

Managing Conflict: In the Boardroom and Beyond




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Assertion:

We are influenced and shaped by a number of factors including:

- 1) The decade in which we were born
- 2) The place and culture of our birth
- 3) The values and practices of adults of influence
- 4) Family systems
- 5) Race, ethnicity, gender, age of parents
- 6) Socio-economic realities



Essentially, the only instrument we bring to the helping process is ourselves. Hence, the more self aware we are the more present we can be in the helping exchange.


Paraphrased from comments
by Virginia Satir





Qualities Of Effective Commissioners

- Human presence
- Empathy
- Empathizing with yourself
- Respect
- Authenticity
- Flexibility
- Mutual participation
- Leadership

- 
- If a new commissioner or new staff person for a commissioner was being added to next week, apart from the technical skills to perform their tasks, what qualities would you be seeking in this person, especially as it relates to managing conflict?



Proposition:

Commissioners Serve Many

“Publics”:

Other County Commissioners

County Leadership

Departmental Leaders

All County Staff

Community Agencies

The Public Served by County Programs



For County Commissioners

- Commissioners have many “publics”
- Organizational / systems barriers can limit options
- “Values” conflicts are predictable and on-going
- Open meeting laws restrict some contacts and discussions

Therefore:



County Leadership Staff will almost always experience tensions as they consider their publics.

That can lead to:

ambivalence

ambiguity

micro situations

second guessing

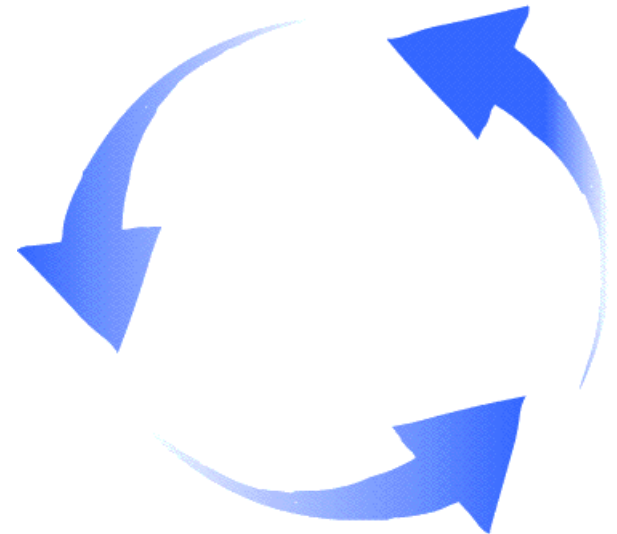
the need for an internal compass

diplomacy

perspective

context

conflicts





Appreciative Inquiry Assumptions

- In every system, some things work well.
- What we focus on becomes our reality.
- People have confidence in the journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past.
- If we carry parts of the past into the future, they should be what is best about the past.
- It is important to value differences.



More – Appreciative Inquiry

- The language we use creates our reality.
- County governments are heliotropic: (botanical term – plants lean toward the sun).
- Managers, workers and the public lean toward the source of energy whether positive or not
- Outcomes should be useful.
- All steps are collaborative.



Show Up
And Choose To Be Present

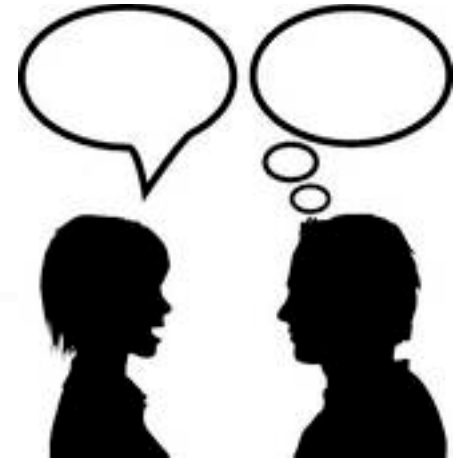
Pay Attention
To What Has Heart And Meaning

Tell The Truth
Without Blame Or Judgment

Be Open To Outcome
Not Attached To Outcome

Angeles Arrien

It's Impossible To
Not
Communicate



Silence Is One
Of The Most Powerful
Communication Tools We Have

Understanding is More Important
Than Agreement




Two Principles

- If Something Is Unmentionable, It Is Also Unmanageable

Folk Wisdom

- Not Everything That Is Faced Can Be Changed, But Nothing Can Be Changed Until It Is Faced

James Baldwin



The direction in which you look will
determine what you see

HOW things are handled is often more
important than WHAT happens


The antidote to violence is conversation/
communication

Larson

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Civility has two parts: generosity, even when it is costly, and trust, even when there is risk.

Civility creates not merely a negative duty not to do harm, but an affirmative duty to do good.

Stephen Carter



Listening Means Listening.

Many People Do More Preparing
Than They Do Listening

Listening, Really Listening,
Requires One To Pay More Attention
To What The Other Person Is Now
Saying Than To One's Response



Further Perspectives:

- Communication/Conversation is an antidote to violence...verbal, physical, or the failure to compromise
- Either / Or thinking and talking, if dominant, allows no space for both / and thinking and talking

Perspective On Anger

Anger Is Often A Secondary
Emotion, Preceded By A More
Primary Emotional Experience

Listen For Messages Beneath
The Messages
(Meta-communication)





Suggestions:

Responses to ANGER

Take a deep breath, relax as much as possible

Respectful listening will often defuse anger

Listen for more than anger; ask questions that get before the anger, things that may have precipitated the anger



Communication

- Communication is contagious. When others are agitated or angry, speak slowly, softly, strongly
- Don't escalate
- Avoid character comments
- Ask how you can be helpful
- Communicate your bottom lines

Communicating About Change And Distress



Information tames fears


- Information gives a sense of control
- Communication gives permission
- If you don't talk, people fill in blanks
- Communication helps with future fears, plans, or concerns
- Listen with empathy
- Don't interrupt too quickly
- Revisit and re-communicate
- Be patient

Things That Influence Distress

- Threats – safety, income, health, those we love, image or reputation, future
- Timing – time of day, time of life, state of our lives
- Ambiguity – situations that are “clear” are often easier to address than those that are ambiguous
- Perceived capacities
- Perceived support



More Reasons for Behaviors

- 
- Overwhelmed by life circumstances
 - Lack knowledge about county services
 - General suspicion of government
 - Poor previous experience with county services
 - Limited social skills
 - Personal temperament – demanding, talkative, negative

Positive Wording



Negative Words

Positive Alternatives

Problem

Situation, issue,
concern

No

What I/we can do

Cannot

What I/we can do

It's not my job

Although not my
usual, let me assist you
to...

You'll have to...

Can I get you to...

Our policy says

While I'm unable
to...what I can do is



Systems - Perspectives


Basic Principles

The Whole Is Greater Than The Sum Of Its
Parts

Every Part Of A System Affects And Is
Affected By Every Other Part Of The
System

Interdependence / Interrelated

More – Systems

- 
- Intra - Within County Units Or Within The Whole County System
 - Inter - Between Systems: Differing Counties And With Other Systems, e.g., Non-profit, Voluntary, Political, Religious

Work Place Resiliency Factors



An environment of incentives and rewards

- Staff members are accessible/available
- Workers walk the talk
- Match between "service" behavior and colleague behavior
- An environment of high expectations...for everyone
- Workers are involved in decisions that affect them



When You Run Into A Delay, Change, Or Loss

- Explain – Tell Them What You Can
- Tell Them What You Wish You Could Tell Them
- Tell Them You Know This Is A Difficult Time For Them
- Tell Them You Hope They Will Hang In With You And The Team



Commissioners Get The Heat For:

- Failure To Communicate
- Failure To Prepare For The Future
- Failure To Lead (Can Include Shared Leadership)
- Failure To Be Compassionate
- Failure To Honor The Past While Moving To The Future

Raising Issues

When to raise issues:

1. When something is affecting me or my work as a commissioner to the degree that it is interfering with quality
2. When my working relationship with someone is being or will be adversely affected unless we deal with it

(In both cases, the issue is of sufficient impact that you can not lay it aside and go on with your usual work.)



Raising Issues:

- HOW??
 - Directly
 - Quickly
 - Respectfully
 - Privately
 - Clearly
 - Personally (Speaking for oneself)

Conflict – A Definition



CONFLICT INVOLVES COMPETING STORIES

Neither is right or wrong, but each story is constructed by OUR ways of:

- Taking in information

- Interpreting information

- Making conclusions

- Weaving these together in a stable story

Conflict Occurs When Two Or

More People Differ And At

Least One Of Them Thinks It

Matters



HOW WE RESPOND TO CONFLICT

Escalation

Underground

Constructive



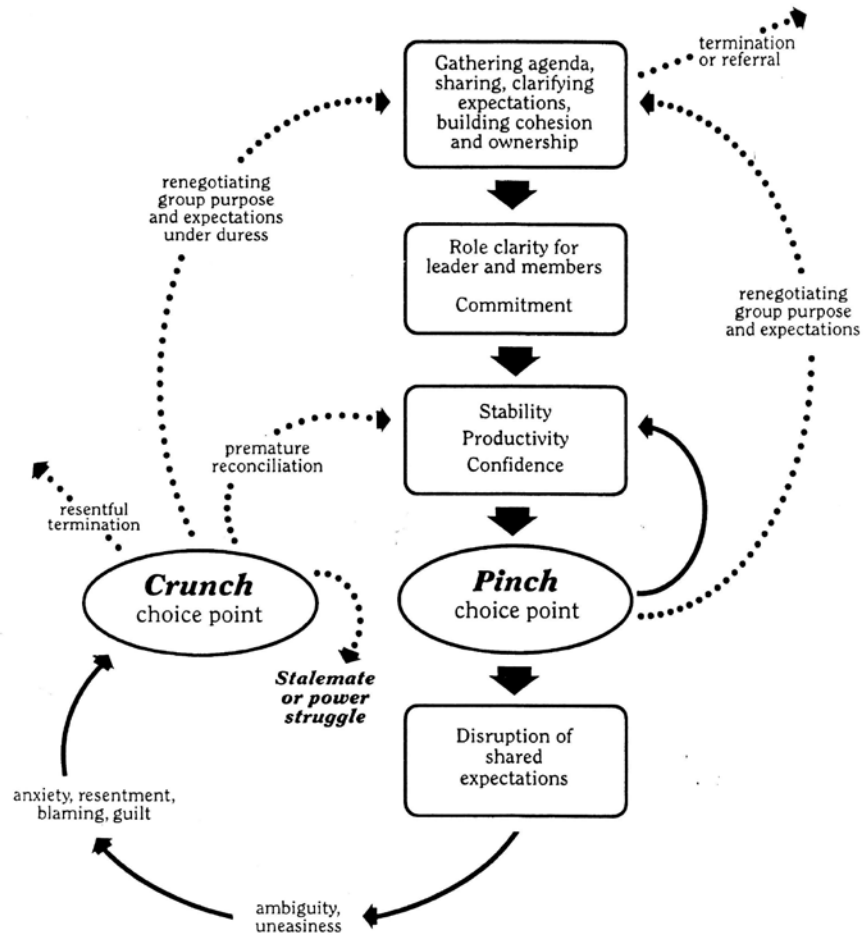


Two Kinds Of Conflict

- *Task conflict* - about facts, process, how to do things in the best way - essential for good decision-making, destructive of good relations unless addressed
- *Emotional conflict* - about feelings, anger, jealousy, fear - common, occurs easily, destructive of good relations unless addressed

“The Pinch Theory”

*A Model for Clarification and Negotiation
of Group Leadership Issues*



Adapted with permission by Ted Bowman from "Model for Couples: How Two Can Grow Together" by J.J. Sherwood and J.J. Scherer, *Journal for Small Group Behavior*, February, 1975. Originally "Planned Renegotiation" by J.J. Sherwood and J.C. Glidewell, in J.E. Jones and J.W. Pfeiffer (Eds.), *The 1973 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators*, San Diego, CA: University Associates.



Suggestions

- Listen And Practice Curiosity
- Clarify Roles – Who Does What, Whose Job This Is
- Commitment To We / Our
- Recognize Difference Between What And How
- Expect And Practice Civil Discourse

What Are Your “RED” Flags?

- What sorts of situations are hard for you for whatever reasons?
- What behaviors or words get to you?
- What erodes your ability to do good work?





Responses

Awareness

- Acknowledgement - Name
- Process
- Limit Setting
- Letting Go
- Grieving
- Practicing Self-care Daily
- Tend To Personal Relationships
- Cultivate Your Internal Supervisor



Managing Distress

- Address the elephants in the room
- Encourage people's best during these days
- Balance compassion and accountability
- Keep a focus on worker performance, not on their behaviors or speed of adjustment
- Don't personalize anger at the "system"; represent the best of the "system"

Suggestions



Accepted What They Could Not Change,
Changed What They Could

- Manageable Pieces/Steps
- Realized: Bad Things Happen To Good People
- Used Creativity
- Healed Themselves By Helping Others
- Did Not Allow Bitterness To Consume / Define Them
- Hopeful Visions Of Future
- Drew On Spiritual Resources



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For further support and/or counseling,
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