

## **When the Gears Don't Work – Problem Solving II: Conflict management**

**Interventions and resolutions for disagreements, factions, and difficult or offensive individuals.  
How to have that difficult conversation.**

Class Period 5: Sat. 3:40-4:50 -- 70 minutes

### Factions

Basic Concepts of conflict resolution:

- Mutual respect
  
- The idea of win-win solutions
  - o If I can help you meet your interests, you'll have no need to block mine
  
- Interests vs. positions – what vs. why

### Communication

- Active & transactive listening
    - o Active = nodding, questioning, eye contact, posture, focus, encouragement to speak. Do not interrupt, offer advice, or give suggestions. Do not bring up similar feelings and problems from your own experience.
    - o Transactive = repeating what was said to make you focus and make sure you got it right, rather than rehearsing what you plan to say next.
  - Speaking – mature and professional
    - o Passive voice – non-accusatory
    - o Take responsibility on yourself – “*it seems to me...*” or “*I may be wrong but...*” Outline the conflict
    - o State your goal: *I'm interested in working with you to resolve this issue so we can all enjoy a little less tension. Will you work with me?*
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Difficult People – Having that hard conversation (*In educational lingo, this is called “positive discipline”. Lots of literature out there for further reading. Do a Google search).*

Offensive vs. clueless

Sexual, Injurious/physically dangerous, Hygiene, Drunk, Other?

- Two organizers to approach a problem person – to have witness of the conversation
- Pick the right time – pulling aside during the break is like being called to the Principal’s office. Help them save face.
- Reiterate respect → *I think you’re a great person and I always enjoy seeing you here.*
- Set up your good intentions. This is a favor to them: *Someone shared something with me about you, and if it were me, I’d want to know, so I’m telling you as what I hope is a favor to you.*
- As you describe the problem, leave room for the very likely possibility that the problem is the result of mismatched thresholds, mis-perception, etc. Give them the benefit of the doubt that they didn’t have bad intentions. → *I’m sure you didn’t mean this, but....* State what was felt or experienced, not what was done. *“Susie felt uncomfortable dancing with you. She felt she didn’t have enough space.”* NOT *“You were dancing too close with Susie.”*

Receiving complaints (as an organizer)

- Complainer must be able to pinpoint the offensive behavior. General offensiveness is not good enough.
- Try to train them to have this conversation themselves, rather than you fight their battle for them.
  - o Sexual harassment training from professional resource.
  - o *“Let me share some tips on how to respond to this kind of thing”* Develop a 2-minute on-the-spot training speech.
- Be sympathetic: *“I’m so sorry you’re feeling this way.”* Incredible power of the two meanings of “sorry” – sympathy vs. apology.
- Be clear on what any next steps are going to be: Organizer will speak with the accused; accuser will speak with the accused; no action requested, just wanted you to know; etc.
- Have an organizational reporting system – institutional history. What the complaint was and what was done about it. Confidentiality very important. Maybe written, maybe not.

The other side of the story – give the accused a chance to respond

- Really listen
- Be the more mature one – take any verbal hits (they don’t really hurt you). Never rise to their anger or defensiveness.
- Two possible responses:
  - o True remorse
    - This is the easy one. You are now allies in helping raise this person’s awareness and help them change behavior. Your favor really is one. This is no longer a difficult person.
  - o Denial & Defensiveness
    - Conflict resolution strategies – same as for factions
    - *“My interest is to help resolve this conflict so everyone can enjoy the dance”*
    - Explain how misperceptions work. *“You may not have meant (xyz) but this is how it was perceived. I understand your feelings, and they are legitimate, but so are so-n-so’s feelings. Can you acknowledge their feelings?”*
    - If the person doesn’t agree there is a problem, start serving as mediator between the parties. ID the positions and interests. Focus on specific behavior, not general personality.
    - Try to get an apology. Many folks have never learned that it doesn’t cost anything to apologize. Help them learn to take that high road.

Practice with Role Plays:

- Physically dangerous
- Inappropriate
- Hygiene
- Drunk
- Other?

} Intentional & Unintentional

Prevention: Develop written guidelines and policies. See examples.

Resources: *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In.* Roger Fisher, William Ury, & Bruce Patton. 1991.