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Tips on How to Resolve Conflicts Effectively, Part Seven – August 31, 2010
by Joe Salama

If you are trying to solve a dispute in your life, let go of the need to allocate BLAME. It is less important who started it, or even who is right or wrong. It is more important to look at the actual NEEDS of the parties, and what a solution that satisfies everyone's needs would look like. It's really hard to do this, because as soon as you see the other party in person, the tendency is to assume the same role as before; your emotions set in, your defenses go back up, and you stop listening to the other party altogether. Research has actually proven that the EXACT SAME IDEA, if suggested by a neutral third party, is more likely to be accepted than if suggested by the opponent in a conflict - they call it "negative reactive devaluation." Another way to say it is simply "close-mindedness" because as a result of the conflict, you instinctively close your mind to anything the other party suggests.

The impact that stress, sleep deprivation, and skipping meals has on our mood is tremendous. Many of us become more sensitive to these things as we grow older, not less. If you are on the verge of an outburst before you even talk to a person because of a weak constitution, that's something you need to be aware of. Add "Taking care of your health" to your personal list of conflict management tools.

Workplace relationships take care to manage. Be careful not to let little things build in your mind, little "strikes" that you are quietly tallying against the guy down the hall because he drank the last cup of coffee or something else. We spend more time awake at work than at home, and we do it under more stress, with less freedom to express ourselves. Workplace conflicts happen easily and can seriously damage your career.

Never underestimate the value of sharing your perspective. What seems like a crystal clear background that justifies the position you are taking is very useful information to share with the person you are at odds with. More often than not, it's a view they hadn't considered - had they understood it before, they probably wouldn't be at odds with you now. So break out the peace pipe, sit down, and start talking.

It's amazing how often, out of stubbornness, desire to save face/fear of looking weak, or another reason, I will see a client act in a way that is directly against his best interest in a negotiation - even in the face of overwhelming evidence on the other side and even when there are dire consequences for doing so. Never let ego or pride get in the way of common sense.

Whenever something almost unreal happens out of the blue, it's a big clue that there is a misunderstanding going on. This comes up often in divorce mediations where one spouse thinks the other is cheating. It comes up in partner disputes where one partner thinks the other is stealing money from the business for personal expenses. Sometimes they are right, but often they are not. The person you once trusted deserves the benefit of the doubt until the truth can be discovered.

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