

## It's Not My Fault

We all know that sometimes, despite our best efforts, problems arise in organisations. These can be for all sorts of reasons, difficult personalities, misunderstandings, several people with different ideas of what is best for their organisation believing that their way is the only way to achieve that. Conflicts can manifest themselves in different ways. Some are unpleasant undercurrents, some are overt disagreements, some are power struggles.

Whatever the reason and however it manifests itself, conflict can be very destructive for an organisation and needs to be resolved as quickly as possible.

## What Can I Do About It?

Conflict can be difficult to manage, particularly when it involves an organisation that you care about.

Some of the most productive ways of dealing with conflict can also be the hardest to do. Here are some general things that will almost always make a difference when you come to address conflict:

- STAY CALM - Try not to get angry (however frustrated you may feel) it rarely gets you any further than allowing you a release for your feelings and will often make the situation worse.
- Try to empathise - Ask yourself (and if it is possible, the other person themselves) why they are feeling the way they do? If you can understand the problem a bit better you might come closer to finding a solution.
- Don't brush it under the carpet - rather than leaving something to fester, approach an issue in a positive way, at a time and in a space that is productive (e.g. don't bring up an issue in a way that might embarrass the other person or at a time when you are unable to discuss it fully)
- Find out what the other person is REALLY trying to say - A lot of conflicts come about through simple misunderstandings or miscommunications. Ask the other person what they meant when they said "\_\_\_"
- Make sure you have all the information available - Sometimes people have reasons that you are unaware of for acting in the way they do. Again, talk to them in a positive way about why they are acting in the way they are acting.
- Where possible, try to diffuse situations - In addition to keeping calm yourself, try to calm the other person down too so you are able to talk about the issue rationally.
- Remember the Organisation - a lot of conflicts come about because people care so much about what the organisation does, SO REMEMBER IT! Conflict rarely brings anything positive to an organisation so you should aim to resolve it as quickly as possible, learn from it and move forward in a productive way. (NB Conflict is different from disagreement which, done in a positive and productive way is a good thing for an organisation).

## 2 Different Types of Conflict and Ways to Approach Them

There are many different types of conflict. Below are 2 types that could be a problem and suggested ways to approach them. All situations are different so you will need to use your judgement over the best approach to take and should always try to put the

needs of the organisation first.

There is underlying tension - Sometimes conflict can continue under the surface and, if left unaddressed, could undermine an organisation. This kind of conflict should not necessarily always be addressed. Make a judgement based on risk. Is the problem affecting the running/work of your organisation. Is the organisation able to cope with the possible results of addressing the issue? Does it need addressing? Will addressing the issue make a difference? Reasons you might want to address the issue might be, for example, if two people refuse to work with each other and this becomes unmanageable; if they disagree with things simply to undermine the other person; if someone stops pulling their weight on a committee. Plan how and when to address the issue. Find out what the problem is and if it can be solved. Address the issue in a positive and fair way and remember, you need to find a solution that is best for your organisation.

Someone is acting aggressively - Remain calm and do not get angry yourself. Ensure that your body language is not confrontational. Do not put yourself at risk. Address the other person's behaviour first (anger makes people irrational and you want to be able to understand the problem in order to address it). Try not to ask questions at this stage. Make a statement or a request about their behaviour ("Please stop shouting" or "David, you're shouting"). If it is possible, try to find out the cause of the anger and, once they have cooled off, make an arrangement to settle the problem. While talking to them, let them have their say, listen to and value their opinions, make sure you are fair and, when you are talking, make sure you explain things carefully so that there can be no misunderstandings. If you are the person they are angry with, be prepared to admit fault, if it is the case; try to understand things from their point of view. Be careful not to be pressured into doing something or admitting something that is not true in order to resolve the situation quickly.

### Mediation

Sometimes conflicts get out of hand and, if you are involved in the organisation, it is very difficult to be seen as impartial. In these cases it is often very useful to involve an independent third party who has the respect of both sides of the conflict. This person can mediate a meeting aimed at moving the conflict towards a resolution. Any meeting of this kind must be well planned with a clear agenda that both sides of the conflict are happy with and which allows everyone to have their say. They can ensure the meeting is kept positive and moving forwards to what will happen, rather than looking at the details of what happened. The CVS offers mediation of this kind to any of its members.

### Contact CVS Hounslow

If you would like help with this or any other issue, get in touch with Clare Sewell, the Development Officer at CVS Hounslow who would be happy to help.

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