Leadership Principles for Conflict Resolution

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Office of Global Leadership Development
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True or False:

1. There should really be no conflict situations in the Seventh-day Adventist Church organization.

2. The presence of conflict in the church indicates a spiritual problem.

3. Spending time resolving conflict in the organization detracts from accom-plishing the mission of the Church.

Seventh-day Adventists entertain a theological and spiritual expectation of harmony in domestic and organizational life. The presence of conflict is generally viewed as **negative**, unhealthy and destructive.

Leaders often sense that conflict within the organization, office or home represents a **spiritual** problem.

Having to deal with conflicts is seen as a diversion from mission. Contention carries a stigma—and is often viewed as a sign of organizational ill health.

Perceptions about conflict:

- almost always viewed as negative, a blemish on the expected tranquility of organizational life and relationships, a disruption of order and a negative experience.

- a battle between competing and incompatible interests.

- often regarded as defining the **entire** relationship.

- involves a struggle between **absolutes**—right and wrong, good and evil.

But conflict in an organization can be beneficial. One of major reasons businesses fail or decline is that they cannot readily adapt to **changing** environments.

When an organization figures out what works it is tempted to become fixated on that. Unless an organization encourages regular and thorough internal **challenge** it is unlikely to keep up with the changing world. Persistent questioning, inquiry, is **essential** for remaining current.

Benefits of conflict:

- Realization of **alternative** ways of thinking and behaving.
- Clarification and growth in a relationship.
- Increased **confidence**.
- Less **anger** and depression.

Benefits of conflict—cont'd

- Greater respect from and for others.
- Greater self-respect.
- Improved **team** atmosphere.
- More **collaboration**, less competition.
- Reduction of fear.

Encouraging good conflict:

- Encourage people/groups to articulate **differences** and opinions
- Praise **disagreement**. Let people know that differences are appreciated.
- Mixed membership on committees. Include people having different views.
- Listen to **newcomers**—fresh perspective, not accustomed to status quo.

Encouraging good conflict—
cont'd

- Engage committee members in analysis, evaluating options.
- Deal with one issue at a time.
- Don't tolerate inappropriate behavior—name calling, attribution of motives, discrediting another person, getting personal.
- Practice **fairness**—be specific, honest, allow for response.

Basic elements of conflict:

- Diversity—in perceptions, needs, values, power, desires, goals, opinions. In dealing with conflict the purpose should not be to remove the differ-ences but to use them **constructively**.

- Needs—one or both parties ignore other's needs, obstruct the meeting of needs, or experience incompatibility over what the parties deem essential.

Basic elements of conflict—cont'd

- Perceptions—of self, other, situation, expectations, threat.
- **Power**—the capacity to act effectively and ability to influence. How power is defined and used plays a role in almost every conflict. Misuse of power to control or gain advantage leads to damaging conflict...

Basic elements of conflict – cont'd

- Resolving conflict by the "power over" pattern is ultimately ineffective and nurtures the potential for **reaction** or undermining.

Basic elements of conflict – cont'd

- **Values** and principles.
- Feelings and emotions.
- Internal conflicts.
- **Behavioral** styles.
- Communication styles.

Behavioral types (DISC system)

Focus	Approach	
	Fast	Methodical
On Tasks		
On Relationships		

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On Tasks	**Dominance**	
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On Tasks	**Dominance**	
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On Tasks	**Dominance**	
On Relationships	**Influence**	**Steadiness**

Behavioral types (DISC system)

Focus	Approach	
	Fast	Methodical
On Tasks	**Dominance**	**Conscientious**
On Relationships	**Influence**	**Steadiness**

High dominance style:

Process info quickly, focused on tasks, results oriented, will get the job done. Motivated by challenge, opportunity for achievements, and freedom from control.

High dominance style—cont'd

Can be too directive, impatient, insensitive. Tendency to steamroll. See themselves as **effective** and **honest**. Others see them as uncaring and pushy. Need to tone down their intensity and develop greater patience.

High influence style:

Process info quickly, more focused on relationships than on tasks, enthusiastic, charismatic, motivated by **recognition**, relationships, and freedom from details. Excellent in persuading and motivating people. Can be good negotiators.

High influence style:

Tend to **over-promise** and under-deliver. Need to pay more attention to detail.

High steadiness style:

More methodical than fast, tend to focus more on relationships than **tasks**, loyal, kind, giving, cooperative, calm, motivated by security, stability, and sincere **appreciation**.

High steadiness style:

Need to watch indecisiveness, being too indirect, subconsciously encourage others not to change.

High conscientious style:

Overly perfectionistic. Can discourage creativity in others. Can be quite rigid in view of world.

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Behavioral types (DISC system)

Focus	Approach	
	Fast	Methodical
On Tasks	**Dominance**	**Conscientious**
On Relationships	**Influence**	**Steadiness**

What happens under stress:

- High dominance people can become dominating and controlling.
- Influence people become manipulative and overly **emotional**.
- Steadiness people become passive and give in to others too easily.
- Conscientious people can become **paralyzed** by their perfectionism and high expectations.

If you understand these differences you can deal with conflict in a way that is productive rather than destructive. Cannot treat these differences as issues of right and wrong—or else chances of resolving conflict in a healthy manner are greatly reduced.

Behavioral styles in an elevator:

- High dominance—step into elevator and push the "close door" button.

- High influence—step into elevator and say, "Come on, there's room for all."

- High steadiness—lets everyone step in and waits for the next elevator.

- High conscientious--steps in, sizes up everyone, and then looks at the weight limit charts on the elevator wall.

Behavioral styles speeding:

- High dominance--steps out of car and begin arguing with police officer.

- High influence—ignites charm, asks for donation, officer becomes good friend.

- High steadiness—thanks officer for the ticket and points out that he wasn't wearing seatbelt either.

- High conscientious—politely pulls out rules, starts preparing logical defense.

Behavior response patterns:

Direct   Indirect

Honest   Dishonest

Appropriate   Inappropriate

Respectful   Disrespectful

Focus on my feelings/reactions   Focus on others' feelings/reactions

"Words have the power to both destroy and heal. When words are both true and kind, they can change our world."

—Buddha

Direct—indirect continuum: how much your discussion is to the point and conducted with the **right person**.

Honest—dishonest continuum: how much the discussion truly represents your opinion, thought, feeling or request.

"Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body."

—Ephesians 4:25

Appropriate—inappropriate continuum: concerns time and place of the discussion (right time, right environment).

Respectful—disrespectful continuum: indicates how well you show honor to the other person's rights in the way that you **express** yourself to him/her.

Focus continuum demonstrates whose feelings and reactions are considered most important.

Response patterns:

Passive

Aggressive

Assertive

Passive response pattern:

Direct   **X** Indirect

Honest   **X** Dishonest

Appropriate   **X**   Inappropriate

Respectful   **X**   Disrespectful

Focus on my   **X** Focus on others'
feelings/reactions   feelings/reactions

Aggressive response pattern:

Direct   **X** Indirect

Honest   **X**   Dishonest

Appropriate   **X** Inappropriate

Respectful   **X** Disrespectful

Focus on my   **X**   Focus on others'
feelings/reactions   feelings/reactions

Assertive response pattern:

Direct   **X** Indirect

Honest   **X**   Dishonest

Appropriate   **X**   Inappropriate

Respectful   **X**   Disrespectful

Focus on my   **X**   Focus on others'
feelings/reactions   feelings/reactions

"If you want to gather honey, don't kick over the beehive." —Dale

Carnegie

Ten mistakes to avoid:

- Defensiveness (reacting). When we do so we take on the emotions of the upset person and end up damaging our **integrity**.

- Pacifying—often has the effect of escalating the anger of the upset person.

Ten mistakes to avoid—cont'd

- Lack of pacing—match the intensity without matching **aggressiveness**, then slowly soften your voice.

Ten mistakes to avoid—cont'd

- Forgetting that understanding is not the same as **agreeing**. In conflict most people put understanding what the other person is feeling at a much lower priority. Their attention goes immediately to disagreements. We start building our argument against the person even before we have understood the issue.

Ten mistakes to avoid—cont'd

- Verbal and nonverbal behaviors do not match. We tend to **trust** the nonverbal behavior much more than the verbal.

Ten mistakes to avoid—cont'd

- Failing to use appropriate listening style: appreciative (for enjoyment), empathic (in order to emotionally support), comprehensive (in order to organize information), discerning (to gather all the information), and evaluative (in order to make a decision).

Ten mistakes to avoid—cont'd

- Focusing on details of **discussion** rather than the core issue. Stay with core issues, own where you have made mistakes, attempt to move toward compromise. Keep away from grocery list of side issues.

Ten mistakes to avoid—cont'd

- Failing to reflect back what other person is saying. Gives the person peace of mind and assurance that you **understand**.

- Not utilizing the 100 + 1% principle—find the 1% in the upset person's argument that you agree with and agree with it 100%.—Psychologist Donald Moine

Ten mistakes to avoid—cont'd

- Putting your "but" in the **wrong** place. "But" erases everything that came before it. People tend to focus on or believe what they hear after the "but" rather than what comes before it.

Which statement is better?

"I love you but you always burn the toast."

OR

"You always burn the toast but I love you."

Which statement is better?

"It was wrong of me to get so angry, but your behavior really frustrated me."

OR

"Your behavior really frustrated me, but it was wrong of me to get so angry."

"It is a luxury to be understood."—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Seven possible choices when confronted with conflict: avoid, give in, be passive-aggressive (aggressive behavior that is indirect), bully, compromise, problem solve, honor. Perhaps the most common response to conflict is **avoidance**.

Among the reasons for not dealing with conflict are: fear of harm, rejection, loss of relationship, anger, being seen as selfish, saying the wrong thing, failing, hurting someone, getting what you want, intimacy.

Traditional approaches to conflict resolution: negotiation, **mediation**, arbitration. Each approach seems to reward the party who could find a way to get more out of his/her/their demands, or who could make fewer concessions, or who could perform better on conflict resolution competition. These resolution strategies are primarily adversarial rather than collaborative.

Ineffective strategies:

Conquest: often uses power in destructive ways, he who has the power at the start usually has an advantage, polarizes attitudes, "loser" is necessary, does not heal relationships.

Ineffective strategies—cont'd

Avoidance: Tempting to believe that conflict will disappear if ignored. Merely postpones necessity of dealing with conflict. Deprives opportunity of personal growth and redefinition of relationships.

Ineffective strategies—cont'd

Bargaining: Each gives up something but remains unsatisfied. Defines power in terms of what one can coerce from the other. Fails to assess needs, values, perceptions, goals and feelings of participants. Tends to focus on arithmetic of negotiation, obscures the relative values of needs and interests held by the parties.

Ineffective strategies—cont'd

Bandaid: Quick-fix approach. Creates the **illusion** that fundamental issues have been addressed. Often produces a heightened lack of confidence in conflict resolution procedures. Parties involved do not develop a process of addressing future issues.

Ineffective strategies—cont'd

Role-player: Boss-subordinate, teacher-student, parent-child, etc. Relates to roles and structures rather than to persons. Perpetuates a fixed relationship that blocks needed changes. Options for resolving conflict are reduced. Creates an adversarial relationship.

Five basic principles:

- We, not I versus you.
- Conflicts are dealt with in context of overall relationship.
- Should improve the relationship.
- Results in mutual benefits.
- Relationship-building and conflict resolution are connected.

Eight essential steps:

Create an effective **atmosphere**—your personal preparation, timing location and initial opening statements. Avoid locking yourself into rigid demands of what the solution must be. Choose a time that does not give an advantage to one. Choose a place that is **non-threatening**. Try to create a partnership atmosphere.

Eight essential steps—cont'd

Clarify **perceptions**—is the conflict over one isolated event or over a consistent pattern of events? Is it over values or preferences, needs or desires, goals or methods. Identify the specific components of the relationship. Begin working on a component that stands a good chance of being resolved. Avoid stereotyping of other party. Use good communication skills

Eight essential steps—cont'd

Focus on individual and shared needs —focus on needs not **demands**. Try to outline and prioritize specific needs.

Eight essential steps—cont'd

Build shared positive power. Avoid negative power—focuses on attempts to gain advantage over the other, emphasizes power over rather than power with, requires a loser or a subservient rather than a partner. Positive power seeks to promote the **constructive** capabilities of all parties involved in a conflict.

Eight essential steps—cont'd

Look to the future, then learn from the past. Every relationship has a past, present and future. Try first to focus on the present-future. Temptation will be to focus only on past because that is where injury, suspicion or mistrust began to occur.

Eight essential steps—cont'd

Generate **options**. Look for more than packaged standard responses. Generating options can often break through preconceived limitations.

Eight essential steps—cont'd

Develop specific **action steps**. Not satisfactory to merely identify a desired outcome.

Eight essential steps—cont'd

Make mutual benefit agreements.
Become a caretaker of the partner's
welfare. Clarify specific
responsibilities. Understand and
respect the needs of each other.

Acknowledgements:

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- *The Coward's Guide to Conflict*, Tim Ursiny, Sourcebooks, Inc. 2003
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End