



Management Assistance Program

NEGOTIATING COMPROMISES:

How to Establish Positive Relationships to Overcome the Negative Dynamics Involved in Difficult Negotiations

GOALS:

The goal of this module is to provide organizations, managers and employees with guidance for building a workplace environment that fosters open communication, clear and fair expectations, and mutual respect so if conflict occurs, compromises can be negotiated quickly and successfully.

The specific goals are to help organizations, managers, and employees:

- Set and follow standards of behavior that promotes open communication, clear expectations, and mutual respect.
- Learn the five interactive styles of conflict resolution and when to use them.
- Obtain techniques for negotiating compromises effectively.

OVERVIEW:

It is essential for managers to take appropriate steps to build an environment where there is open communication, clear and fair expectations, established work role boundaries and proper conflict resolution processes.

These steps will help create a mutual respect between a manager and his or her employees, and in turn, increase the likelihood of a win-win compromise, if should conflict arise. However, if the manager fails to set clear standards of behavior and lacks respect from staff members, a compromise may not be able to be achieved. In these situations, the manager must take steps toward building better relationships with his or her staff so as to facilitate the negotiation of future compromises when issues of disagreement occur. A manager must also decide if negotiating a compromise is appropriate and possible, or if another form of conflict resolution should be utilized.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Setting the Standard

Managers often set the standards of behavior for their employees. They have the power to create and foster a positive framework for staff interactions through their own leadership and communication styles. As mentioned above, if managers fail to establish standards of behavior with their staff, it can result in negative organizational health and create an obstacle to reaching a win-win compromise when conflict arises.

Communicating Effectively

As a manager, it is important to encourage open and honest communication with your staff. Effective communication is the means for establishing clarity of intentions and explanation of actions. Below are tips to help managers communicate more efficiently with their staff:¹

- *Understand the main goals of communication:* Communication is meant to inform or educate, garner support for organizational initiatives, effect positive employee behaviors, and move people to action.¹
- *Provide context:* Let employees know what is happening and why. Communicate problems, obstacles, plans, and timelines.¹
- *Communicate from an employee-centered perspective:* Employees always want to know what your news means to them. Explain potential benefits and consequences associated with change.¹
- *Identify and define desired behaviors:* Share your expectations for employee actions and outcomes.¹
- *Involve employees in the process:* Employees are less likely to become disengaged if they have some ownership in decisions and processes.¹
- *Create an open communication environment in your unit:* Encourage employees to talk about work issues. Listen carefully and respond to questions or concerns with actions or answers. If an issue is outside your authority, pass it along to the appropriate person; then be sure to

¹ "Communicating Effectively with your Staff." *In the Know: A Newsletter for Supervisors and Managers at The University of Chicago from University Human Resources Management*. January 2007. Available at: hr.uchicago.edu/newsletter/itk-20050601/wgo1.html

follow up².

- *Conduct regular staff meetings:* Tell your staff about decisions that may affect them or the work they do and the reasons for those decisions. Use staff meetings to encourage feedback, generate ideas, solve problems, and gain support.²
- *Set up individual meetings:* Set some time aside periodically to meet one-on-one with employees. Group staff meetings are important; however, meeting separately with your employees shows concern about their individual work issues.²

If the lines of communication are always open, staff members will appreciate the fact that their concerns are taken seriously, and their opinions are valued.

Communicating Expectations

It is imperative for managers to communicate their expectations to their employees. When expectations are established and respected, it leaves little room for confusion. In addition, it is important for the expectations to be both fair and positive. According to the article, *Expectations Make a Difference in Results*³, "People who are treated as if they are smart and hardworking will try to live up to that image, while employees of who little is expected will not perform as well. Although forming expectations of other people is normal and unavoidable, expectations are often built on stereotypes--especially of people who differ in age, gender, culture, style, language, economics, education, physical attributes and/or religious beliefs." When a manager has low or unfair expectations of his or her employees it creates a difficult underlying workplace dynamic, and it will cause employees to disregard any attempt by the manager to establish a win-win compromise if when conflict occurs. The manager in this situation must reevaluate his or her expectations and work to build a better relationship with their staff. When a manager takes the necessary steps to communicate more effectively with employees and establish clear and fair expectations and job responsibilities, the manager has created a mutually beneficial relationship with them. Therefore, if conflict should arise, a win-win compromise can more likely be negotiated.

² "Guide to Managing Human Resources: Chapter 13: Communication." University of California, Berkeley. Office of Human Resources. Accessed: 11 January 2007. Available at: hrweb.berkeley.edu/guide/communication.htm

³ "Expectations Make a Difference in Results." *Work and Family Life*. New York: Nov 2005. Vol. 19, Issue 11; pg. 4.

2. Five Styles of Conflict Resolution

While negotiating a compromise is the ideal technique for resolving conflict and maintaining a positive work environment, there are four other interactive styles of conflict resolution that can be utilized in the workplace. The five interactive styles of conflict resolution are: avoid, compete, accommodate, collaborate and compromise. Richard Weaver and John Farrell, authors of *Managers as Facilitators*, detail these five interactive styles and illustrate occasions when these styles are most effectively employed. According to Weaver and Farrell, "Each person is capable of employing any of the five conflict-handling modes. No one can be characterized as having a single, rigid style of dealing with conflict. However, any given individual is more comfortable with certain modes, using them more often and effectively, therefore, tending to rely on them more heavily than on others."⁴

1. *Avoiding: Do not address the situation at this time*
 - When an issue is less important than others.
 - When you perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns, or the issue seems off the track or symptomatic of another, more basic issue.
 - When the potential damage of confronting a conflict outweighs the benefits of its resolution.
 - To let people cool down; to reduce tension as well as to regain perspective and composure.
 - To let others resolve the conflict more effectively.
2. *Competing: Focus on your perspective, regardless of others*
 - When quick, decisive action is vital.
 - On important issues where unpopular courses of action need implementation (e.g. supporting unpopular rules, insisting on a particular course of action).
 - On issue vital to group welfare when you know you are right.
 - To protect yourself against people who take advantage of non-competitive behavior.
3. *Accommodating: Focus on other's perspective, regardless of your own*
 - When you realize you are wrong, to allow a better position to be heard, to learn from others, and to show that you are reasonable.
 - When the issue is much more important to the other person than to you, to satisfy the needs of others, and as a goodwill gesture to help maintain a cooperative relationship.

⁴ Weaver, Richard G and Farrell John D. *Managers as Facilitators*. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1997), 96-99.

- When preserving harmony and avoiding disruption are especially important.
4. *Collaborating: All members get what they want, maybe more*
- To find an integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised.
 - To blend insights from people with different perspectives.
 - To work through hard feelings which have been interfering with an interpersonal relationship.
5. *Compromises: Everyone gives a little*
- When goals are moderately important but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes.
 - When two opponents with equal power are strongly committed to perceived mutually exclusive goals.
 - To achieve temporary settlements to complex issues.
 - To arrive quick solutions under time pressures.

As a manager, it is important to keep in mind that always exercising one style of conflict resolution will eventually work to your detriment no matter how comfortable you are in using it. For example, if you are always accommodating your staff or constantly competing with your staff when conflict occurs, you may have pigeonholed yourself. Your staff members will not be open to a more beneficial form of problem solving such as collaboration or compromising. In this case, it is the manager's responsibility to try and change this difficult dynamic by re-establishing expectations and opening the lines of communication with staff members.

While collaborating or compromising is the preferred way to handle conflict in the workplace, collaboration may not always be appropriate. For instance, if four staff members request vacation at the same time, the manager has to negotiate a compromise with each staff member and determine who is able to take the vacation, and who will need to choose another time. If the manager has not set a standard of behavior or established mutual respect with his staff members, and is constantly exercising only one interactive style of conflict resolution, the situation could be slightly more difficult to handle and no one may be satisfied with the outcomes.

3. Negotiating a Compromise/Problem Solving

Before negotiating a compromise, managers may want to ask themselves: What resources will be needed? How much time should be allotted? What are the expected outcomes? Managers and employees do not want to have to compromise all the time, for each issue, therefore, it is important to

determine if negotiating a compromise will have a positive return on investment.

The Human Resources Department of the University of California at San Francisco offers the following advice for successfully negotiating a compromise.⁵

- *Acknowledge that a difficult situation exists.* Honesty and clear communication play an important role in the resolution process. Acquaint yourself with what is happening and be open about the problem.
- *Let individuals express their feelings.* Some feelings of anger and/or hurt usually accompany conflict situations. Before any kind of problem-solving can take place, these emotions should be expressed and acknowledged.
- *Determine underlying need.* The goal of conflict resolution is not to decide which person is right or wrong; the goal is to reach a solution that everyone can live with. Looking first for needs, rather than solutions, is a powerful tool for generating win/win options. To discover needs, you must try to find out why people want the solutions they initially proposed. Once you understand the advantages their solutions have for them, you have discovered their needs.
- *Find common areas of agreement, no matter how small.* Agree on the problem, agree on the procedure to follow, agree on worst fears and/or agree on some small change to give an experience of success.
- *Find solutions to satisfy needs.* Problem-solve by generating multiple alternatives, determine which actions will be taken, and make sure involved parties buy into actions. Total silence may be a sign of passive resistance so be sure you get real agreement from everyone.
- *Determine follow-up you will take to monitor actions.* You may want to schedule a follow-up meeting in about two weeks to determine if the compromise has been successful.
- *Mediation.* Mediation is an option to help resolve and manage conflicts. On some occasions a mediator or a third party facilitator may be utilized to assist in coming up with a win-win compromise.

⁵ University of California, San Francisco. *Guide to Managing Human Resources. Chapter 15: Conflict Resolution.* Accessed 11 January 2007. Available at ucsfhr.ucsf.edu/index.php/pubs/hrguidearticle/chapter-15-conflict-resolution/#699

As a manager it is also helpful to:

- *Define the root of the problem.* What is the stated problem? What is the negative impact on the work or relationships?
- *Share Responsibility.* This will convey to the staff members that you respect them, and you are willing to take your share of the blame or responsibility for the conflict.

Secrets for Success:

According to Melissa Ezarik, author of "What you can do when "wants' collide," the negotiation process won't always go the way you hope it will, but if you follow these tips you will be well on your way to success⁶:

- *Have a positive attitude.* Approach the negotiation in a non-threatening way. Make sure the way you act and react is the way you would want to be treated.
- *Understand the roots of the anger.* When the person you're negotiating with sounds angry, it's probably because the person feels powerless or misunderstood. Show that you want to understand by listening, and use "I" statements instead of "you" statements (for example: "I feel frustrated when you ..." will get a better reaction than "You always ..."). In addition, make sure your posture and facial expressions don't show any negative feelings.
- *Have a back-up plan in mind.* If you're having trouble reaching an agreement, a back-up plan gives you the option of bowing out without making an agreement that's not satisfying to you.

⁶ Ezarik, Melissa M. "What you can do when "wants' collide." *Current Health* 2. Apr/May 2002. Vol.28, Issue. 8; page 13.

SUMMARY: Tips for Negotiating Compromises

- Set clear and fair expectations for your staff members.
- Learn how to become a better communicator, and foster open and honest communication with your staff.
- Engage the other person in dialogue when discussing issues rather than one sided communication.
- Avoid utilizing only one interactive style of conflict resolution all of the time.
- In choosing a style, think of your goals, the situation, and the other person's goals.
- If possible, choose to collaborate or compromise with staff members when conflict arises. A win-win compromise is the ideal outcome of a negotiation.
- When confronting another person, to gain a compromise, make sure you, the other person, and the situation (setting) are all under control before proceeding.
- When negotiating a compromise, define the root of the problem, let individuals express their feelings and share the responsibility for the positive outcomes.
- Have a positive attitude, understand the roots of anger and frustration, and have a back up plan.
- Understand that you first must establish a positive framework for your staff members so that when conflict arises, a win-win compromise can be achieved.