



## Five Habits of Highly Effective Conflict Resolvers

By Dina Beach Lynch, Esq.

# Five Habits of Highly Effective Conflict Resolvers

By Dina Beach Lynch, Esq.

*Learn and apply these five highly effective habits of really excellent conflict resolvers, following along the Steven Covey theme about highly effective people. Particularly relevant to managers, supervisors and workplace conflict.*

Steven Covey had the right idea. There are discreet skills and attitudes, habits if you will, that can elevate your conflict practice to a new level. This article shares a selection of habits and attitudes that can transform a good conflict resolver into a highly effective one. By that I mean someone who facilitates productive, meaningful discussion between others that results in deeper self-awareness, mutual understanding and workable solutions.

I have used the term ‘conflict resolver’ intentionally to reienforce the idea that human resource professionals and managers are instrumental in ending disputes, regardless of whether they are also mediators. These conflict management techniques are life skills that are useful in whatever setting you find yourself. With these skills, you can create environments that are respectful, collaborative and conducive to problem-solving. And, you’ll teach your employees to be proactive, by modeling successful conflict management behaviors.

## 5 Habits. . . . .

- 1. UNDERSTAND THE EMPLOYEE’S NEEDS**
- 2. ENGAGE IN COLLABORATIVE LISTENING**
- 3. BE A GOOD TRANSMITTER**
- 4. RECOGNIZE POWER**
- 5. BE OPTIMISTIC & RESILIENT**

## 1. UNDERSTAND THE EMPLOYEE'S NEEDS

Since you're the 'go to person' in your organization, it's natural for you to jump right in to handle conflict. When an employee visits you to discuss a personality conflict, you assess a situation, determine the next steps and proceed until the problem is solved. But is that helpful?

When you take charge, the employee is relieved of his or her responsibility to find a solution. That leaves you to do the work around finding alternatives. And while you want to do what's best for this person (and the organization), it's important to ask what the employee wants first-- whether it's to vent, brainstorm solutions or get some coaching. Understand what the person entering your door wants by asking questions:

- How can I be most helpful to you?
- What are you hoping I will do?
- What do you see my role as in this matter?

## 2. ENGAGE IN COLLABORATIVE LISTENING

By now everyone has taken at least one active listening course so I won't address the basic skills. Collaborative Listening takes those attending and discerning skills one step further. It recognizes that in listening each person has a job that supports the work of the other. The speaker's job is to clearly express his or her thoughts, feelings and goals. The listener's job is facilitating clarity; understanding and make the employee feel heard.

So what's the difference? The distinction is acknowledgement. Your role is to help the employee gain a deeper understanding of her own interests and needs; to define concepts and words in a way that expresses her values (i.e. respect means something different to each one of us); and to make her feel acknowledged—someone sees things from her point of view.

Making an acknowledgement is tricky in corporate settings. Understandably, you want to help the employee but are mindful of

the issues of corporate liability. You can acknowledge the employee even while safeguarding your company.

Simply put, acknowledgement does not mean agreement. It means letting the employee know that you can see how he got to his truth. It doesn't mean taking sides with the employee or abandoning your corporate responsibilities. Acknowledgement can be the bridge across misperceptions. Engage in Collaborative Listening by:

- Help the employee to explore and be clear about his interests and goals
- Acknowledge her perspective
- I can see how you might see it that way.
- That must be difficult for you.
- I understand that you feel \_\_\_\_\_ about this.
- Ask questions that probe for deeper understanding on both your parts:
- When you said x, what did you mean by that?
- If y happens, what's significant about that for you?
- What am I missing in understanding this from your perspective?

### **3. BE A GOOD TRANSMITTER**

Messages transmitted from one person to the next are very powerful. Sometimes people have to hear it 'from the horse's mouth'. Other times, you'll have to be the transmitter of good thoughts and feelings. Pick up those 'gems', those positive messages that flow when employees feel safe and heard in mediation, and present them to the other employee. Your progress will improve.

We're all human. You know how easy it is to hold a grudge, or assign blame. Sharing gems appropriately can help each employee begin to shift their perceptions of the situation, and more importantly, of each other. To deliver polished gems, try to:

- Act soon after hearing the gem
- Paraphrase accurately so the words aren't distorted
- Ask the listener if this is new information and if changes her stance
- Avoid expecting the employees to visibly demonstrate a 'shift in stance' (it happens internally and on their timetable, not ours)

### **4. RECOGNIZE POWER**

Power is a dominant factor in mediation that raises many questions: What is it? Who has it? How to do you balance power? Assumptions about who is the 'powerful one' are easy to make and sometimes wrong. Skillful conflict resolvers recognize power dynamics in conflicts and are mindful about how to authentically manage them. You can recognize power by being aware that:

- Power is fluid and exchangeable
- Employees possess power over the content and their process (think of employees concerns as the water flowing into and being held by the container)
- Resolvers possess power over the mediation process (their knowledge, wisdom, experience, and commitment form the container)
- Your roles as an HR professional and resolver will have a significant impact on power dynamics

## 5. BE OPTIMISTIC & RESILIENT

Agreeing to participate in mediation is an act of courage and hope. By participating, employees are conveying their belief in value of the relationship. They are also expressing their trust in you to be responsive to and supportive of our efforts. Employees may first communicate their anger, frustration, suffering, righteousness, regret, not their best hopes. You can inspire them to continue by being optimistic:

- Be positive about your experiences with mediation
- Hold their best wishes and hopes for the future
- Encourage them to work towards their hopes

Be Resilient. Remember the last time you were stuck in a conflict? You probably replayed the conversation in your mind over and over, thinking about different endings and scolding yourself. Employees get stuck, too. In fact, employees can become so worn down and apathetic about their conflict, especially a long-standing dispute; they'd do anything to end it.

Yes, even agree with each other prematurely. Don't let them settle. Mediation is about each employee getting their interest met. Be resilient:

- Be prepared to move yourself and the employees through productive and less productive cycles of the mediation
- Help the employees see their movement and progress
- Be mindful and appreciative of the hard work you all are doing

Hopefully, you've discovered that these are your own habits in one form or another and that your organization is benefiting from your knowledge. Your job as a manager or human resource professional is to learn more about resolving issues in the workplace by using these five habits.

Article Excerpt Source: [http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Dina\\_Beach\\_Lynch,\\_Esq](http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Dina_Beach_Lynch,_Esq).