveness.

Forget about being right. Instead, choose to be effective. The compelling need to be right is an enormous barrier to effective conflict resolution. If being right is your intent, then in “winning” you will lose – pretty much every time.