

Conflict Resolution

“There is no goodwill in there...the fight is on...and we will keep fighting until we get a resolution”

Leading trade union official, General Secretary Designate of the Technical Engineering and Electrical Union (TEEU) as he entered the Labour Relations Commission “talks” with employers bodies on July 8th 2009.

Is this the basis for resolution? Is this the mindset that will find an end to conflict? Will fighting words and fighting tones and fighting body language get resolutions? Is this what leadership is about...using fighting language which expresses an entrenched mindset to get a resolution?

This is in fact the antithesis of conflict resolution. This represents the mindset which created the conflict not which will resolve it. Nobody is being represented with a mindset like this. There is no “win-win” in this mindset. This represents the mindset of battle, where there has to be a winner and a loser. This is not conflict resolution. This represents an escalation of conflict. If the other side has the same mindset (as it surely has), then this is truly a battle with the winners and losers spawning yet another future battle. The war continues. There is no peace and there is no resolution.

Conflict causes more stress than anything else in our lives. Fear of conflict is one of the biggest obstacles in life for many people and so often people’s lives are coloured, moulded and shaped by their inability to deal well with it. Conflict doesn’t go away just because we turn our back on it, or because we pretend it is not there, or because we choose to go down a completely different route in order to avoid it. In trying to avoid conflict we are far more likely to be setting up even greater conflict for ourselves in the future. In other words what you are running from is likely to be waiting for you around the next corner. Remember, “where ever you go, there you are!”

Assertive

In order to competently deal with conflict you need to get a number of things in place. Firstly you need to be able to assert yourself...do you consider yourself to be assertive? If not, then dealing with conflict will be an issue for you on an ongoing basis. To be assertive you need to be able to stand up and ask (or look) for what you want (or need) in any given situation in a manner that will progress your hoped for outcome. To be able to do this with a “win-win” attitude is key.

Win-Win

“Win-Win” isn’t a corporate cliché. It is a very powerful state of mind which brings with it an understanding and a sense of interconnection and oneness at a deeper level. This understanding makes it clear that any other form of attitude will only create problems, obstacles, hard work, unnecessary effort, disappointment, delay and at best short term success only. Why would anyone want to consciously choose this for?

themselves?! You've all heard the phrases "what goes around comes around" and "as you sow, so shall you reap". If you think only of yourself and act accordingly you will encounter problems and difficulties and you will isolate yourself. The isolation is of course a perception and is a direct result of the way you are thinking. In fact there is no separation between thoughts and consequences, it just appears that way. There is indeed no separation between anyone and anything either, it just appears that way.

Thinking is the problem

Every situation brings with it an opportunity for growth. When two people seem to be at loggerheads over an issue, the issue isn't the problem; their way of thinking about the issue is the problem. There is nothing wrong about coming from different angles on something...there is after all different angles to everything. What is wrong is people only seeing things from their own angle and refusing to entertain the possibility of another angle, let alone see it, because of their fears, their stubbornness, their competitiveness, or their need to be right.

Leave the past in the past

This inability or refusal to see another point of view is as a result of people's need to be right. This is the "ghost in the machine". It becomes the driver of the situation and creates a big divide between people thus making things much more difficult to resolve. Yet this ghost in the machine has nothing to do with the situation being presented. It has to do with need of the people or the person to be right and is therefore about self validation and validation by others. This is about unresolved self esteem issues from the past, not the presenting situation.

The power of presence

The best way to resolve conflict is to be "present" to the presenting situation. This requires you to enter into conversations with others (when others are involved) with a clear mind, emptied particularly of the need to be right, the need to win, the need to get your own way etc. It requires you to have trust that if you are present then the answer to the problem or the way forward is present with you. It requires you to pull back from acting on reactions which would only make the situation worse. To do this successfully you must filter the reactions through your body in full awareness of them with the intention of letting them go, and then let them go and tune back in to the presenting situation with a clear mind. Be always aware of your desired outcome.

Align yourself with your desired outcome

Everything you think, feel, say and do when you are trying to resolve conflict must be aligned with your desired outcome. A clear and present mind will get you all of these. A confused mind will not; a tired mind will not; a competitive mind will not; a lazy mind will not; a vengeful mind will not; a selfish mind will not; a disrespectful mind will not; a stressed mind will not; an emotional mind will not; a fearful mind will not. Are you getting the drift?!

Clear and Present Mind

To have a clear and present mind, you first need to detach yourself from all of the above mental states and others not mentioned and go to the place of peace and stillness within. This stillness is your presence; your being in the present moment. This process naturally enough requires practise. You should practise it on a daily basis and soon it will become a habit and the mind state that comes most readily to you when dealing with conflict.

When you do visit your stillness, you will experience clarity. In other words clarity is always inherent in stillness and peace. There is nothing in there to confuse; there is just peace and stillness and therefore clarity. By going beyond the mind to your presence you leave all the problems, confusion, chaos, emotions etc behind. There is nothing left to distract you. You then bring your awakened presence with its peace stillness and clarity back to your mind and infuse the mind with all these qualities. Your ability to read situations, make choices and decisions, and pull back from reactions will be heightened considerably and thus also increases your chances considerably of achieving your outcome. The Lifescope Model of Awareness© helps you to do this on an ongoing basis.

Conflict with others

When the conflict is with others the sooner it is addressed the better. Be aware of your desired outcomes at all times (even if that outcome is simply to gain some understanding of what the conflict is about). This is your guiding light. Keep checking in with yourself that you are keeping on track with the desired outcomes. If you have gone off track, then you need to take corrective action immediately to get back on track.

Every viewpoint is valid

Remember that every viewpoint is valid. This means that the person you are in conflict with has a valid argument about the conflict (whether you can see this or not, it is true). Keep this in mind at all times. No matter how stupid or silly or irrelevant or unjust the other person's viewpoint seems to be to you, remember to that person it seems perfectly valid. Furthermore despite you being absolutely convinced that the way you are seeing it is the only obvious and logical way to look at it, the other person thinks your way of looking at it, is stupid or silly or irrelevant or unjust because to the other person their way of looking at it is the only obvious and logical way of looking at it!

Finding a way forward

As both of you think you are right and the other person is therefore wrong something and someone has to change. It was pointed out earlier that you need to move away from right and wrong because that is the mental state that causes conflict in the first place. As being right and wrong is always attached to, and sourced from, emotions, it is important that you recognise the emotions within you that may be driving your side of the conflict.

These emotions are the ghosts in the machine mentioned earlier and are connected to unresolved issues. Internal unresolved issues always cause external conflict. When you become aware of the thoughts and emotions that have found their way into the driver's seat, you need to see that they are from the past and are not allowing you to be in the

present. Your very recognition of these will be enough usually to help you to let go of them enough to allow you to be present to the situation and therefore see it clearly (without your own bias).

Common Ground

You next need to seek common ground with the other person. As long as conflict exists, common ground doesn't. Common ground is the precursor to a resolution. By you being able to let go of your own bias your verbal language, tone and body language will change and create a new healthier and more positive vibration (vibe) which will in turn help the other person to loosen themselves from their viewpoint. This loosening is vital for progress to happen. The common ground that you are looking for is the highest or most pure version of the subject matter. It represents the one and only place or point the two of you agree on relative to the subject matter. The two of you must go back to this point and seek a way forward from there.

What happens when despite your best efforts the other person will not let go of the conflict?

This may happen. If it does then you need to find your internal source of the presenting external conflict. If you are at harmony within then you are at harmony without. So, if despite everything, the conflict persists, then you need to look within and realise that your inner disharmony is allowing the continuation of the external conflict and you need to seek to let it go from within. In other words something inside you is still keeping it there. When it is resolved on the inside it falls away on the outside.

Don't get into the boxing ring!

If you want harmony in your life then don't get into the boxing ring with people. What I mean by this is conflict only happens when you allow yourself to get dragged into conflict with someone else or as happens very frequently when you drag yourself into conflict with yourself over particular issues. If another person is dragging, encouraging, enticing or manipulating you into conflict with them, you need to be very aware of what is happening emotionally within you. You need to be able to step back from the potential conflict and ask yourself "what outcome do I want to achieve here?" When you are clear on this, you then need to ask yourself "what course of action will bring me my outcome with the least amount of stress and in the quickest amount of time?" You will then see that conflict is not the answer. Assertiveness is. By being assertive you do not enter the ring with the other person. You communicate with the other person from outside the ring. As soon as you enter the ring you have lost. There are no winners in the boxing ring!

Conflict is always about winning and losing and right and wrong

Life is never about winning and losing or about being right or wrong. Life is always about living, being alive and feeling alive. When we enter conflict there is always someone going to be right and someone going to be wrong, someone who is going to win and someone who is going to lose. We can get hooked on the sensation of winning and we can get addicted to sensation of losing. When we want to be right it is never to do with what appears to be the obvious issue, which we get blinded by and can't see what is behind or beneath the obvious. It will always be about validation and self

esteem. Those of us who keep on winning will find ourselves continuously in conflict and those of us who keep on losing will find ourselves continuously in conflict as well. This is because life will keep teaching us until we learn. When we learn, we move on to the next lesson.

Conflict or potential conflict must never be ignored. If it appears on your radar screen then you have somehow already gotten into the ring. Ignoring it or running or hiding from it will not work as you will still be in the ring and there are no hiding places in there! When you realize you are in the ring, climb over the ropes and get out as quickly as you can. Do your communicating from outside the ring. The other person will eventually get out as well.

Conflict with ourselves

How many times have you heard yourself or others say something like, “I’m torn between (this) and (that)...” or “on the one hand I want (this) but on the other hand I want (that)” or “one half of me wants (this) and the other half of me wants (that)”. We all go through inner conflict at different times over small things and big things. Our inner conflict arises as a result of lack of clarity about choices and decisions facing us. We are made up of many different aspects of ourselves and oftentimes these aspects (or voices or parts) represent different viewpoints to us. The riskier side of us will seek to always take chances, to expand what we already have and the more cautious side of us will always seek to protect what we already have. These are two aspects of us that are often in conflict.

All aspects of us always seek to serve us

In order to resolve conflicts of this nature we need to be able to hear both voices and we need to represent the “common ground” that must be found before a resolution can take place between these two apparently opposing voices within. By being able to step back from both voices we can hear both of them. In hearing both of them we can understand where they are coming from. When we understand where each of them are coming from we can then begin to get clarity on which one we need to go with on this particular occasion. However this can only when common ground is found. In other words, why, at the highest and purest level, each voice is so intent on having its way. Remember, all aspects of us are subservient to us and always represent us. They never seek to destroy us although if we continually ignore them then they could unwittingly destroy us.

Mediating between others

Mediating between others is very like mediating between different parts of ourselves. As a mediator we act as the voice for the common ground between the parties. Remember there is always common ground. The parties in conflict cannot see it because they are so stuck in their narrow vision, blinkered to all other possibilities, particularly the one put forward by the “opposition”. As a mediator you make sure that each party is listening to and gaining an understanding of the other part’s viewpoint. You don’t move forward until both have demonstrated this understanding and verbalised it to the other. Every time thereafter that there is disagreement, you bring both of them back to their stated understanding of the other’s viewpoint. Because you are not attached to either of their

viewpoints your main role is to call back to both of them what each of them is saying as the tendency is that they find it difficult to listen to the other but they will both listen to you because you are not on either side. It is clear that you need to continue to demonstrate your non partiality on an ongoing basis. The process is about listening, calling back, clarifying, reminding them of their agreed understanding of the other's viewpoint, reminding them of what they are trying to achieve and keeping them on track with all of this.

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