

Conflict Resolution Resource Sheet

The Conflict Resolution Process

Create community agreements.

It is best to do this as a group, so that everyone feels ownership of the agreements. However, you may choose to bring in some non-negotiables of your own, as facilitator (for example: try the process in good faith and respect it). Ensuring the community agreements are upheld is your job description, as facilitator. Community agreements can be amended and added to throughout the process, as needed.

How do you feel?

Responses start with “I feel...”

If this go-around is done too quickly, or if people don't feel heard, it can lead to conflict later on. If that happens, go back to this phase. You can go around twice on this item, if you feel that it's needed. Direct people to talk about how they are feeling; steer them away from how others made them feel, assumptions or accusations, name calling etc. (I'm feeling disrespected vs. I feel like you don't care.)

What is happening?

Responses start with “I see/saw...” “I hear/heard...”

Most of the time this go-around will surface that everyone has a different idea of what happened/what is happening. This can be enlightening, build empathy, and can really be the root of the conflict. It can be useful to point this out as the facilitator during or at the end of this go-around.

What do you need?

Responses start with “I need...”

As facilitator, helps identify needs vs wants. Be sure to list them all visually (on flipchart paper, white board, etc). This helps a lot!

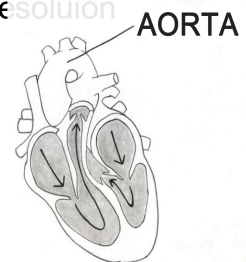
What are you going to do about it?

Responses start with “I am going to...”

This is not about what we want others to do about it, but what we are willing to do to help solve the conflict. Most conflicts are 50/50 and the resolutions should also be 50/50. This isn't always the case; as always, use your best judgement. Conflict resolution is an art, not a science.

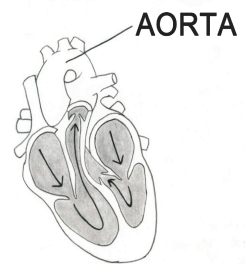
Tips for Facilitators and Participants

- Develop goals along the way, especially as people identify needs. List these goals up visually
- , for all to see and refer to.
- It's important that the person facilitating the process not be deeply involved in the process.
- As facilitator, take care of your own needs. You can facilitate conflict resolution



processes as a team, choose a back up facilitator, or even just stop and take a break as needed by the facilitator.

- This process can be done with any size group: the whole group, the two individuals involved, or individuals with support people.
- The role of support people: Support people help keep tone, body language, and language in check. They provide emotional support help with re-wording and communicating, and can help identify power dynamics, commonalities, etc.
- Including more people can be very helpful-- people less triggered by the conflict can help to lend a more calm perspective and de-escalate tensions.
- As a facilitator, it can be very helpful to paraphrase, synthesize, restate, and reflect back what people are saying. It can also be very helpful to point out when you're hearing agreement.
- You can request people fill out and read each other's conflict resolution sheets in advance.



COMMUNICATION: NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Workshop Assumptions

- We have all experienced miscommunication, conflict, and resolution.
- We have all been at fault at one point or another. We have all been generous or forgiving.
- Communication takes a lot of work. It can be difficult, but we can always improve and develop skills to do it better
- Everyone has different perspectives- these are based in our cultural backgrounds, different personalities, and everything that shapes us.
- There is no one way to participate well in a meeting or be a great group facilitator
- Cooperatives are stronger when we devote the time, care, talent, and generosity to work better with one another.
- Nobody knows everything, but together we know a lot

Synthesizing

Can be de-escalating and can prevent miscommunications by increasing understanding. For this reason, it can be especially helpful in situations where the people involved speak different languages as their first language, or come from different cultures. It can also help slow down a conversation, calm down emotions, and help with language barriers.

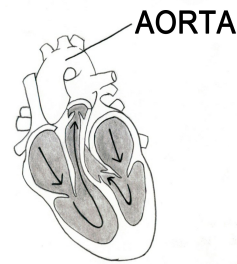
Synthesizing is not summarizing. Synthesizing distills what a person says, often looking for the core what they are saying, as well as what values or feelings are underlying what they're saying.

Synthesis statements often start with:

- it sounds like..i
- i'm hearing that.....
- are you saying.....
- if i'm understanding you.....

Communication Fabulous Practices

- Before: think, reflect, set intentions
- WAIT: Why Am I Talking?
- You can't control their reaction. You can control: your preparation, setting, skills, timing
- Is it: true? helpful? the right time? Kind?
- Focus on behavior, not person, blame, generalizations (you always/never...)
- Focus on preferred outcome, lesson
- Rehearse success
- Take responsibility for your actions
- Ask open-ended questions for better understanding
- Hear their perspective first
- Focus on building solutions together
- Can you find love for this person? If not, what is your investment in this person/relationship/conversation?



Considerations in **Preparing** to Give Criticism

- What is the recipient's preferred way of receiving criticism? How can I gear my approach/comments towards those preferences?
 - Don't assume recipient has the same preferences as you.
 - Don't just use your habitual approach.
- Can I gear my criticism so that the recipient can act constructively upon it?
 - Can I think of concrete preferred, alternative outcomes?
 - Can I be specific enough that the recipient will understand what behavior I want him to avoid?
- What do I need to accomplish in this exchange versus what is my ideal outcome?
- When is the right time to approach the recipient?
 - When we both have adequate time to talk about the issue and listen to each other.
 - Not when the person is feeling defensive, beating herself up over the mistake – or is occupied with some other source of stress.
 - As soon as reasonably possible.
 - Once you've had the opportunity to consider recipient's preferred approach and prepare yourself.
 - Once you've had the opportunity to mentally rehearse.
- Can I express the criticism in the context of the recipient's (and, hopefully, our shared) goals? How can I express my positive intentions for giving criticism? *Example: "I can see that you're working hard each day on getting your sweet bake done earlier and on schedule. I'm wondering if I can share with you some ideas regarding how you might be able to save some time."*
- What do I expect will be the recipient's most likely objections to my criticism, impediments to hearing my criticism? What can I do to avoid the impediments, defuse or overcome the objections?
- What can I do to make the recipient feel safe, valued?
- Balance the negatives with some positives; if possible start and/or end with a positive.
- Express that you value the person, your relationship, her progress/skills, etc.
- Speak slowly and calmly as possible.
- What negative patterns do I have a tendency/temptation to engage in during conflict-laden/stressful exchanges? What can I do to avoid them?
 - Possible methods: visualization, reminders/affirmative messages, perspective checks, relaxation techniques.
- What are my motivations, good and possibly not so good, in wanting to express this criticism? What can I do to keep negative motivations/tendencies in check?

Considerations in **Giving** Criticism

- Rather than characterizing the person, focus on their behavior.
- Don't overwhelm the person with a long list of criticisms or a harangue. Give recipient opportunity to respond.
- Really listen to the recipient's response. Convey (through your statements and body language) that you are hearing what the recipient has to say.
- Avoid phrases of blame: "you were wrong," "you screwed up," etc. These can often be avoided by simply focusing on a preferred future outcome rather than past behavior.
- Speak from your own perspective and perceptions.
 - Ask rather than assume.
 - Avoid speaking in absolutes and broad generalizations.
 - Avoid hearsay.
- Maintain as your goal a constructive resolution, rather than proving the person wrong or wresting an apology. Don't get bogged down in factual disputes, differing perspectives about the past.
- Focus on the lesson rather than the mistake.
- Be circumspect about the use of humor.
- Keep problem and person in perspective. Keep the person's good qualities in mind. See the person in process. "How important will this incident seem next month, compared to the value of our relationship?" – in balance with value of relationship, the value you see in the person. "X days from now, how important will this {problem behavior, incident} be compared to the importance of our relationship?"
- Don't carry rehearsed/imagined argument into actual exchange.
- If relevant, share your own struggles with the same or a related issue.
- If you contributed to the problem to any degree, own up to that responsibility early.
- Invite feedback on your performance from the subject of your criticism. Could include asking how well you did in giving her/him criticism.
- Express thanks/affirmation for the person taking/applying your criticism well.

Considerations in **Receiving** Criticism

- Don't take bait/excuse of imperfect delivery to stop listening or retaliate/escalate.
- Keep the critic's good intentions and the content in mind. How can I derive something positive, constructive out of this?
- Is my level of upset fully explained by how badly this person is delivering her/his criticism?
- Cease engaging in other tasks if possible.
- Monitor stress and take any reasonable steps to relieve: pause, breath, relax muscles.
- Know when and how to walk away.
- Don't simply respond to criticism with counter-criticism. Deal with the substance of what the person is saying; bring up your problems with your critic only to the degree necessary and, ideally, only after addressing the content of her/his criticism.

POSITIVE GROUP ROLES

TASK FOCUSING

- Give clear direction and purpose to the group.
- Help the group identify and state its goals, and keep the group focused on achieving its goals.
- Suggest procedures for achieving goals.
- Identify, clarify, and define problems.

INFORMATION GIVING AND CLARIFYING

- Show the group which information is relevant to its work and help to decrease confusion.
- Request or provide relevant facts, define terms.

ELABORATING AND SUMMARIZING

- Try to show consequences of plans and positions, and show how ideas in the group are relating to each other.
- Give examples, explain, pull together related ideas, and offer conclusions.
- Look for and lift up areas of unity and agreement. Help the group move towards consensus.

DECISION FOCUSING

- Help the group move toward and make decisions.
- Initiate discussion on and agreement about how decisions are made.
- Propose tentative solutions to problems, initiate examination of how well the proposed solutions meet the needs of the group.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FOCUSING

- Maintain open communication. Suggest procedures for discussion.
- Ask for information and opinions from others and listen to others.

ENCOURAGING

- Draw out others' opinions, give recognition to others. Accept others' opinions.
- Be friendly, warm, responsive to others.
- Seek full identification and use of all members' resources.

FEELING EXPRESSING

- Call the group's attention to people's feelings and reactions to ideas, suggestions, course of discussion, etc.
- Express your own feelings.

CONFLICT RESOLVING

- Identify, acknowledge, and help to reconcile differences. Get people to explore differences.
- Help reduce tension, identify and suggest common ground.
- Be willing to let your opinion change throughout the meeting.

PROCESS COMMENTING

- Make the group aware of how it is working on its task.
- Call attention to group process, identify recurring interactional patterns and unmet group needs unmet by the current process.
- Initiate evaluation of the group's emotional climate, members' satisfaction, etc.

NEGATIVE GROUP ROLES

AGREEING AND ACCEPTANCE SEEKING

- Be quick to agree with the ideas of others and provide uncritical agreement.
- Use your agreement to gain acceptance from members of the group who you want to think well of you.

DISAGREEING AND FIGHTING

- Be quick to disagree with the ideas of others; struggle aggressively for your ideas and your place in the group.
- Focus on individual needs, rather than the needs of the group or organization as a whole.

DOMINEERING AND RECOGNITION SEEKING

- Actively and continually assert yourself in the group.
- Take charge by imposing a set of ideas and molding all other ideas to these focal ideas.
- Draw attention to yourself by using jokes, making funny comments in relation to others' ideas, and by sitting and moving in ways which draw attention to yourself.
- Interrupt others.
- Bring fully formulated ideas and proposals to the meeting and request that the group decide on these without prior discussion or brainstorming. Respond to questions or proposed changes as personal attack or a lack of appreciation for your hard work.

BLOCKING

- Slow down group process by preventing group decision-making.
- Draw attention to every detail of unclarity and every unexplored source of conflict.
- Encourage people not to compromise and not to give assent to group procedures and ideas.

CYNISSISM AND PESSIMISM

- Indicate suspicion of the motives of others.
- Point out all difficulties, indicate the likelihood of error and failure and the difficulty groups have in successfully solving problems.
- Greet changes in positions, feelings, and opinions as evidence of mindless compliance or attempted manipulation.

DRIFTING AND CHECKING OUT

- Let your attention wander.
- If given the opportunity, indicate via body language, words, facial expressions, or tone that you are bored and wish the meeting to be over so you can do something else.
- When your attention is on the group, indicate directly or indirectly your low level of commitment to ideas, decisions, and the group itself.

PERSONALIZING ISSUES

- Whatever the topic being discussed, relate it to your own personal experience.
- Insist on group members relating their ideas, suggestions, decision alternatives, and concerns to examples from your personal experience.

SAMPLE CONFLICT RESOLUTION POLICY

Having some basic agreements about communication practices and steps to take to work towards resolving a conflict among staff is invaluable. Below is a simple step-by-step guide to addressing and resolving conflicts among staff. For a deeper understanding of what conflict is and where it comes from as well as tips and tools for engaging in conflict mediation, please see the further resources from AORTA on Conflict Resolution.

Important work staff should do, before/in addition to following through on the below conflict resolution steps to support healthy communication and ensure smooth processes should the need for conflict resolution occur:

AHEAD OF TIME

1. Collectively develop staff agreements regarding communication and behavior in the office and during meetings. Crafting agreements and upholding them can go a long way to curbing potential conflicts.
2. Develop a list of available mediators in the area with relevant information. (Name, contact info, price, and a little about them and their mediation practices.)
3. Go over this conflict resolution practice with staff and make room for questions and discussion.
4. Develop agreed upon *best practices* for this process (i.e. do not initiate a conversation about tension right before a staff meeting, do not bring up conflict in front of co-workers or members, etc.) Developing this list of best practices will not only help plan for the uniqueness of your organization and the preferences of staff, but it is also a venue for staff to gain familiarity with this process by exploring different scenarios of how conflict and subsequent mediation may arise.

STEP BY STEP

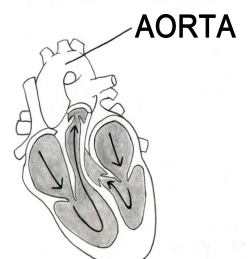
Step 1: Acknowledge Tension

When a tension with a co-worker arises, it is important to acknowledge it as early as possible. Waiting is a fast track for irritation and hurt feelings to fester and grow. If you are comfortable approaching your co-worker directly, do so, either in-person or over email. Sometimes the issue can be resolved over a cup of coffee, or with an informal conversation.

If you aren't comfortable addressing your co-worker for fear of retaliation, humiliation, or disrespect, approach an HR coordinator, a trusted board member, or the ED and ask them to communicate on your behalf.

Step 2: Conflict Mediation

If a one-on-one check-in or message communicated on your behalf doesn't adequately address the conflict, ask for conflict mediation. If you feel able to communicate to your co-worker, either in person or over email, let them know. You might use language such as, "We've been having some tensions/conflict and I really want to make sure we



acknowledge it. Would you be willing to go through conflict mediation with me? I think it would go a long way to making our working relationship more smooth and sustainable.”

You should alert the HR coordinator or ED that you wish to initiate a conflict mediation process and ask them for support to set up the process. The HR Coordinator or ED should:

1. Ask both parties if they have any preferences or needs about who mediates the process,
2. Find an outside mediator from an already prepared list of vetted conflict mediators,
3. Arrange a conflict mediation as soon as possible.

Step 3: After the Mediation

The mediation will hopefully be an important time for both/all parties to express themselves, challenge themselves, and come to new understandings about the conflict. But the work doesn't end when the mediation does. Prompt and steady follow up is generally an important next step. The ED and/or Personnel Coordinator should:

1. Check in with both parties after the mediation to hear about progress, learn if they need any support in the workplace. (i.e. not to work closely with co-worker on a specific project, to take a day or two off, etc.)
2. Ask if any behaviors or practices were identified that the staff member would like to work on changing (i.e. communication styles, ways of giving feedback, jokes made in the office, etc.) and support staff member in setting goals and a plan for how to those changes.
3. Often, when staff members have conflict, they identify working environments or structures that played a role in that conflict. Remain open to hearing constructive feedback about organizational structures or cultures that might need shifting or addressing, and take responsibility to bottom-line some of those changes.
4. Arrange a check in 4-8 weeks after mediation is completed to check in on and strategize towards progress. This could include checking in on any individual changes, structural changes, and to see if a follow up mediation needs to be scheduled.

