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Capacity-Building Skills For Public Officials

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WHY WE DON'T AGREE, AND WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT



Developed by

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CAPACITY-BUILDING SKILLS FOR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

WHY WE DON'T AGREE, AND WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT

Objectives of this bulletin are to:

- 1. Describe the types of disagreements found on local boards.
- 2. Explain basic causes of disagreement.
- 3. Provide a framework for a process of managing conflict in general terms and using the assertive style.
- 4. Describe the role of the third party intervenor in managing conflict.

While the focus of these bulletins is the public official, the material covered is appropriate for all Extension audiences.

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I. Introduction

To discuss confrontation and conflict on local elected boards, we must first destroy a cherished myth. Like it or not, nice people *DO* get into conflict! Many people were brought up to believe that this isn't true, but experience shows that it is. Your board may be fortunate and have smooth sailing for years, but sooner or later a situation or a clash of personalities will disturb the peace. This bulletin will give you some ideas on how this comes about. It will help you to be able to sort out the pieces and to know what to do about it before it becomes hurtful to individuals or to the progress of the board.

The causes of disagreement are as complex as all the personalities that bring it about. The local official needs to learn to expect a variety of causes and forms of disagreement, and to develop an equal variety of techniques for managing it when it comes. As the political activist Stokeley Carmichael once observed, "Conflict is as American as apple pie." In a free society, where people may express themselves openly, disagreements will always occur from time to time. The public policy maker needs to accept this as part of life. It is better to develop skills in managing conflict when it comes than to try to ignore its presence.

Sometimes disagreement on a board may only indicate that the board, as a unit, is alive and well! At other times, its presence may be very divisive. This bulletin will present information to aid you, as a local official, in determining what kind of trouble you may be experiencing and some techniques for dealing with it.¹

¹Refer to Appendix A, p. 20, "Work-Related Conflict Evaluation," for assessment of conflict your office situation may bring you.

II. Types and Causes of Disagreement on the Local Board

As indicated above, disagreements on local boards and councils don't always take the same form. Though it is an oversimplification to speak of conflict as entirely positive or entirely negative, there is enough validity in the positive-negative differentiation to pursue it further. A township treasurer described a problem she experiences every year at tax time. She said, "I know, just like clockwork, when Joe is going to come roaring in! He always feels the township—and I guess me, personally—is cheating him by his tax assessment. We 'have it in for him.' So every year he yells and swears at me. I hate it, and I don't think I should have to take that kind of abuse, but I don't know what to do about it." Joe is clearly one of "the Bullies" described in Bulletin III of this series.² Is this a conflict? Joe is in conflict with the idea of his tax assessment and the treasurer feels the brunt of his anger. She doesn't respond in a conflictive way, so conflict is only one-sided. vet her feelings towards Joe are certainly negative.

Here is another example: "We never get anything accomplished on our council! Every time we just begin our meeting, the police chief and the fire chief get into their usual arguments. If they don't argue about each department's 'turf,' they argue about budget or something else! They never have gotten along, and the rest of us are held up in getting our business done. Too often, some of the rest of us are drawn into the argument and it gets pretty unpleasant. It's when some of them start name calling that disgusts me the most!" This is clearly a conflict, but is it a board conflict or a personality conflict? Another example was recounted

²Refer to Extension bulletin E-1917, "Local Boards—Working Together," page 7, for a description of the Bullies and how to handle them.

recently by a local official: "We have the darnedest bunch on the board! It seems like every meeting we get in arguments, but some way they never feel bad to anyone. We just hash out the issue until we decide what is best to do. Actually, it's kind of fun and I think we all learn a lot from it!" Is this a group conflict? Should it be avoided?

The first example (the Bully) is not a conflict so much as a case of inappropriate behavior used by a highly conflictive individual. Upon being guestioned about Joe, the treasurer stated that he seems to react to many things in life in this antagonistic way. Such a conflictive personality needs to be dealt with by using specific behavior, such as that referred to in Bulletin III. In the second example, there is definitely a conflict, but it is not a group conflict, though it occurs within the context of the board meeting. It is a personality conflict and probably happens wherever those two meet. However, because it detracts from the goal achievement of the group, it needs to be dealt with in that setting. The third example should happen more often! What a healthy group that is. Members can argue lustily, yet keep to the issues, without getting into personalities, and cheerfully admit they learn from the conflict.

These examples illustrate two very basic types of conflict, as well as a third that may be seen as conflict but really involves a troublesome personality and its victim. There are always occasional bullying personalities, and they need to be dealt with firmly and not allowed to abuse others. Unless a bully's intended victim fights back with similar abuse, there is no conflict. The case of the police chief and the fire chief is a definite conflict. The situation describing their behaviors is typical of disagreements based on personality differences. Such problems usually include name calling and other examples of vindictiveness. Conflicting personalities will frequently draw others into the fray and cause a deterioration of goal accomplishment for everyone. When personality conflicts occur in a meeting, they very often are based in personal power struggles. We can say, "Oh, they just don't get along!" But with a deeper look we see that power or status gaining it or keeping it—often is at the root of the problem. There is very little to be gained when a local board allows itself to become involved in this type of disagreeable behavior. In fact, some of the effects of this negative behavior are:

- It interrupts normal relations among individuals or within the group.
- It harms the self-concepts of the antagonists.
- It makes rational discussions difficult or impossible.
- It takes the time and energy of the whole group.
- It considerably lessens the productivity of the group.

The third example given earlier, the board that argues out problems and learns in the process, illustrates what can be termed positive conflict. This occurs when the conflict is based on ideas, issues, values or principles and does not deteriorate into personality attacks. Such interchanges allow some very valuable results for the group, such as:

- It helps members know where others stand on issues-what is important to them.
- It aids in defining a variety of issues and values, so the group can see itself more clearly.

- It often leads to a healthy confrontation that can bring out ideas, issues or values in a way that resolves the conflict and minimizes bad feelings.
- It can be the beginning of a redefinition of goals, which will result in a more satisfying situation for all the members.

Whenever a local board finds itself in disagreement, each member needs to be willing to face the facts and help to keep it positive in areas of issues and ideas. It is important not to try to avoid it or pretend it isn't happening—conflict does not sweep under rugs well at all!—or to allow it to become harmful and negative—centered around personality attacks. Leaders skilled in dealing with conflict are very helpful to the success of a local board. Such a person will generally be able to manage disagreements so that they don't take on the greater dimensions of actual conflict.

Many local board chairpersons, however, do not necessarily have those skills. In fact, these leaders may even be part of the problem. As the old saying goes so correctly, "If you are part of the problem, you can't be part of the solution!" The time may come when severe problems necessitate bringing in an outside intervenor. (This will be discussed later.) On most daily problems, however, each member of a local board, commission or council has equal responsibility to be alert to the development of conflict. They can help keep it positive and show a willingness to help save the group from the wasteful effects of unchecked disagreement.

Trying to bring a disagreement back to a legitimate basis after it has been allowed to deteriorate is very difficult. At the first sign of petty bullying, attacking or fruitless head banging, each member must be prepared to attempt intervention, for the sake of the whole group and its goal achievement. Impersonal statements can be used, such as, "That is not the issue. The issue is..." or "Let's not bring in personalities. Our problem, rather, is this...." These are firm, meaningful statements that do not put blame on any individual. Keep intervening statements from pointing out those who are attacking others. This will help avoid escalating the conflict by provoking defensive reactions from the perpetrators.

The illustrations above provide examples of interpersonal and intragroup conflicts. Another type of disagreement can occur between boards or councils. This is called intergroup conflict. This was described by a township supervisor who related a problem his community was facing: "The county commission wants to put a landfill on a particular 40 acres in our township. We are fighting them because we are farmers and know that piece of land is too valuable to use for a landfill. If we have to have the landfill in our township, we can identify other property that is poor for farming and has lighter soil that would work better, anyway. They don't want to listen to us, though, and they are trying to force it on us!"

A city manager complained of intergroup conflict this way: "We have one commissioner in our county who doesn't seem to understand what territory is served by the county and what is served by the city. He is always stirring up the commission against us about something that is ours to handle. He keeps saying that the city is part of the county, too. This doesn't make sense, but he just keeps something going all the time." Then after a moment's reflection, the city manager added, "You know, he lost a race for mayor once. I think he's been mad about that ever since and takes it out on us!"

These are very different examples of intergroup disagreement and ensuing conflict. The first case is

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more typical: one group exerts its power over another, and the second group guards its territory jealously, as it must to remain intact. Each side feels the other is out of order and misperceiving the real situation. In the second example, one board member's "hidden agenda"-to "get back at" the city because it rejected him-influences others to disharmony with the other board. This shows a characteristic in group-oriented conflict that may distinguish it from person-to-person conflict: the "mass reaction" possible either in intraor intergroup conflict. Emotional or hostile individuals or subgroups can influence the larger group to irrational behavior by playing on their loyalties to their own group and/or by developing a sense of threat from the opposing group. It is precisely in this way that mass hysteria begins. When carried to extreme, this has too often ended in actions such as lynch mobs or other examples of totally irrational mob violence. Interpersonal conflict, on the other hand, generally hurts only the original combatants

Intra- or intergroup conflicts both have the potential to incite whole groups to unplanned, irrational action against opposing groups. This potential should provide further incentive to group members to take the responsibility for intervening, whenever this is possible.³

III. Underlying Causes of Disagreement

The incidents described above that led to conflict demonstrate different types of conflict. It will be helpful now to take a close look at what goes on in groups that brings about disagreement. Think of your membership on local boards and recall incidents from your own experience that will illustrate the following concepts.

³Refer to Appendix B, page 23, "The Spring Conflict."

Sometimes members of boards agree on what they are working toward but disagree on how to get there. This is a *goal vs. method* disagreement. Example: Your board may see the need for plans for future development of the outlying areas you deal with. All of you agree this is important, but some say it is necessary to hire a planning firm to carry out the development, while others feel the board can do it "without spending all that money."

Can you think of another example of goal vs. method disagreement?

Just the opposite situation gets local boards into trouble with each other at times. This occurs when they don't agree on where they should be going or on what actions they should take in particular situations. This is strictly a *goal assessment conflict*. Let's say you are budgeting funds. Some members argue that they should be used to buy needed parks equipment, while another group feels that the money should be put in savings against urgent future needs.

What situation have you seen that illustrates disagreement because of differing assessment of goals in a particular situation?

Another cause of disagreement that easily leads to conflict is when individual members or groups feel *threatened* by other members or by some situation. The sense of threat affects insecure members most heavily, but everyone feels threatened occasionally. What causes us to feel threatened in our groups? It could be a threat to positions, knowledge, values or our sense of "territory." A threat to position and territory can be the same, but we sense our territory in more ways than by position. It could refer to groups of constituents that an official feels are his/her particular supporters; it could be physical territory when sharing office space. Most people react defensively when they feel a sense of threat. An example might be when a new secretary is hired. You may feel he/she will be welcomed by the present secretary, as he/she can share the work load. When you notice the original person acting put out and offended, you don't understand it. What is occurring is reaction to a territorial and possibly a knowledge threat.

Can you recall other examples of disagreement arising because someone felt threatened?

Many times members of local boards get into disagreement when it seems there is not enough of something needed, as well as a problem allocating what is available. This is a conflict of *disposition of resources* and can focus either on tangible or intangible resources. We easily think of tangibles, such as land, money, records, materials or facts, as resources. But sometimes certain intangible resources are equally important to a situation. Try to move ahead on your board with a shortage of time, ideas or cooperation! Clearly, scarcity of resources and the issue of who will get what is available for use are common causes of disagreement on local boards.

A member of a local council recently discussed a problem that illustrates this concept. She said, "We have so much trouble getting anything done that needs to involve several departments. They all see each other as competing for every dollar the city gets. They don't realize how much it would be an advantage to all of them if they would support each other, rather than waste energies and abilities in non-productive competition." This is an example of conflict over a tangible resource (money) that results in an intangible resource

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(cooperation) becoming more scarce because of the original conflict.

What have you experienced that would further illustrate conflict over scarcity or allocation of resources?

All the causes of disagreement discussed above are greatly intensified when communication is poor or nonexistent. When people either can't communicate or communicate poorly, the results can include increased hostility, resentment, defiance, apathy (why try?) or total polarization. It is easy to see that the effectiveness of communication can greatly influence whether a problem remains at the level of disagreement or escalates to full-blown conflict.

A township trustee related a sad example of communication problems leading to conflict when she said: "Our treasurer has never accepted the new clerk, simply because the clerk is a man. The clerk in our township had always been a woman and the treasurer (herself a woman) just thinks clerks should be women! Consequently, she 'picks' at everything the clerk does, criticizing and fault finding continually. At first, the new clerk was rather amused and able to tolerate it, but now he resents this behavior. It has gotten so bad that they get into an argument several times a week. The supervisor is about ready to suggest they both leave!" What a waste of time and energy this illustrates.

Does this remind you of times that poor communication added fuel to a small fire, resulting in real trouble?⁴

⁴Refer to Appendix C, page 24, "Conflict on the Commission."

IV. Techniques for Handling Disagreements, Confrontations and Conflicts

A. General Guidelines

Problems between individuals or groups can often be kept in the positive arena—that is, kept to issues, ideas, values, etc. When this occurs, management techniques can be used to reduce the acrimony, minimize hostility and enable everyone to learn from the situation. This is what needs to be done with a conflictive situation—reduce it, manage it, minimize negativism. Too often, local officials feel they should attempt to eliminate conflict completely, including simple disputes, or there is something wrong. This is part of that "nice people don't get into conflict" myth that was rebutted early in this discussion.

Eliminating disagreements would also eliminate all chance to learn from each other. Healthy conflict can provide challenges to members that otherwise might not occur. Also, it helps us test our knowledge and belief systems against those of our peers. Rather than thinking how to do away with various levels of disagreement, local decision makers can concentrate on managing it for the greatest good to all.

Organizations that see themselves as successful that is, meeting their goals to a reasonable extent and satisfying their followers—tend to have a tolerance for disagreement and even for conflict. In such an atmosphere, members are often willing to be conciliatory with each other, smoothing over disagreements and ignoring factors that could cause unpleasant situations. When tension, unrest or organizational insecurity exists, for whatever reasons, members are far less able or willing to tolerate additional stress. This holds true on local boards as well as in any other kind of human grouping. Assuming that there is some level of tolerance present in the group, the following guidelines can be used in minimizing potential problems:

- Recognize and admit to a growing problem while it is still small.
- Be willing to discuss it-don't avoid it.
- Do your best to empathize and feel the other's viewpoint.⁵
- Admit your own shortcomings or errors.
- Minimize self-defending behavior.
- Ask questions, rather than attack.
- Attempt to understand, rather than being judgmental or critical.
- Use the problem to discover the other's thinking, not as a way to WIN.
- Try to suggest mutual conciliation and/or compromise.
- Be flexible! Settle for gaining a little, rather than trying for total defeat of the other.
- Keep the discussion focused on issues. Avoid allowing the interaction to deteriorate into personality attacks!

Always remember that you will live beyond this situation, probably with these same people. It is too easy to win the battle only to lose the war. You can ''go for the jugular'' today with a fellow board member, but it gets a bit uncomfortable if you find yourself passing the

⁵Refer to Extension bulletin E-1915, "Express Yourself (Without Turning Others Off!) for explanations of empathy.

collection box with the same person in church a few days later!

B. Using the Assertive Style

Few people really enjoy situations in which disagreements get out of hand. You may find that risking confrontation makes you very uncomfortable. However, the use of the Assertive behavior style discussed earlier in this series will help keep hostility and negative kinds of conflict to a minimum.⁶ The use of Assertive behavior in a confrontation creates a possibility of reducing ill feelings and gives an opportunity for positive results and "clearing the air."

In general, it is important to provide opportunities, as well as encouragement, so hostile persons can honestly express their feelings. You need ask only that they refrain from abusive language. If you are in a situation with a bully, as described earlier, it is all right to say something like, "Now, hold on a minute! Let's make a deal. I'll listen to you as long as it takes, if you promise not to swear at me!" If you can do that with some humor, it might help a bit, too. In any case, be willing to give time and attention to the other person, and do your best to use good listening skills. People who are full of acrimonious feelings are rarely as rational as they might be. So let them run down before you begin to respond. When you are faced with an angry or hostile individual, try to remember that hostility is often based on fear, insecurity, misinformation, frustration or a combination of all of these. Knowing that this may be the basis for the tirade you face can help you keep your response somewhat milder.

⁶Refer to Extension bulletin E-1915, "Express Yourself (Without Turning Others Off!) for explanations of assertiveness.

As a public official facing confrontation—whether person to person or by a group at a meetingremember that you are the symbol of government to constituents who are frustrated or feel ill-treated. Local officials are handy-they live nearby and are approachable. Try to recognize that, very often, the anger or frustration directed toward you is really felt toward your role, and not toward you as an individual. You are there, and people can express their dissatisfaction personally. An elderly woman who has spent many years in local government put it this way: "When they come in mad, I just remember it's not really me they are mad at, so I let them blow off steam! You know, very often they apologize when they are done and tell me they weren't upset at me." She also wisely said that she "wouldn't think of interrupting them before they were finished."

When facing confrontation, local policy makers will benefit by using straightforward, assertive behavior and being very careful not to become judgmental. A part of the process of defusing hostile people is to recognize, openly, the negative feelings they are expressing. When people are upset, they expect to have those negative feelings rejected by the one they are confronting. It generally reduces some frustration if you can respond with an honest "I" message, such as, "I can see you are really angry today," or, "I feel you don't trust me in this matter." Angry people often expect they can dump their feelings on another. Accepting that puts the victim in a defensive position, and the confronter just "won a round." The assertive person refuses to be dumped on by openly recognizing the other's negative feelings.

The next step in the defusing process is to tell the upset person that you regret there is a problem and that the accusations or hostility being directed toward you are personally hurtful. "I feel bad that you are upset with me," is an honest statement of feelings. It can easily be followed by a statement such as, "But let's see if we can find a way to work out this problem." Note: not "your" problem—that can sound judgmental. If you can use this assertive process, it tells the confronter that you:

- Really heard what he/she said.
- Recognize that there is a problem.
- Have feelings/reactions, too.
- Are not trying to deny that he/she is upset.
- Do not intend to allow the confrontation to become a shouting match.
- Refuse to be dumped on.
- Are willing to work with him/her to try to solve the problem.

At this point, it will be helpful to be as open and thorough as possible in using facts in further dealing with the confronter. When people are upset, they tend to see written material as more valid than words. Showing the records, or whatever, will be more convincing than your statements.⁷

V. The Role of the Third Party

Earlier in this bulletin appeared the statement, "If you are part of the problem, you can't be part of the solution." That old saying is generally accepted as valid. If the problem is severe, the local official may well find him/herself in a situation where this holds true. If con-

^{&#}x27;Refer to Appendix D, page 25, "The Domineering Clerk."

frontation and intense, negative conflict have come about through a personality clash, the saying may very well apply. If a group of citizens is taking hostile action against a unit of local government, the saying may also apply. Further, it may be valid if subgroups on a board or council are in conflict and simply cannot resolve their differences.

When a confrontation has become intense and reached an impasse, it may be time to consider identifying a third party to serve as an intervenor.⁸ The intervenor needs to be someone who has little or no association with the individuals or groups in conflict. For instance, if subgroups on a board or council are in conflict, the third party chosen to intervene would not be a member of any of the groups. An intervenor should be selected because he/she is:

- Someone known and credible to all parties.
- One who can be fair and impartial.
- Able to use group skills effectively (is a good "people person").
- Patient, positive and tactful.
- Available over extended periods of time, if this becomes necessary.

Though all of these criteria are important, credibility to all those involved is the factor that provides the best chance for success.

Once an intervenor has been selected, the process he/she uses should be based on the following guidelines:

• Use assertive behaviors in all interactions.

^{*}Refer to Appendix E, page 27, "The Cool Colleagues."

- Be well prepared with all facts pertaining to the problem.
- Use non-judgmental, feeling response questions.
- Help all parties to "save face" wherever possible.
- Attempt to establish any common goals, perceptions, information or attitudes shared by the opposing parties.
- Reinforce all positive behavior or attitudes shown by any party.
- Tackle the problems a piece at a time, easiest pieces first, in separate sessions.
- Build confidence by emphasizing even small successes.
- Negotiate subparts of the conflict when this is possible.
- Show that reasonable behavior is expected from participants, and disallow behavior that may be offensive or abusive.
- Choose ''neutral ground'' for the negotiating sessions.
- Attempt to develop consensus wherever possible (a little agreement gives hope that more can occur).
- Restate and summarize frequently, helping each party to express his/her real feelings.
- Attempt to separate feelings from facts as participants express themselves.
- Maintain a calm and positive demeanor throughout the process.

VI. Summary

Though few people enjoy being involved in disagreement or conflict with friends or colleagues, it is important to accept that it will happen at times. To find vourself occasionally involved in an unpleasant dispute is a normal part of life and should be accepted as such. Instead of wasting time and energy looking for what went wrong and then worrying about how it came about, try to develop skills in managing conflict. Concentrate on keeping the problem within the bounds of issues and ideas. Proceed with an open, flexible attitude that shows a willingness to learn from the conflict. Remember that conflict can help both individuals and groups to grow, to become stronger and more capable. Pursuit of goal accomplishment can become more meaningful and give increased satisfaction when group members develop skills in conflict management.

For Further Readings In This Area

Robinson and Clifford. *Conflict Management in Community Groups.* University of Illinois Press.

Steve Turne. Conflict in Organizations: Practical Solutions Any Manager Can Use. Prentice-Hall.

"Dealing With Conflict." *Harvard Business Review.* Harvard University Press.

Dean Tjosvold. *Productive Conflict Management: Perspectives for Organizations.* Irvington.

Joyce Hocker Frost. *Interpersonal Conflict.* W.C. Brown Co.

Richard Walton. Interpersonal Peacemaking, Confrontations and Third-Party Consultation. Addison-Wesley.

Robert J. Doolittle. *Communication and Conflict.* Science Research Foundation.

Sex Roles, Rights and Values In Conflict. New York: Facts on File.

Jay Folbert. *Mediation: A Comprehensive Guide to Resolving Conflicts Without Litigation.* Jossey-Bass.

Roger Fisher and William Ury. *Getting to Yes.* Penquin Books.

Appendices

Appendix A

WORK-RELATED CONFLICT EVALUATION

Stressful day-to-day conditions, such as those listed below, often exist in the office with employees or with the elected staff members in a local governmental unit. Indicate the relative frequency with which you experience each of the following sources of conflict by writing the appropriate response number in the corresponding blank. Then add all numbers in the frequency column and write the result in the TOTAL column.

FREQUENCY SCALE

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Infrequently
- 3 =Sometimes
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Always

FREQUENCY CONDITION

- 1. I am unclear about what is expected of me.
- 2. My fellow board members seem unclear about what my job is.
- 3. I have differences of opinion with my fellow board members.

 4.	The demands of others for my time are in conflict.
 5.	I lack confidence in the board on which I serve.
 6.	New board policies interrupt my daily work routine.
 7.	Conflict exists between my unit and others with which it must work.
 8.	l get feedback from the public only when my performance is unsatisfactory.
 9.	Decisions or changes that affect me are made without my knowledge or involvement.
 10.	I am sometimes expected to ac- cept the decisions of others without being told their rationale.
 11.	I must attend too many meetings to get my job done.
 12.	I feel the need to be cautious about what I say in meetings.
 13.	I have too much to do and too lit- tle time in which to do it.
 14.	I feel overqualified for the work I actually do.
 15.	I feel underqualified for the work I actually do.
 16.	The people I work with closely are trained in a field that is different from mine.

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 17.	I must go to other departments (units) to get my job done.
 18.	I have unsettled conflicts with my co-workers.
 19.	l get no personal support from my co-workers.
 20.	I spend my time ''fighting fires'' rather than working according to a plan.
 21.	I do not have the right amount of interaction (too much or too little) with others.
 22.	I do not have the opportunity to use my knowledge and skills to the best advantage.
 23.	I worry about complying with state laws affecting my job.

Scoring:

Frequency

- 115 90 = Extreme conflict (unlivable)
 89 60 = Unpleasantly high conflict
 59 35 = Reasonable conflict (livable)
 - 34 Below = Excellent work environment

If your score is 60 or higher, seriously consider using assertive, confident behavior and discuss your conflictive feelings with your fellow board members. Point out that a positive feeling about the work and work situation will increase everyone's productivity.



Appendix B

THE SPRING CONFLICT

Every spring you observe the same conflicts. The roads start to break up from the stress of winter, and new residents who don't understand the law come to the township board to protest. The supervisor tells them that roads are up to the county to handle. Sooner or later, they are right back to the township saying the county hasn't done anything and they think their township board should act. As a trustee for several terms, you know this will be repeated again this year. Your supervisor ends up annoyed at the county because they "don't move faster": the commissioners make remarks about "those township people not knowing their business''; the new residents become frustrated because they "don't get any help from anyone!" As a township trustee, you think something should be done to resolve this annual spring conflict. but you don't really know what to do or where to start.

Review Section II and determine what type of conflict this is. Is it

- a personality conflict?
- an intragroup conflict?
- an intergroup conflict?

Do you understand the differences among these types of conflict?

Appendix C

CONFLICT ON THE COMMISSION

You have just become township treasurer. As you went over the records to acquaint yourself with them, it seemed that some transactions didn't make sense. You felt that either you didn't understand the system or the transactions had been done improperly. The former treasurer moved away, so you went to the township clerk to ask for clarification. You were met with indignation and affront that you would imply that things were done crookedly. You weren't implying that and had asked in an honest effort toward clarification, so you felt hurt and confused at such a hostile reaction.

- a. What is happening here, in terms of causes of disagreement between people? Review Section III and identify which causes described there apply to this situation.
- b. Would you say this is a positive or a negative disagreement? Why?
- c. How could this disagreement be managed before it becomes a real conflict? Use information presented in this bulletin to formulate your answers.

Appendix D

THE DOMINEERING CLERK

As a first-term supervisor, you can see that you are going to have to do something about the clerk. When you ran for office, friends warned you about him: "He will try to run you as he has the last three supervisors. He won't stick to what is his business and will get his cronies on the board to oppose anything you do when he doesn't like it." You have found all this to be true. The clerk has met all your attempts at conciliation with his usual argumentative, defensive style, refusing to acknowledge your good intentions, acting as if you are trying to pick on him. It is time for a different approach to work out this problem.

- a. Using the suggestions in Section IV, how could those techniques be employed in this situation?
- b. What behaviors could the supervisor use to face the clerk more effectively?
- c. How could the supervisor employ the assertive style of intervention in this situation? Think these questions through as though the problem was yours.

CONFLICT ON THE BOARD

You and other administrative officials on your township board definitely feel that the trustees are trying to tell you how to run your business too much of the time. They seem to question every decision you make just to show their "authority." The other administrators and you have had enough and intend to force a confrontation about this at the next board meeting.

- a. Describe how this confrontation could be handled negatively. What would be said, how, by whom; what resulting actions or behavior would you predict?
- b. Describe how this confrontation could be handled positively. What would be said, how, by whom; what resulting actions would you predict?
- c. How often have you seen negative behaviors used in a conflict? In the long run, did anyone win, using such behavior?
- d. Could you begin to use positive behaviors now, to help confrontations have positive results?

Appendix E

THE "COOL" COLLEAGUES

Bob is a local official who shares a secretary, Toni, with two other officials, Mary and Tim. Something is not working right in his secretarial arrangements, but he can't figure what it is. Lately he has realized that Toni seems to work for him rather grudgingly. Not only that, he has the distinct impression that Mary and Tim aren't especially friendly to him, although he can't imagine why. After all, he isn't in the office very often, so why should they have anything to be unfriendly about? When he comes in, he puts his priority items on Toni's desk and goes about his work. Of course, he realizes sometimes she has seemed a little busy and actually wanted to put his needs at the end of her "To Do" list! Bob remembered that he had quickly set her straight on that-after all, Mary and Tim are newly elected, while he has been in office for years! Clearly, she should help him first.

After thinking about this little problem, Bob decided to just ignore it. As long as Toni gets to his work fast, in time for his deadlines, it really doesn't matter whether she likes him or not. She's paid to work, not to like him. However, he does wonder why Tim and Mary seem cool; Bob decided to ignore that, too. They probably have so little to do that they get bored and moody. Oh, well!

Think about this case of insensitivity. If you were Toni, Mary or Tim and were increasingly frustrated by Bob's behavior, would you:

- a. Ignore it?
- b. Just tell him off?
- c. Ignore him, and hope he noticed?
- d. Use the assertive conflict management process to try to work out a better atmosphere?
- e. Bring in a third party intervenor? If so, what person could you look to for this role?

Appendix F

CHECKLIST TO DEVELOP COOPERATION

Much of the time, elected officials find taxpayers ready to cooperate with their elected officials. Sometimes, however, the official may have to go further to develop cooperation among certain individuals or groups. The following checklists contain reasons an individual or group may not want to work with the official, and strategies helpful in moving them to accept cooperation.

Instructions:

On a separate paper, apply the following checklists to a particular problem you have experienced where gaining cooperation was very difficult. Think of it through the taxpayer's viewpoint as much as you are able, even if you didn't agree with that view.

- A. Reasons individuals or groups may not want to work with the elected official:
 - 1. Disagreement on defining the problem.
 - 2. Disagreement on how to solve the problem.
 - 3. Bad experience with past cooperation efforts.
 - 4. Bad experience with other officials.
 - 5. Too much expected from taxpayer (in tangibles or intangibles).
 - 6. Fears of:
 - a. Loss of independence.
 - b. Rejection.
 - c. Disrespect.
 - 7. Personality conflict.

- 8. Differences in values and lifestyles.
- 9. Sense of others' values imposed on them.
- B. Strategies used to produce cooperation:
 - 1. Emphasize mutual desire to solve the problem that exists between citizen and official.
 - 2. Clearly spell out the specific areas of cooperation needed and the time period involved.
 - 3. Point out proven reasons for trust of the official.
 - 4. Empathize with the taxpayer—try to encourage him/her to express real feelings; be sensitive to fears; try to see the problem as the other does, through his/her values. Do not judge. Let real feelings spill out.
 - 5. Outline benefits to be gained by the taxpayer through cooperation.
 - 6. Openly discuss past problems and give positive assurance on reasons you feel you both can work together now.
 - 7. When personality or value conflicts have been a problem, level with the person and admit you have found it hard to understand his/her position. Tell him/her eye to eye, that you want a chance to do better this time. Taking blame relieves another person of burdens and possible guilt for past behavior, which itself often produces defensive/hostile reactions.

HOW WE GET INTO CONFLICT WITH OTHERS

DEFINITIONS:

We agree on the goal but differ on how to get there.
 Please mark the best response:

Have you experienced this situation?

Yes ____ No ____

If you have, how was it solved?

- _____a. By someone dominating through argument.
- _____b. By someone using his/her power over the group.
- _____ c. By trying different ideas until one worked.
- _____d. By someone persuading the others.
- _____e. We never got it worked out!
- _____f. Other means (please write in what happened in a sentence or two).
- 2. Our goals simply are far apart.

Please mark the best response:

Have you experienced this situation?

Yes ____ No ____

If you have, how was it solved?

- _____a. By someone dominating through argument.
- _____b. By someone using his/her power over the group.

- _____ c. By trying different ideas until one worked.
- _____ d. By someone persuading the others.
- _____e. We never got it worked out!
- _____ f. Other means (please write in what happened in a sentence or two).
- 3. Others seemed threatening to values or customs I hold important.

Please mark the best response:

Have you experienced this situation?

Yes ____ No ____

If you have, how was it solved?

- _____a. By someone dominating through argument.
- _____b. By someone using his/her power over the group.
- _____ c. By trying different ideas until one worked.
- _____d. By someone persuading the others.
- _____e. We never got it worked out!
- _____f. Other means (please write in what happened in a sentence or two).
- 4. There wasn't enough of something to go around, and who should get what was the problem.

Please mark the best response:

Have you experienced this situation?

Yes ____ No ____

If you have, how was it solved?

- _____a. By someone dominating through argument.
- _____b. By someone using his/her power over the group.
- _____ c. By trying different ideas until one worked.

- _____ d. By someone persuading the others.
- _____e. We never got it worked out!

_____f. Other means (please write in what happened in a sentence or two).

5. We couldn't really communicate.

Please mark the best response:

Have you experienced this situation?

Yes ____ No ____

- If you have, how was it solved?
 - ____a. By someone dominating through argument.
 - _____b. By someone using his/her power over the group.
 - _____ c. By trying different ideas until one worked.
 - _____ d. By someone persuading the others.
 - _____e. We never got it worked out!
 - _____f. Other means (please write in what happened in a sentence or two).

Look back over your responses. Think of how the assertive style might have been used in the situations you have experienced that led to conflict.

- 1. What was the situation?
- 2. If more conflict developed, how did the leaders handle it?
- 3. How could the assertive style have been used to reduce or avoid conflict?

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