

Behold the Mirror

Our last two newsletters have dealt with the serious mistakes leaders make of failing to acknowledge their own errors and also of shifting blame from self to others. Failing to deal with conflict is the sin of omission that undermines morale and confidence. It leaves all parties "hanging" whilst disagreement is unresolved.

The learning opportunities from conflict are frequently overlooked as staff or management reacts with "fight" or "flight". However a conflict engaged and debated frequently results in an increased understanding of a wider range of issues, respect enlarged and relationships deepened. Significantly new levels of trust develop when people learn "we can work it out". Relationships become more robust and are characterized by increased candor and honesty. Depth replaces shallowness, and substance replaces form.

There are numerous ways of tackling unresolved issues but the most effective is to start with ourselves. Conflict resolution centered on the other person changing is limited in its effectiveness and capacity, simply because it waits for the other to do something! Waiting and expecting the other party to move first is significantly disempowering, because unless the "other" initiates, nothing happens. When both parties are waiting, little is accomplished.

The mature approach to any conflict scenario is to first look in the mirror. Once we have objectively assessed our own negative contribution to the situation we need to start a process of discussion and engagement. Our hesitation in doing so is frequently because of misplaced importance around our own pride, 'face' and status. This hesitation is influenced by the way we see life, and business in particular, namely "I win; you lose."

We can only deal with the other party objectively, rationally and in a positive manner after we have first asked ourselves the following:

1. Why am I feeling so angry / hurt / frightened?
2. What do I want to change?
3. Whose problem is this, really? How much is mine? How much is theirs?
4. What is the unspoken message I infer from the situation? (E.g. they don't like me they don't respect me.) *

Conflict can be dealt a lasting blow if instead of seeking how to force one's way upon another, both parties apply themselves to finding solutions that are respectful of each others' concerns. It is this objective, rational pursuit of respect for others that changes men from being pygmies to giants.

The benefit of such introspection is that it forces one to focus on what necessary steps must be taken to correct what's wrong. Asking what outcome one wants to achieve is equally important as to why one is so frustrated, The under mentioned may help clarify what one could aim to achieve.

1. Aim to avoid the desire to punish, get-even or blame. What must I avoid doing?
2. Aim to improve the situation. What can I do that will achieve this?
3. Aim to communicate your feelings appropriately. How do I do this constructively?
4. Aim to improve the relationship and increase communication.
5. Aim to avoid repeating the same situation.

The challenge is to work out any unresolved conflicts with which you may be associated! Until next month ... yebo

* *Conflict Resolution Network (www.crnhq.org)*

