

***Skills for  
Leading***



**O**f all the things that leaders need most, followers must be at the top of the list. This underscores the idea that leadership is about working with people, and no magic formula can turn you into a leader unless and until you commit yourself to being a person people want to follow. People are generally attracted to those who are self-confident, have a positive outlook, communicate well, and lead in a reasoned and yet innovative direction. Jim Rohn, an author and businessman said it well:

The challenge of leadership is to be strong, but not rude . . . kind, but not weak . . . bold, but not a bully . . . thoughtful, but not lazy . . . humble, but not timid . . . proud, but not arrogant . . . have humor, but without folly.

There are a multitude of definitions of leadership and many models of leadership styles. According to Don Clark, their common thread is that leadership style is the manner and approach of providing direction, implementing plans, and motivating people. At its most basic, it is about influencing people in reaching a goal.

### **The Leader's Role in Influencing People**

Leaders' styles include the manner in which they interact with others, how they define leadership, and what their perceptions of the *needs* are: If a vision is needed, who develops it? If a task needs to be completed, who determines the how, when, where, and by whom? If barriers to success emerge, how does the leader respond? If collaboration with others is essential, how does the leader model and support it? If the work environment is not supporting high performance, how does the leader change it? How leaders approach these questions determines how effective their style will be.

Daniel Goleman interviewed several thousands of successful leaders to determine what makes them effective. His research supports the belief that *how* a leader leads sets the tone and climate of the work environment and largely determines the success of what they do. If the emotional climate is positive and supportive, people are more likely to want to expend the effort needed, to contribute their skills and time, and to care about achieving the goals. In *Primal Leadership*, he describes six leadership styles resulting from his research. These styles differ in how a leader works with and influences people to achieve. He asserts that leaders who have mastered four or more styles—especially what he calls the Authoritative, Democratic, Affiliative, and Coaching styles—provide the best climate for group performance. Here is a brief description of how a leader behaves using each of his six styles.

- ♦ *Commanding*: expects compliance with no questions asked, "Do what I say, now."

## **Claiming Your Leadership Style**

*It is a terrible  
thing to look  
over your  
shoulder when  
you are trying  
to lead—and  
find no one  
there.*

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

- ♦ *Authoritative*: can mobilize people toward a vision by providing clear direction and self-confidence. “I’ll show you the Promised Land and how to get there.”
- ♦ *Democratic*: supports collaboration and teamwork with communication and participatory leadership. “What do you think?” “How shall we proceed?”
- ♦ *Coaching*: develops others through a focus on strengths and the future. “Here, try it this way and let’s see if it works.”
- ♦ *Affiliative*: creates harmony through empathy and building relationships. “We are all in this together.”
- ♦ *Pace setting*: expects to succeed through high expectations for performance and a drive to achieve. “Just watch how I do it.”

Most people in leadership positions adopt a style early on that fits their basic temperament and feels comfortable. Over the years, they may veer little from this style, even when situations may require a change in how they direct and motivate people. Goleman asserts that one style per person is no longer the most effective way to approach leadership. He believes that the most effective leaders adapt to fit the environment, the vision, and the needs of others. The more styles leaders use competently, the better the outcome of their leadership. Leaders who are sensitive to how the people around them work best and are flexible in adapting their leadership skills to support the styles and needs of others get the best results.

This does not mean that a good leader is someone who is a chameleon, always switching colors to fit the setting. Rather, good leaders try to understand people’s needs and motivations and to match their style to the people with whom they’re working. They continuously strive to enhance their strengths and learn new skills, with a genuine awareness of the impact of their behaviors on others. This enables them to manage relationships well in a variety of situations, thus drawing out the strengths of others. These keys—self-awareness, effective understanding and management of personal behaviors, social sensitivity, and relationship management skills—create a leader who is effective in a multitude of situations, not just the one for which a single style is well-suited.

### Common Mistakes Would-be Leaders Make

1. *“I’m in charge, therefore people will do what they are told.”* This coercive style assumes that people always agree with what and how things need to be done and that you know more than anyone else. It creates a climate that does not treat people with respect for their strengths and talents. It assumes that leadership is about dictatorship. If you find yourself falling into this style,



work to create an environment that recognizes peoples' efforts and ideas and models positive interaction. Tap into individuals' inherent motivations to be part of something valuable. Support an open exchange of ideas on how to work toward the group's goal. Assure that people know how to complete a task and have the resources necessary. At the same time, hold them accountable for what they say they will and are able to do. Send the message that individual efforts within the team are essential for success.

2. *"I've made up my mind, and no one can convince me otherwise."* Inflexibility breeds unease and resentment. An unwillingness to change, allow new perspectives, or try something different labels a leader as indifferent to others and a poor resource for challenging situations. This behavior can depress morale and send workers and stakeholders elsewhere. New ideas don't stand a chance, and group members will be reluctant to propose any. Effective leaders model openness and personal growth.
3. *"It's all about me and my leadership abilities."* The catch-phrase is, "There is no 'I' in t-e-a-m." If you want people working with you and for you, you must focus on them first. What are their needs and motivations? How can you support them? How can you recognize their efforts? How can they work together to fill the gaps in skills and knowledge in the quest for your common vision?
4. *"I don't dare ask for help. If I do, no one will respect me as a leader."* No one has all the skills, knows all the answers, and acts in the right way every time. Effective leaders know their own strengths and weaknesses, and they don't hesitate to seek help from others. Approaching others and taking advantage of the strengths of those around you benefits everyone. Your effort is strengthened because of diverse skills and knowledge; people have much to contribute and relish being recognized for their contributions, and your outcomes are enhanced by shared responsibility. Additionally, effective leaders know when to delegate and are willing to prioritize and match the best person for the job. False pride does not keep them from turning to others.
5. *"If I am not perceived as a serious person, people will not take me seriously."* Leadership is about influencing others and managing personal inter-

*A good leader takes a little more than his share of the blame, a little less than his share of the credit.*

—Arnold Glasgow

actions in a way that benefits others and the established goals. This can be serious and hard work, but work without laughter and humor is self-centered and depressing. People work best when someone is willing to create shared experiences of fun, celebrations for jobs well done, and project genuine warmth and caring. Effective leaders find opportunities for pleasantries and enjoyment. Effective leaders take the job seriously, but not themselves.

6. *“Mistakes are costly and embarrassing. I need to be perfect.”* Wise people have often said they learn more from their mistakes than their successes. Whether it is your mistake or someone else’s, focus on fixing the problem rather than affixing blame. Use mistakes as an opportunity for what to do differently next time. Model that all learning is valuable. People watch how leaders react to situations to identify what is important and acceptable. Wise leaders know that they are always setting precedents by what they do and don’t do. Modeling acceptance, continued learning, and personal growth send powerful messages. People will be more willing to admit to mistakes, enabling corrections to be more timely. People will become accountable for what they do if they aren’t governed by fear. Great leaders have the self-confidence and integrity to own up to mistakes and then move on.
7. *“Leadership is about telling people what to do.”* One of the challenges of leadership is quieting your own voice in order to listen to others. Through active and focused listening, good leaders acknowledge the experience of others. As a leader, you will also hear new ideas, concerns, and information that will help you make decisions, improve personal interactions, and evaluate progress. Effective listening models healthy team behaviors that support conflict resolution as well as creativity.
8. *“I just need to supply the vision and the rest will take care of itself.”* Providing inspiration and leading the envisioning process are integral parts of leadership. However, leadership also has elements of strategic thinking and planning for making the vision a reality, empowering others to contribute, orienting people to the task, evaluating progress, and supporting and monitoring accountability. Leadership can and should be trans-

formative—proposing and helping others develop new ways of doing and being—but it also must demonstrate a day-to-day commitment to the strategies and tasks necessary for change to happen. Leaders keep their eyes on the mountain top, but they plan adequate provisions and carry their share, too.

## Shared Leadership

In community planning, there is often a cadre of leaders. This pools their skills and abilities and spreads the responsibilities among several people. However, sometimes leadership styles do not mesh, and people may compete rather than collaborate. When this happens, participants and stakeholders get mixed messages and have to choose which leader to follow. Effective leadership in community planning requires development of a team that has a shared vision, manages their relationships with one another well, has an effective communication network, is sensitive to one another's needs and strengths, and is committed to participatory management. In creating your team of leaders, look for people who demonstrate most of these values, skills, and behaviors:

- ◆ empathy
- ◆ healthy management of conflict
- ◆ belief in empowering others
- ◆ visionary ideas and practices
- ◆ participatory management skills
- ◆ comfort with shared decision making
- ◆ commitment to developing others
- ◆ willing to share the power and the glory
- ◆ support teamwork
- ◆ recognize others' contributions
- ◆ innovative and creative thinking
- ◆ appreciate diversity and act to include as many perspectives as possible
- ◆ flexibility
- ◆ integrity
- ◆ fairness
- ◆ realism
- ◆ belief in the project
- ◆ respect for and of others
- ◆ commitment

Shared leadership draws on the strengths of individuals and provides diverse perspectives and experiences. The different leadership styles represented can enrich community planning. However, if one style is over- or underrepresented, talk about it. Don't wait for the gaps to become a barrier to success. Look for people who can adapt and use different styles. Look for leadership in unexpected places—it doesn't necessar-

*Fail to honor  
people,  
They fail to  
honor you;  
But of a good  
leader, who  
talks little,  
When the work  
is done, his aim  
fulfilled,  
They will say,  
“We did this  
ourselves.”*

— Lao Tzu

ily have to be someone who is currently in a paid leadership position. Goleman and colleagues identified the many forms leaders come in. Use this to expand your leadership base and broadened your effort's appeal to your stakeholders.

### **Resources**

- Adam, Bob. 2001. *The Everything Leadership Book*. Avon Mass.: Adams.
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- Ponder, Randall D. 1998. *The Leader's Guide: 15 Essential Skills*. Central Point, Ore.: Oasis.
- Rohn, Jim. 2004. The Qualities of Skillful Leadership. <http://www.affinitymc.com/qualities-of-skillful-leadership.htm>.

# *The Art of Motivation*

Look in any bookstore or surf the Web and you will find seemingly endless resources for how to motivate others. Generally speaking, the keys to the art of motivation seem to be clear communication of vision and goals, ongoing support and coaching, appreciation, modeling effective behaviors, and reinforcement for positive action—all excellent skills most leaders aspire to have. With these often agreed-upon ingredients for success, why then is practicing the art of motivation so challenging?

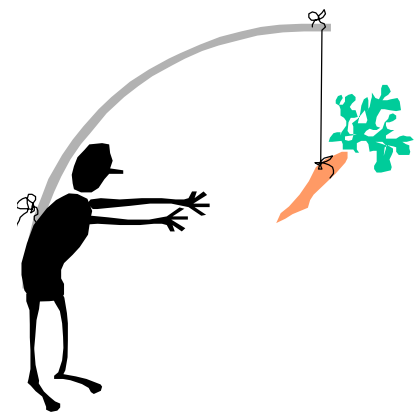
Motivation is often described as getting others to do something because they want to do it. Examining this concept more closely yields that motivation is not so much a product of external influence but more appropriately an internal desire to achieve something accompanied with the belief that you can do it. The link between a leader and an external influence and a worker's internal desire is a work environment in which people respond with increased effort and enthusiasm for the task at hand and intrinsically strive for success. It often comes down to individuals finding the answer to the age-old question, "What's in it for me?"

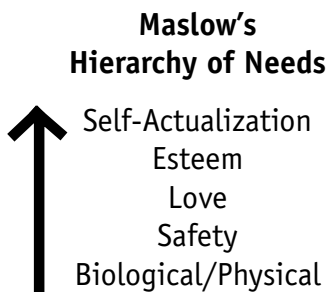
People are more likely to complete projects and tasks competently when they perceive a benefit for themselves. Fear can be a motivator, for at least the short run. The initial benefit for a worker may be the avoidance of "pain" (e.g., embarrassment, demotion, anxiety). However, scaring people into submission often results in an angry and tense work environment whose workers seek safer and more rewarding surroundings. Community projects most often involve workers who are volunteers for whom an easy and fast exit is their reaction to leadership practicing motivation through fear and intimidation. The most lasting motivational environments identify what participants gain and support meeting their basic needs through emotionally intelligent leadership.

Leaders should not operate under the assumption that people are most influenced into action by monetary rewards, perks, and recognition. These extrinsic rewards are helpful and do often provide positive morale and enthusiastic responses to become engaged in the task process. However, these kinds of rewards can be short-lived if they are not supported by the longer-term process of helping people meet inner needs that increase their desire for success. These intrinsic motivators provide the fuel for sustained engagement and enthusiasm over the long haul.

## **Identifying and Meeting People's Needs**

Answers to "What's in it for me?" are as varied as the individuals involved. However, a framework for beginning to understand these answers can be found in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which he hypothesizes as the drivers of most of our





*Motivation is  
when your  
dreams put on  
work clothes.*

—Parkes Robinson

behaviors. Regardless of how valid and comprehensive you think his framework is, it is useful to consider the power of the drive for belonging and self-esteem. This often accounts for much of the volunteer effort projects enjoy. It is also helpful to realize that if the basic needs of individuals are not met and they don't feel safe, they are not likely to be motivated to take part in a project that is conceptual in nature and does not relate to their immediate lives. Helping volunteers and other workers in a community project realize a sense of belonging and feel good about their contribution is essential in engaging their enthusiasm and motivation to help the project succeed.

### **Leading with Emotional Intelligence**

The concept of emotional intelligence, mostly widely recognized through Daniel Goleman's work, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It can Matter More than IQ*, is defined as "a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions." According to Goleman, emotional intelligence involves abilities that may be categorized into five domains:

*Self-awareness:* Observing yourself and recognizing a feeling as it happens.

*Managing emotions:* Handling feelings so that they are appropriate; realizing what is behind a feeling; finding ways to handle fears and anxieties, anger, and sadness.

*Motivation:* Channeling emotions in the service of a goal; emotional self-control; delaying gratification and stifling impulses.

*Empathy:* Sensitivity to others' feelings and concerns; understanding their perspective; appreciating the differences in how people feel about things.

*Handling relationships:* Managing emotions in others; social competence and social skills.

Why is emotional intelligence important in motivation? The skills that help people harmonize are fundamental to channeling energies and emotions to achieve a goal. Leaders who are self-aware, manage their emotions appropriately, successfully focus their efforts to reach a goal, and are empathic and socially skilled create environments that facilitate positive outcomes. People appreciate and react positively to leaders who model positive behaviors and communicate well. The resulting supportive and safe environment aids people in gearing up for challenges managed by project leaders who understand workers' individual needs and foster communication through active listening. It also helps groups and individuals develop productive patterns of behavior that lead to a sense of belonging. Additionally, persistence in the face of frustra-

tion or delayed gratification is enhanced because workers feel valued and understood. How leaders respond to challenges, setbacks, and conflict often determines how committed others are to the project. Leaders who demonstrate high emotional intelligence are reassuring to be around and promote risk taking and honest effort. People are motivated and energized. They feel their leader knows them, how they like to work, and what is important to them.

Here are some questions to help assess whether you have created a motivational environment:

1. Does trust exist at a high level among all members of the team?
2. Are our leaders confident in our capacity to move toward change?
3. Is everyone clear about the vision and mission?
4. Does the mission speak to individuals' need for change?
5. Do we have the skills and tools to make change happen?
6. Are we open to learning new ideas, taking risks, and personal growth?
7. Do we recognize individuals' contributions and give credit where credit is due?
8. Is teamwork the style used most to complete the project's tasks?
9. Are our communication networks open and viable?
10. Are our relationships valued and treated with care?

### **Resources**

- Daniels, Aubrey. 1999. *Bringing Out the Best in People*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
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- Maslow, Abraham. 1998. *Maslow on Management*. New York: John Wiley. (Published originally in Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2nd ed., Harper & Row, 1970.)
- Ponder, Randall D. 1998. *The Leader's Guide, 15 Essential Skills*. Grants Pass, Ore.: Oasis Press.



Most of us can remember a childhood experience when an adult knowingly or unknowingly disparaged something we had made and discouraged our budding creativity. Perhaps our drawing of a dog looked to them like a tree stump, or our rainbow had the “wrong” colors, or our poems didn’t quite rhyme. What does this have to do with successful change efforts? Developing innovative approaches requires creativity and the willingness to generate and explore ideas that haven’t been tried before. This can be difficult for many people to do, publicly or privately, particularly if their creative efforts haven’t been well nurtured or rewarded.

Change begins with questions. Generating ideas for solutions to answer those questions requires two types of thinking, *convergent* or *divergent*. Convergent or “logical” thinking is linear and often efficient. Using our relevant experiences, we approach change by judging possible potential actions against what we know and believe to be appropriate and workable. We often look for the one right solution because that is the way we have been conditioned. We make decisions and implement plans. However, if we don’t have sufficient relevant experience or the potential solutions we’ve identified don’t work, we need to try a new approach. Divergent thinking, sometimes called creative thinking, is another way to look for answers. Creativity arises from the ability to look at situations from different perspectives or in a different contexts. It involves suspending our current notions, assumptions, and beliefs. It often involves asking not only “why?” but “why not?”

Using both styles of thinking to understand the issues in change, generate ideas for future actions, and prioritize realistic strategies leads to a better and broader array of solutions. Promoting the benefits of both styles and sparking creativity are vital to facilitating group work because it uses the whole range of talents people bring to solving issues and creating change.

The first challenge is to quiet any voices from the past that made us doubt our own creativity. We need to understand that everyone has the potential to be creative and that we all have the ability to think more creatively than we already do. Bringing together ideas that were not previously connected or seeing things from a new perspective is creative. As a leader in the planning process, one of your roles is to help the planning team and other groups realize their own creative potential. Here are some ways to do this.

- ♦ Model an open-minded approach to others’ experiences and ideas.
- ♦ Challenging your own ideas and assumptions in public as well as in private.
- ♦ Foster flexibility in adapting to barriers, changes in how things are routinely handled, and surprises.

## Sparking Creative Thinking



*If you always  
do what you  
always did,  
you’ll always  
get what you  
always got.*

—Anonymous

*Creativity is the ability to replace old, familiar patterns of living and problem-solving with new and equally or more successful ones.*

—Dr. Jean Masterson

- ♦ Try not to be constrained by rules and regulations. At the least, question their purpose.
- ♦ Don't take the easy way out.
- ♦ Seek out people with diverse opinions and listen to them.
- ♦ Treat problems as opportunities.
- ♦ Ask questions and encouraging others to ask questions. There are no stupid questions.
- ♦ Incorporate activities into your meetings that stimulate creative thinking.

### **Try This!**

Here are some brief descriptions of formal and informal activities that can stimulate creative thinking for a work group.

- ♦ *Mind-mapping.* Give one or more groups of people a sheet of flip chart paper or newsprint to put in the center of their table. Ask each group to write a key word in the center of the paper. Then have them work as quickly as possible to write related concepts or words and connect them to the key word (and to one another).
- ♦ *Physical activity.* Have the group walk in pairs or threes and discuss ideas, take stretch breaks if a meeting lasts more than one hour, find other ways to move around while working.
- ♦ *Incorporate surprise.* Celebrate someone's birthday with all the trimmings, invite a guest participant who may not have an obvious connection to the task at hand but who has a sincere interest in the process, bring food (or maybe some unusual food) to a meeting, change the standard room arrangement, meet outdoors.
- ♦ *Think visually.* Use a flip chart or butcher paper to draw out ideas; use index cards or Post-Its® to write, categorize, and move around ideas; have notepads and colored pencils for doodling (and give people permission to doodle).
- ♦ *Set limits or conditions.* Call for a 30-minute session to come up with 15 ideas. Setting conditions often spurs people into action.
- ♦ *Play "what if?"* Ask "If we received one million dollars tomorrow to solve this problem what would we do?" Or "How would \_\_\_\_\_ (a respected national expert) tell us to address this issue?" Then use the ideas to establish what the group really envisions as the ideal and work on making this dream realistic.
- ♦ *Look to other fields for help.* Invite people from a completely different walk of life to join you for an idea

- session. Cut across disciplines, cultures, interests, and populations. Conversely, encourage team members to discuss the work of the group with outsiders. Describing the issues often sparks insight, and others may see solutions the group hasn't considered.
- ♦ *Brainstorm.* Invite people to write or say ideas as fast as they can, without judging whether they are realistic or not. Write down or post the ideas for everyone to see, and then reflect on what just might work.
  - ♦ *Change the topic and relax for a moment.* Moving away from the issue at hand and providing some distraction may allow other ideas in the subconscious to emerge. Sometimes you just need a break.
  - ♦ *Celebrate!* Use any excuse to help the group recognize the value of their efforts. Promote their creativity with support, praise, fun, and humor.

*Creativity can  
never be  
explained by  
appeal to  
reason alone.  
Like the birth  
of a child,  
creativity  
compels us not  
to explanation  
but to wonder  
and awe.*

*—George Vaillant*



In the next few chapters, we're going to talk about some of the challenges of leadership—negotiation, conflict resolution, and managing challenging behaviors within the team. By the time you finish reading them, you will likely be convinced (if you aren't already) that active listening is critical to your success as leader and lead agent in the planning process. If you would like to become a better listener, there are three actions that will help you.

1. Commit yourself to understanding what others say and mean.
2. Identify those specific listening skills you need to enhance your communication.
3. Practice.

Seeking to understand others before getting them to understand you is a central principle in Stephen Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. This commitment is challenging because we often engage in conversations in which our listening is inhibited because we are looking for a chance to express ourselves and our own viewpoints, rather than using all our senses to understand clearly what the other person is saying. Quieting our own urge to speak is often the most difficult skills to practice and achieve. Hearing only becomes listening when you pay close attention to what is said and how it is said, and when you check whether your interpretation of what was said is correct.

## **Communication Techniques that Enhance Listening**

*Attending* is using effective body language and verbal responses to build rapport and indicate to the speaker that you are paying complete attention. When you see someone who is skilled at attending, you will likely observe

1. open body posture—that is, arms at the side, rather than crossed over the chest—and head leaning in slightly towards the speaker
2. direct but comfortable eye contact that is appropriate and culturally sensitive
3. relaxed demeanor that indicates comfort with the conversation and a desire to spend the time to understand the speaker accurately
4. short verbal phrases and nonverbal responses that encourage the speaker (e.g., "Please go on," or subtle head nodding).

Well-chosen *verbal responses* to a speaker's communication can help the listener understand the message within the words. Some useful techniques are

1. questioning or rephrasing that helps the listener clarify the speaker's message (e.g., "Are you

# **Active Listening**



*Easy listening only exists on the radio.*

—David Barkan

saying. . . ?” or “Do you mean . . . ?” or “You are feeling \_\_\_\_\_ because this happened”).

2. probing questions that elicit more information but are not invasive. These can yield a fuller comprehension of the conversation. Asking who, what, when, where, and how in a nonconfrontational way can often get the speaker to respond more fully.
3. rephrasing what the speaker said. This allows the listener to check out their interpretation of the speaker’s message. Confirming what you heard by restating or summarizing the main points gives the speaker an opportunity to correct any misunderstandings or inaccuracies.

*Active listening strategies* lead to listening that is engaged, focused, and empathic. Here are a few.

1. Prepare to listen. Quiet your own inner conversation. Minimize environmental distractions and interruptions. Give your full attention to the moment.
2. When you are listening, just listen. Focus on the conversation, not what you are going to say next, have for dinner, and do after the conversation is over. Don’t interrupt unless it is to ask for clarification.
3. Listen to the content. Try to discriminate between the key points in the message and extraneous material. Confirm your understanding of the speaker’s central message.
4. Refrain from judging the person or the information prematurely. Forming your opinion before you completely understand can lead to missed opportunities, negative feelings, and conflict.
5. Listen for the intensity in the speaker’s message. The volume, tone, speed of delivery, and emotion with which the words are spoken are important clues to the speaker’s feelings behind the message. Acknowledging these feelings and checking out your interpretation of these clues are important and help the speaker feel deeply understood.
6. Use positive body language to indicate interest and involvement. Listen with your other senses—watch closely, lightly touch the speaker (if it’s appropriate) to indicate concern or camaraderie. Keep your non-verbal and verbal messages congruent: If you say you agree but your facial expression indicates puzzlement or disbelief, the speaker will get a mixed message and rapport will be damaged.
7. Refrain from immediately offering solutions. Fixing a problem is not always what the speaker wants or needs. Truly listening often provides a supportive en-

*Nature gave us  
one tongue and  
two ears so we  
could hear  
twice as much  
as we speak.*

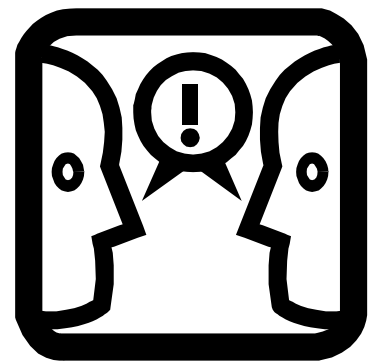
—*Epictetus*

- environment in which the speaker can identify options and possible solutions.
8. Provide feedback by subtle nodding and through your facial expressions, hand movements, or statements to let the speaker know what you are thinking and feeling. This helps the speaker know when to elaborate, pause, or go on. Encouraging verbalizations (umm-hmm) and comments support the process.
  9. Don't be afraid of silence. It gives speakers time to consider their remarks. The person you are talking to may try to fill silences with more information.
  10. Be aware of mental filters that can affect your ability to listen. Gender, religion, culture, personal values, education, life experiences, expectations, feelings, and other factors can influence your interpretation and acceptance of the speaker's meaning. What you hear through your filters may be different from what the speaker intended. Check out your assumptions about the speaker's message. Develop a keen self-awareness of when and how your mental filters interfere with effective listening.
  11. Demonstrate empathy by perceiving the speaker's feelings and perspective. Try to understand the meaning of the message from the speaker's vantage point and experience, rather than by how you would think, feel, and do. Labeling the speaker's feelings, when you fully understand them can let the speaker know the depth of your active listening. For example, "It sounds like you felt unappreciated when she did not acknowledge all the work you did."

Increasing your ability to listen is much like any other skill you choose to develop. Identify your strengths and areas for improvement. Gain information and feedback, set goals, and practice. People feel good when others listen to what they have to say. Active listening can prevent misunderstandings, build rapport, save time, strengthen relationships, and model collaboration. More work can be done, information can be shared effectively, trust can be developed, and groups can build cohesion. As people feel they have been listened to well, they are often motivated to listen well to others—including you.

#### **Resources**

Bolton, Robert. 1979. *People Skills*. New York: Simon and Schuster.  
Kratz, Dennis, and Abby Kratz. 1995. *Effective Listening Skills*. New York: McGraw-Hill.



*Listening is an attitude of the heart, a genuine desire to be with another which both attracts and heals.*

—J. Isham



**N**egotiation is something that we all do as we engage in our day-to-day activities, both in our professional lives and in our social lives. For example, we negotiate with our supervisor and peers about work activities and deadlines. We negotiate with our family members and friends about where to go for a get-together, when to meet, and how long to stay. Parents negotiate with children about dress, curfews, and friendships. In these cases, negotiation aims at a compromise to settle differences of opinions according to outcomes we personally value.

In group activities such as community planning, there are many opportunities to use negotiation skills. Indeed, the success of the whole process rides on the ability to negotiate actions and responsibilities among agencies or individuals.

Before you enter a negotiation, it is a good idea to prepare. What requires negotiation? Is the desired outcome concrete, for example, a meeting schedule? Or is it more diffuse, for example, ways to increase individual participation in the planning process? Is it something relatively minor—who will photocopy the minutes?—or something critical to the outcome—which organization will assume responsibility for undertaking the strategies developed in the plan?

### Positions vs. Interests

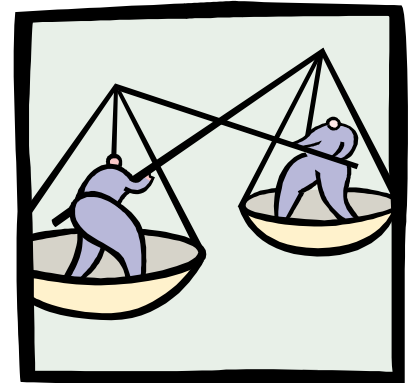
Some of the vocabulary used when talking about *mediation* may be useful in a discussion of *negotiation* (and conflict resolution; see the next chapter). Participants in either form of interactions start out with *positions* that sometimes seem irreconcilable. Positions are based on the outcomes the participants wish to see, and they are often coupled with strong emotions and a firm opinion about how the outcome should be reached. Generally speaking, people can't be argued out of positions, and conflict arises when others try to do so.

Participants also have *interests*, which are the “why” behind positions—what the desired outcome is supposed to accomplish. The facilitator of mediation and conflict resolution (see the next chapter) usually will get participants to talk about all the aspects of the situation as they see it and what their feelings are. The key to finding an agreeable solution is to get the parties to really listen to one another. When that happens, parties who seem to be at odds often discover interests in common for which they can jointly identify solutions.

### When You Are the Negotiator for Your Organization

When your organization is a party in the negotiation, it helps to identify your own interests in the outcome. Be clear about the limits of what is acceptable. What are your organization's priorities. What ground are you willing to give. What losses

# Negotiation



*Listen or thy  
tongue will  
keep thee deaf.*  
—Native American

are you *not* willing to sustain? Identify resources that can support the plan you propose. Have relevant facts and materials at hand.

Once you have analyzed and understood your situation, consider the range of possible opposition and disagreements, and think about your response. However, be prepared to listen carefully to the other parties and open to hearing what they have to say, even though you've imagined what their interests and positions are. Verify that you understand their needs and interests and, to the extent possible, identify the emotion behind their positions. What are their priorities? In what areas will you likely to be agreement? This preparation not only helps you think through the process of negotiation but can prepare you emotionally for it.

As negotiator for your organization, project confidence in a positive outcome and your own ability to see the process through. Your confidence comes from knowing how to be effective in negotiation, understanding clearly the issues at hand, awareness of opposing views, and being able to communicate well to all parties. This also promotes a positive environment. Second, be clear with the individual and/or group with whom you're negotiating about why negotiation is necessary and how the outcome supports the overall purpose of the collaborative effort. This helps frame the negotiation process as business-like rather than personal, and it supports shared interests, not divisive positions.

### **Steps in negotiating agreements**

1. Determine a time and place for the discussion that is acceptable to all parties.
2. Decide on your role in the process. Are you a neutral arbitrator among other parties, or are you representing your own interests.
3. If necessary, attend to any details of the setting that facilitate the process: materials and equipment for the meeting, food, temperature, accessibility, seating arrangements, etc.
4. Identify and agree upon the objective of the negotiation. Stress the need for agreement.
5. Agree upon the agenda and time frames.
6. Assign necessary roles, facilitator, recorder.
7. Listen, keep options open, attend to cultural differences, model flexibility, and pay close attention to all proposals.
8. Use positive body language when phrasing possible and realistic proposals.
9. Seek and provide any clarification needed.
10. Use breaks and silences within the meeting to allow

- participants time to consider.
11. Listen to and propose alternatives.
  12. Deal effectively with new and tangential information by focusing on common interests and objectives. Deflect personal attacks with humor or by ignoring the invitation to anger. Stay in control. Avoid displaying impatience.
  13. Offer hypothetical proposals for creative consideration: "Suppose this happens, what will you do then?"
  14. Make certain that everyone understands the winning proposal. Agree to the terms and record them.
  15. Discuss follow-up activities or responses. Be clear about assignments and tasks.
  16. Look participants squarely in the eye as the agreement is closed and finalized.
  17. Emphasize the benefits, the achievement of the objectives, and the participation of the parties.

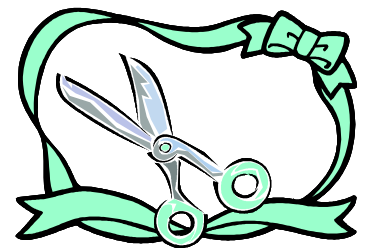
### **If Things Aren't Working Out**

If the discussion breaks down and it appears that the negotiation is likely to fail, think carefully about how to restore the communication. Avoid angry responses and model the need to understand the interests of those involved. If necessary, take a break, and resume by reviewing the objectives and stated priorities of the parties. Limit the time allowed for the parties to complain. Encourage productive proposals of how to proceed. Help people save face. Employ a neutral outside facilitator when necessary.

Successful negotiating—an attempt to achieve a mutually acceptable solution—is not about winning or losing. It is about reaching a satisfying conclusion for all involved. The key is that all parties need to gain something of value in order to make compromises worthwhile. Keeping your eye on the ultimate purpose and vision can promote agreement and productive collaboration.

### **Resources**

- Fisher, Roger, William Ury, and Bruce Patton. 1992. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Cohen, Herb. 1980. *You Can Negotiate Anything*. New York: Bantam.
- Shell, Richard. 2000. *Bargaining for Advantage: Negotiation Strategies for Reasonable People*. New York: Penguin.
- Ury, William. 1993. *Getting Past No*. New York: Bantam.
- Wertheim, E. Negotiations and resolving conflicts: An overview, <http://web.cba.neu.edu/~ewertheim/interper/negot3.htm>



*Never cut what  
you can untie.*

—Joseph Joubert

*The most  
important trip  
you may take  
in life is  
meeting people  
half way.*

—Henry Boyle

## **Do you have what it takes to be a successful negotiator?**

1. Do you support win-win outcomes?
2. Do you project a high expectation of success?
3. Can you create a comfortable and professional atmosphere?
4. Are you flexible with your ideas?
5. Do you encourage creativity in problem solving?
6. Are you willing to take the time to prepare for negotiation?
7. Can you maintain your composure under stress?
8. Are you willing to ask questions? To answer questions?
9. Do you strive to communicate clearly, concisely, and with a respectful tone?
10. Do you work to understand others' point of view?
11. Can you separate the person from the issues?
12. Can you discriminate between interests and positions?
13. Are you willing to compromise? Are you clear with yourself about what you are willing to compromise?
14. Do you understand the power of body language?
15. Do you listen well?

**C**onflict. For most, the word alone conjures up negative thoughts and feelings. It may make you feel nervous and agitated, or it may get your adrenaline rushing and help prepare you for a fight. However, conflict is an inevitable part of the planning process and should be expected. *When managed appropriately*, conflict is actually good for your planning team. For example, Emily Kittle Morrison notes that conflict can

- ♦ cause the leader or team members to better define the purpose and need for any proposed changes or decisions
- ♦ help determine when a current decision or issue needs to be better evaluated, analyzed, or discussed before action is taken
- ♦ show that the team needs to work on cooperation and collaboration, as well as “team-building”
- ♦ bring to light breakdowns in team communications.

Carter McNamara also discusses team conflict in a positive manner, saying that it helps raise and address team problems, energizes people to think and act, and helps team members learn to recognize and appreciate differences in each other. In addition, when conflict is a part of your planning process, you can be sure that *groupthink* (discussed in the chapter on Managing Difficult Team Behaviors) is not occurring.

When managed ineffectively, however, conflict can reduce productivity, lower morale, create continued problems and conflicts, and cause team members to become frustrated and aggravated with the planning process. Thus, conflict resolution skills are essential to your role as lead agent and facilitator to help maintain positive momentum of the team.

### Common Reactions to Conflict

Many psychologists and managerial theorists recognize five generic approaches that people use when conflict enters their lives: *denial*, *avoidance*, *accommodation*, *domination*, and *compromise*. Most people do not stick to one approach for every conflict in which they find themselves involved; instead, they use different approaches or combinations of approaches, depending on the situation.

It is important to recognize and understand the different ways in which you and your team members may react to conflict so that you can help facilitate resolution. In the popular book, *People Skills*, Robert Bolton describes in detail the five generic approaches. Briefly, they are

- ♦ *Denial*. According to Bolton, some people find conflict so threatening that they try to deny its existence in any way possible and pretend, to themselves and others, that it doesn't exist.

## Conflict Resolution

*Where all think alike, no one thinks very much.*

—Walter Lippman

- ◆ *Avoidance.* According to Bolton, people who avoid conflict are aware of it but “do everything within their power” not to deal with it or the person creating it. This approach cause people to withdraw from a situation, often because they give “premature forgiveness,” even though they don’t agree with the resolution.
- ◆ *Accommodation.* Bolton calls this approach “capitulation,” although some others use the term accommodation. People who use this approach give in without a struggle, to preserve harmony. The consequence is resentment, because their needs are not getting met.
- ◆ *Domination.* People who use domination push their opinions and solutions onto others. People who use this approach may get the results they want, but “winning” often has serious, negative effects on the relationship among the people involved in the conflict and block agreement in the future.
- ◆ *Compromise.* People who compromise take into account both the fears and the needs of all involved parties and try to find a resolution that will be acceptable to all.

## **Avoiding Unnecessary Conflict**

The best remedy is prevention. To avoid unnecessary conflict in the first place:

- ◆ Make sure that your team develops clear mission and vision statements early in the planning process. These will help your team refocus on its purpose when conflict arises. Post both on the wall at each meeting.
- ◆ Good facilitation skills are critical to group planning processes. If you, as lead agent, are the facilitator and do not feel especially comfortable about handling conflict, it may be helpful to ask for a co-chair or co-facilitator.
- ◆ Ensure that team members develop ground rules and adhere to them at all times. One of your jobs as facilitator is to watch for and correct breaches in respect, honesty, and professionalism.
- ◆ Team members and leaders need to understand their roles and responsibilities. Create job descriptions for for all members.
- ◆ Make sure that decisions are based sufficient and correct information. Those that aren’t may produce solutions that are unacceptable to your team or your community. To the degree possible, stakeholders who might be affected by the team’s decision should be present when decisions are made.

- ◆ Do what you can to support and improve the team's communication skills.

## Conflict Resolution

Even if you follow all those guidelines, your team will still encounter conflict. Wolff and Nagy define conflict resolution as “a way for two or more parties to find a peaceful solution to a disagreement among them.” There are many books and websites on conflict resolution, and many people who have developed their own techniques for conflict resolution. Some resources are listed at the end of this chapter, and you can find many more by searching the web or looking through your local library or bookstore. Because you have your own unique strengths and traits, you will likely need to adapt the more general conflict resolution techniques to suit your own skill level and the situations you use them in. Bolton explains a conflict resolution technique that may be helpful to you in developing your own style. In it, at all times, the team should be looking for a “win-win” strategy, and not fall into the “me versus them” trap, thus making sure that everyone's needs are met.

1. *Define the problem in terms of needs, not solutions.*

Often, conflicts occur over *what* people want to do, not *why* they want to do it. In order to create a resolution where all the participants feel they've won, Bolton explains that the conflict must be understood in terms of each party's needs rather than their proposed solutions. Each party's proposed solution likely meets its own needs, but conflict arises when proposed solutions don't meet *everyone's* needs. A solution that is acceptable to all can only be developed when everyone's needs are known.

Bolton says that helping people move beyond their proposed solutions toward understanding each other's interests can take at least half the time required for the entire process. He notes that active listening (see [Chapter 15](#)) is critical in assisting people to understand each other. This may be even more difficult if the conflict is heated. You may need to remind people of the ground rules they set for themselves, which probably includes respect for one another and different opinions, to stop destructive behavior.

Because planning in a community involves many organizations, your team will have to identify the specific needs of all the conflicting individuals and organizations. Having done that, the team will determine which needs are most critical to your mission and vision. You may be faced with making difficult decisions about which needs will be met and which will not.

*A problem  
well-defined is  
half-solved.*

*Proverb*

2. *Brainstorm possible solutions.* Once each party's needs are identified, the team can begin defining solutions. Bolton suggests brainstorming as a first step, rather than trying to identify THE solution to the conflict immediately. He defines brainstorming as "the rapid generation and listing of solution ideas without clarification and without evaluation of their merits." People should be encouraged to say whatever pops into their mind and to avoid criticizing either their own or others' suggestions. Here are his rules for doing it successfully.

- ◆ Don't evaluate any idea. (No judgments like "that won't work," or even "that's a great idea").
- ◆ Don't ask people to clarify their ideas yet.
- ◆ Do welcome zany ideas.
- ◆ Expand and play off one another's ideas.
- ◆ List every idea somewhere (on a flip chart or blackboard, where everyone can see them).
- ◆ Don't attach people's names to the ideas they suggest or list contributions by person (pp. \_\_\_\_).

Most of the ideas that emerge from your brainstorming session will be ruled out in step 3, but brainstorming can help develop very creative and innovative ideas in a relatively short period of time.

3. *Select the solution or combination of solutions that will best meet everyone's needs.* Now is the time for the group to go back to the list and cross off the suggests that obviously won't meet many needs, are unfeasible, etc. Get clarification for suggestions that team members do not understand.

When your team has narrowed the possible solutions, it's time to discuss and evaluate the merits of each alternative. Which solutions do the conflicting parties each favor and why? Which could they agree to? Which do they feel would not meet their needs? Which do other team members feel is the best? Which solution will give the most to all parties? Which will be best for your community? Which best fits with your team's mission and vision? As facilitator, you will need to continue using active listening skills to help clarify people's ideas and your facilitation skills to help the discussion stay positive.

The goal of the process is to determine a solution that everyone finds acceptable and that meets as many needs as possible. When discussion is difficult, it may seem easy simply to vote on the choices. However, unless the issue is relatively unimportant or there is evidently substantial agreement with only a few dissenters, voting is not usually the best ap-

proach to take. It can leave a large number of people feeling that their needs are not met— especially in close votes. If it is apparent that the conflicting parties will not come to consensus, postpone the discussion. In the interim, people’s emotions may cool and you and other team members can conduct additional research to try to make it easier to evaluate the possible solutions.

4. *Plan who will do what, where, and by when.* Bolton advises determining immediately who will complete each task associated with the solution, where the task will be completed (if that’s relevant), and by when. He also suggests that your team write down the details of the agreement somewhere (in your minutes is a good place) to remind participants of their expected roles. Don’t forget to thank everyone for their efforts in coming up with a solution and plan.
5. *Implement the solution.* Up to now, your team has been primarily thinking and discussing. Now it’s time for the key parties identified in the plan to do their assigned tasks. If any of the parties aren’t able to complete the task on time, as lead agent/facilitator, you should find out what barriers they encountered, how you can help, and when they can get the task completed. If necessary, ask for help from other team members.
6. *Evaluate the problem-solving process and, at a later date, how well the solution turned out.* Bolton suggests evaluating the process at two different times and in two different ways. First, evaluate how the process has gone before implementation of the solution (between steps 4 and 5). Then evaluate the results, once implementation (step 5) is complete. To evaluate the *process*, Bolton suggests that your team answer these questions in small- or large-group discussion or individually in writing.
  - ◆ How did the team feel about the conflict resolution process?
  - ◆ What did each team member like most about the process?
  - ◆ What did each team member liked least?
  - ◆ Was there anything that bothered them?
  - ◆ Was there anything they wish hadn’t been said?
  - ◆ What can each team member can do better next time?To evaluate the *solution*, Bolton suggests setting a time near the expected end of the implementation (step 5) to have the team discuss these questions.
  - ◆ Did the solution work as planned?

*You can’t shake hands with a clenched fist.*

—Gandhi

- ◆ How well did the implementation activities go?
- ◆ What still needs to be changed?
- ◆ What should be done differently if a similar situation arises?

If the conflict resolution process and the solution worked well, be sure that the team celebrates this productive collaboration.

## Other Tips

- ◆ Always work toward a win-win solution.
- ◆ Use and have others use their active listening skills.
- ◆ Strong negative emotions (outrage, dismay) make it almost impossible to come to an agreeable solution. If necessary, postpone the process and work to help participants approach the situation from a less emotional state.
- ◆ Team members may attack one another's ideas, but negative remarks about individuals should not be tolerated. As facilitator, your job is to watch out for and prevent personal attacks, and when possible, help the attacker reframe the comments to something more usable for planning.
- ◆ Do not try to resolve conflicts that are too big or too general. Doing so often results in frustration and turmoil for the group. If possible, identify component areas of the conflict and address them one at a time.
- ◆ When conflict resolution stalls, Sandelin suggests having the conflicting sides reverse roles and argue *for the other viewpoint* for 15 minutes, as persuasively as possible. This often help each party understand the opponents' reasons for their view.
- ◆ Sandelin also suggests giving a trial run to solutions that people feel unsure about. Agree to try the solution for a limited time, and then reevaluate the strategy.
- ◆ If the resolution process is especially hard or emotional, try to help the parties find ways to feel comfortable giving up positions for which they once advocated strongly.
- ◆ Make sure that any stakeholder or organization that may be affected by a solution is involved in the conflict resolution process. If not, you may not get the necessary buy-in and the solution will not be implemented.

## When the Facilitator Has an Interest in the Outcome

If you are the lead agent and facilitating the team's work, and you have either a large interest in the conflict or you actually

started it, it is probably best for you to step back and ask someone else to facilitate the process. By doing so, you will reaffirm to your team that you, as leader, want what is best for the community rather than what is best for you or your organization and you will trust in yourself and organization that is vital for successful leadership.

## **Conflicts That Can't Be Resolved**

Sometimes, conflicts are too big, too emotional, or too much a part of your community's history to work through using conflict resolution skills. In cases such as these, formal negotiation and mediation techniques may work better (see the chapters on these topics), or you may want to seek the assistance of a professional conflict resolution specialist or mediator to help your team move past the conflict and begin working again as a team.

### **Resources**

- Bolton, Robert. 1979. *People Skills*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Burgess, Heidi, and Guy Burgess. 1997. *The Encyclopedia of Conflict Resolution*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO.
- Fisher, Roger, and William Ury. 1991. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*. New York: Penguin.
- McNamara, Carter. Basics of conflict resolution. *Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits*. <http://www.mapnp.org/library/intrpsnl/basics.htm>
- Morrison, Emily Kittle. 1994. *Leadership Skills*. Tucson, Ariz.: Fisher Books.
- Sandelin, Rob. 1997. Interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution. *Community Resource Guide*, <http://www.ic.org/nica/Process/Relation.html>
- Ursiny, Tim. 2003. *The Coward's Guide to Conflict: Empowering Guide for Those Who Would Rather Run Than Fight*. Napierville, Ill.: Sourcebooks.
- Wolff, Rebecca, and Jenette Nagy. Training for conflict resolution. *Community Toolbox*, [http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub\\_section\\_main\\_1164.htm](http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1164.htm)

*Have you  
learned lessons  
only from  
those who  
admired you,  
and were  
tender with  
you, and stood  
aside for you?  
Have you not  
learned great  
lessons from  
those who  
braced  
themselves  
against you,  
and disputed  
the passage  
with you?*

—Walt Whitman



**D**isruptive behaviors are any individual or group behaviors that impede successful collaborative teamwork, keeping your team from accomplishing its goals. It's a rare meeting that passes without a display of some type of disruptive behavior. One of the key differences between productive meetings and those which people leave frustrated, unfulfilled, and sometimes even agitated or angry, is effective management of disruptive team behaviors.

### **But First, Are You a Disruptive Lead Agent?**

As Sandra Crowe notes, "Everyone is someone's difficult person at one time or another, including you." In your role as lead agent, one of your jobs is to ensure that you are not one of the "difficult persons" during the planning process. By setting a good example and being a person that others can trust and count on, you will be poised to assist others in managing their own behaviors that might interfere with the planning team's success. In addition to reviewing the chapters on Claiming Your Leadership Style and Facilitation in this guide, consider your own style in meetings. Rabinowitz and Berkowitz note some personal challenges to overcome to ensure that you are not a disruptive or difficult leader.

- ♦ *Defensiveness.* Rabinowitz and Berkowitz define defensiveness as "an inability to take criticism...[and] a stubborn resistance to change ideas, plans, or assumptions, even if they have been ineffective." Being defensive yourself, instead of promoting innovation and new concepts, will give others the idea that it is o.k. for them to act in defensive ways as well.
- ♦ *Lack of decisiveness.* Team members become frustrated when they feel their time is wasted on minor issues that should be resolved quickly. Lead agents are sometimes called upon to make quick decisions in order to keep the team's momentum going. You must be confident enough in your role as lead agent to do this when necessary. Without a leader who can make the necessary decisions—and live with the consequences—the team may become stalled on an issue.
- ♦ *Wanting to be liked by everyone.* All of us want to be liked, and sometimes that causes us to be too nice or accommodating. As lead agent, it's necessary to learn when you must be firm and how to do so assertively (and not aggressively). Handling difficult situations in a calm, fair, and matter-of-fact manner may not always make everyone like you, but it will make you a leader whom the team respects and trusts.

## **Managing Disruptive Behaviors in Teams**

*Everything that irritates us about others can lead to an understanding of ourselves.*

—Carl Jung

- ♦ *Impatience.* As Rabinowitz and Berkowitz point out, everything takes longer than you expect it to. Lead agents who become impatient with the process can hurry the team into making rash decisions, lose valuable members, and often make situations worse.

As lead agent, it is imperative that you build positive and productive relationships with every single member of the planning team, as well as helping your team members build relationships with one another. With good working relationships comes trust, and it becomes easier to resolve conflicts, not to mention making the whole planning process more enjoyable. For more thoughts about this, consult Axner’s article, “Building and Sustaining Relationships,” in the *Community Toolbox*, which gives tips and an 11-step program.

## **General Strategies for Managing Disruptive Behaviors**

Now that you are doing all you can not to be a disruptive or difficult leader, the first step in dealing with disruptive behaviors within your planning team is to understand that the way you react to the situation and the team members involved will either help resolve the issue or cause it to continue or escalate. Helping your team manage disruptive behaviors usually starts with managing your own response. If you become frustrated, impatient, or frazzled, your team members will often follow suit. In *Working with Difficult People*, Muriel Solomon gives some guidelines for helping reshape your own attitudes and perceptions to better, and more calmly, manage difficult behaviors. Here are some of the things she suggests.

- ♦ *Don’t expect people to change disruptive behaviors overnight—or perhaps at all.* Individual disruptive behaviors are often based on personality and previous experiences, while group disruptive behaviors may result from a long history poor relationships in the community. Changing disruptive behaviors may be something your team has to work toward during the entire planning process, and in fact two possible positive outcomes of the process may be better relations between citizens and the organizations that serve them or between organizations within the community. So, some disruptive behavior is predictable and even all right, as long as you continue to make progress and reach better mutual understanding. Neither the leader nor other team members can expect to change someone else’s behavior. However, you can alter your reactions to the behavior and work to find the benefits that it may conceal. Is she “stubborn” or committed to a cause? Does he

- “like to hear himself talk,” or is he a potential spokesman for the planning process?
- ♦ *Be positive.* Not giving in to negative feelings or actions will help you and your team resolve conflict in a friendly way, rather than increasing the chances of hurt feelings and controversy. If you remain positive, it is more likely that others will too.
  - ♦ *Be straightforward and unemotional.* Solomon says, “The more you remain calm, . . . the sooner you gain another’s confidence. People want to feel you’re leveling with them, that they can trust you.” Breathe, count to 10 (silently!), take a break, or end the meeting early if you must.
  - ♦ *Learn to respond as well as to listen.* As lead agent, you must feel confident enough to discuss disruptive behaviors with the individual or with the entire team as appropriate. People who don’t know they are being disruptive can’t change their behavior. The chapter on Active Listening Skills can help you better understand and respond to others.
  - ♦ *Deal directly and discreetly.* Whenever you must discuss disruptive behavior with the person(s) doing it, do so confidentially and in person. E-mail, letters, and phone calls can be misinterpreted, because neither of you can observe nonverbal reactions.
  - ♦ *Give and request frequent feedback.* Keep communication open within your planning team. Encourage a positive environment where others can discuss problems or frustrations with the entire team or with you individually, though you may want to make some ground rules about how to bring side discussions back to the group. Consider implementing regular surveys or discussion periods to keep a pulse on the team’s feelings about the process.

## Planning for—and Preventing—Common Disruptive Behaviors

### Individuals’ Disruptive Behaviors

Preparation and prevention are the best cure. Take a few minutes to think about disruptive behaviors that have occurred at other meetings of the planning team or about conflicts that might arise from the agenda items for an upcoming meeting. Prepare options for getting the group or individual back on track. Here are some of the most commonly seen behaviors and suggestions for handling them.

**Silent team members** may be shy, nervous, lack confidence, or intimidated by others on the team, particularly if you have members who tend to dominate. Silent members

*Without difficulties, life would be like a stream without rocks and curves—about as interesting as concrete.*

—Benjamin Hoff in  
The Te of Piglet

probably do have wonderful ideas and suggestions, but they just do not feel comfortable speaking in public or to people they don't trust. Pointing out that they are not speaking or being overly aggressive about having their input will only make them feel criticized and uncomfortable and even less likely to participate. Try these strategies instead.

- ◆ Always give the team a chance to respond or give suggestions after the meeting by e-mail or phone. You can discuss issues you receive in this way at the next meeting. This also helps people who think better in writing than aloud (see the discussion of learning styles in the chapters on decision making and presentations).
- ◆ Give sincere praise to silent members when they contribute, whether by e-mail, phone, or by speaking up in a meeting.
- ◆ Develop your relationship with silent team members (see Axner's article for suggestions on relationship building). If they feel comfortable and supported by you, they may be more willing to risk offering their comments during a meeting.
- ◆ If you know a silent member has information or ideas about an issue but hasn't contributed them, speak to that member individually outside of the meeting. At the next meeting you can bring up the opinions or information and give him or her credit and thanks.
- ◆ If you ask a silent member a direct question during a meeting, start with one that he or she can answer easily. After the initial answer, you can probe for more information (but only probe as long as the person appears comfortable).
- ◆ Encourage supportive team environments that help silent members feel more comfortable and safe. As always, do not allow people to attack anyone's ideas or suggestions. Enforce the ground rules that your team developed early in the process.

**Team members who talk too much.** Team members who take up a lot of air time can be very disruptive to the team's progress and cause resentment and boredom in others. You can almost see the dread on others' faces when these members begin to speak. Too-talkative team members are long-winded, have comments on most topics or questions that arise, digress, and rarely pause for breath or talk louder or faster to avoid interruption. While they may have great thoughts and suggestions, their ideas get lost in the words. As facilitator, your team will look to you to help stop this behavior. Here are some suggestions.

- ◆ Use a "stop" gesture of some sort. You might hold your hand up, palm toward the speaker or make the

“time out” sign from American football. Be careful to make any sign slowly and never thrust your hand toward the person (which would look aggressive). Use the gesture to get the person’s attention long enough to interrupt. If the person pauses, immediately redirect the conversation. You might say something like, “That’s an interesting point. I’d like to hear the groups reactions.” Then ask another member directly for a response.

- ◆ Ask people to submit ideas for discussion in writing, and work through them as part of the agenda. This will ensure that others ideas are acknowledged and not squelched by the talkative team member.
- ◆ Sometimes interrupting is the only solution. Address the person by name, which is more likely to get his or her attention. You might say something like, “You’ve raised a wonderful issue that we need to get back to, but since our agenda today is very tight. I think we’ll need to postpone that discussion until next time.”
- ◆ Maintain your self-control, and don’t get impatient. The more you appear to be in charge, the more likely the person will allow you to interrupt them.

**Unmotivated Members.** When members do not contribute to the teams’ work, they may feel their contributions are not as important as others’ or that they are not responsible for the outcome of the work. They also may not have been willing to participate in the first place but were sent by their organization. Some members just aren’t motivated to put in the needed time and effort. The chapter on The Art of Motivation gives some advice about motivating team members generally, but here are some additional strategies.

- ◆ Determine the person’s needs and interests and involve him or her in work that best addresses them.
- ◆ Assign tasks to these members and put them in writing. Make sure the minutes reflect the specific task, to whom it was assigned, and when it is due. If the task requires time to complete, ask for updates from the person at each meeting.
- ◆ Praise contributions and ideas regularly (everyone’s, not just the unmotivated group member’s).
- ◆ Use the strategies suggested for silent group members to elicit contributions.
- ◆ In an extreme case, if the unmotivated member represents a group or organization that needs active, competent representation, ask if the organization would consider appointing an additional member because you would like more input or to ensure representation if the original member can’t make a

meeting, or because the team needs more help to complete its work (all face-saving but good reasons). As a last resort, you could ask that the member be replaced, but that is difficult to do diplomatically.

**Dominating Personalities.** Discussion, creativity, and solutions can become limited when one or two people dominate the team. Dominating personalities monopolize meetings and may force their views on others. Here are some strategies to reduce their influence.

- ◆ Create an agenda and stick to it. Do not allow discussion to go beyond the agreed-upon agenda. See the section on Time Management and Facilitation for more tips.
- ◆ Set time limits for individual responses to make sure everyone has an equal chance to contribute.
- ◆ Interrupt when necessary, as you would for members who are too talkative.
- ◆ Enforce ground rules and encourage supportive team environments. Do not allow the dominating person to break the rules.
- ◆ Make sure you do your homework before meetings so you can bring attention back to the facts if necessary.

### **How to Intervene with Individuals**

We've discussed some of the more common disruptive behaviors and strategies for discouraging them, and there certainly are many more that distract the team from its work. Often, the people making the disruption don't realize they are causing problems. When disruptive behaviors occur in the course of a meeting, try to intervene quickly but respectfully. Here are some general suggestions.

- ◆ Make and hold eye contact with the person to get their attention. If necessary, move toward them (if you are standing, walk closer to the person, if you are sitting, you can lean toward them).
- ◆ Try to find something to praise in the person's comments or actions, and point it out. For example, if a person continues to make jokes about the issue at hand, thank them for bringing some levity to the situation and ask if they have any suggestions for further research, evaluation, or action.
- ◆ Limit the person's input or disruption by changing the format of the meeting: Break into small group activities, subcommittees, or start a round-robin exercise.
- ◆ Remind the group of the ground rules whenever necessary.
- ◆ If the behavior continues, talk to the person individually. In a calm and neutral way, let him or her know

- how disruptive the behavior is to the group. Find out if the person is unhappy or uncomfortable with how the group is proceeding, and if so, try to develop ways to help the person feel more comfortable.
- ◆ Ask for help from others, if necessary. If you have another team member who is particularly good at keeping the group on track, ask him or her to help you keep attention focused on the task at hand.

There are quite a few books detailing specific types of “difficult personalities” and ways to work and communicate better with people who have them. Muriel Solomon, for example, identifies 100 very specific “difficult personalities” (e.g., “bullies,” “hotheads,” “whiners”) in *Working with Difficult People*. In *Dealing with People You Can’t Stand*, Brinkman and Kirschner identify ten more general categories of “difficult people.” While we believe that labeling people “difficult” isn’t productive and can interfere with collaborative work, sometimes you encounter people whose every action makes it hard for you to remain calm and in control. If that happens, you might consult one or more of these books, which offer specific behavioral approaches for you to use according to the other person’s trigger behavior.

### **Group Behaviors That Inhibit Good Planning**

**Dependency on the Leader.** Sometimes lead agents/leaders are just too good! Teams can become overdependent on their leaders, constantly asking for advice and direction and looking to the leader to make decisions for them. The team may take the leader’s statements or views as fact and not delve deeper or contribute conflicting views and ideas. Such dependency sometimes occurs when a team does not feel empowered as a group or does not feel that individual participation and insights are important to the process. This behavior is also possible when the team feels very confident about their leader’s ideas and ability. In either case, such dependency interferes with the development of a dynamic community planning process. As lead agent, it is your responsibility to help your team become empowered and motivated. The sections on Claiming Your Leadership Style, Facilitation, Sparking Creativity, The Art of Motivation, and Promoting Consumers’ Active Participation offer good suggestions and advice. Here are some other strategies for preventing dependence.

- ◆ Include team members in leadership positions. If your team does not have many opportunities for leadership, develop such positions as co-chair, subcommittee leaders (elsewhere we suggest that the team needs both a publicity and a fundraising subcommittee and there are probably issue- and

service-specific subcommittees that would be useful). These subcommittees should have both the authority and freedom to accomplish their goals.

- ◆ Limit your comments. When asked your opinion or when you feel that you just have to speak up, go ahead, but call upon others to give their opinions or offer information as well, especially those whose opinions differ from yours.
- ◆ Create environments that encourage discussion and conflicting ideas.
- ◆ Break into groups to discuss an issue and have each group report back to the whole.
- ◆ EffectiveMeetings.com has several useful exercises written by Ingrid Bens to get people participating in your meetings. For example, in the “Tossed Salad” exercise, you ask everyone to write down an idea/issue/solution on a small slip of paper and put it in a bowl. Have someone “toss the salad.” Everyone then passes the bowl around and takes out one slip of paper. Go around the room and have people share what was written on the piece they selected and open up the floor for discussion.

**Groupthink.** Irving Janis coined the term *groupthink* to refer to ineffective decision making within a team. Groupthink happens when teams are extremely unified and work well together. It can also occur when teams are under intense pressure to meet overly ambitious deadlines. When teams have groupthink, members generally do not research and examine all aspects of the issue in front of them, examine few or no alternatives to solutions, are not critical of others’ ideas, and make hasty decisions. Instead, they decide to “go with the flow” or assume that the solution in front of them is “good enough,” in order to maintain group harmony or to finish their work within the required timeframe. Here are some strategies for thwarting groupthink.

- ◆ Develop subcommittees to tackle different aspects of the issue.
- ◆ Develop a “Research and Data” subcommittee that is responsible for finding the information your team needs to make informed decisions.
- ◆ Divide the team into small groups to discuss the same issue and report their opinions or suggestions to the large group.
- ◆ Bring in outside experts (by experience or training) to discuss a topic and provide new insights and information.
- ◆ Assign a “Devil’s Advocate” who always must question group decisions and ideas. (You might want to

- rotate this position among the group to avoid making any one member always “the bad guy.”)
- ◆ Give people a chance to “sleep on” the issue and offer suggestions after they have had a chance to process the meeting. Ask team members to write or call you with suggestions and put the final decision off until the next meeting.

**Turfism.** It’s not surprising that team members might act to protect the interests of their own organizations, particularly when, money, jobs, and established ways of doing business are on the line. *Turfism* can be so devastating to a community process that we’ve devoted an entire chapter to how to reduce it, so please consult that for ways to minimize this behavior.

**Fragmentation.** Fragmentation occurs when a team splits into different factions or cliques that take sides during controversial issues. Fragmentation and turfism often go hand-in-hand. The section on Reducing Turfism may be helpful, and here are some other ways to address this problem promptly.

- ◆ Strong leadership and facilitation is required to reunify the team. You may need to reassert yourself as the leader or hire an outside facilitator. Have a look at the chapters on Claiming Your Leadership Style, Facilitation, and Negotiation Skills. Uphold the ground rules diligently to ensure that members respect differing opinions and do not attack one another.
- ◆ If one faction appears to be trying to take over the leadership, talk with them privately to understand the concerns and motivations that are driving this behavior. Determine steps to take that will allow their needs to be met within the team structure.
- ◆ When factions are arguing, discuss each group’s needs with them separately. See if there are common issues, goals, or approaches around which you can rally the whole team. (See the chapter on Conflict Resolution.)
- ◆ Assign people to subcommittees to address specific and separate tasks. Distribute faction members among the groups.

## Resources

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