

# 4 Keys for Managing Conflict

The past several days we've talked about conflict, why people avoid it and why it's better to lean into it.

One thing I've learned about working with teams of people ...

*When two or more are gathered ... there will be conflict!*

Why? Because we all have our opinions about how things should be, and we're rather attached to our opinions. Conflict is a reality of leadership. I've been all over the map on how to lead through conflict, from completely avoiding it to plowing through it and leaving a body count behind. Let me tell you, neither approach works out well.

Today I share with you the 4 Steps to Success that I've discovered help me lead through conflict. But before diving into them, we must make some clarifications. Some "Rules of Engagement."

1. Rule of Engagement: In person is better than text. Please, please, please! Trying to lead through conflict resolution via email is not the answer. Text does not communicate body language, facial expression or voice intonation. If I'm offended, text gives me too much room for interpretation. Text is not the avenue for conflict resolution. Whenever possible, get face-to-face.
2. Rule of Engagement: If the conflict is between more than one party OR if it's between two parties and you're their leader, avoid individual meetings. Avoid having one-on-one meetings with each party to work through the conflict. Too much room for "he said, she said." In that case you end up playing the Mediator role. You don't want to mediate the conflict. You want to facilitate a conversation. Pull all parties involved into the same room and work it out together.

There you go ... these are the preliminary requirements to the 4 Steps to Success. Now... let's move on. 

Once you've adhered to the Rules of Engagement and you have your people together ...

## 4 Steps to Success for Conflict Resolution

**Acknowledge what you see**—It's hard to argue someone's perception. Even if their facts are wrong, their perception is their reality. So ... present your perception.

*"You know, I may be way off base here. But I walked in the office yesterday while you two were talking and I just sensed a lot of tension. Like something was not being resolved and you guys were at an impasse. Help me with this. Is that accurate?"*

**Listen**—In other words, Shut Your Pie Hole! I'm a talker. I tend to fill dead space with my talking. When I feel I need to explain more or describe more or justify more, well, I'll just keep talking. The trick to this step is to NOT talk. Let the silence fill the space. Make it a game of "chicken" if you have to. If you're off base, they'll combat it immediately and let you know. If you're on target, the silence will be deafening. And you are creating an opportunity for them to work it out in that moment. (*cha-ching*)

*\*\*insert cricket sounds\*\**

**Define what you WANT to see**—this part is important. You are their leader. You've got to define your expectation. The conflict you see is not what you want to see. So, tell them what you WANT to happen rather than what IS happening. Let them know that now is the time to talk through how you can

reach that goal. Now is the opportunity to come to agreement. Once you walk away from this meeting, the problem should be put to rest.

*“Here’s the deal. I need both of you working on all cylinders to make this thing work. I mean, we could probably figure out how to put a smile on and make the best of it. But the truth is, I really want to see you both collaborating in such a way that you are celebrating each other’s ideas and finding it easy to work your ideas into a completed project. What do we have to do to get there?”*

**Wrap back around and bring accountability**—This is where the money is. As leaders, we can address a problem that we see but if we never come back around to inspect it again then we miss an opportunity to re-emphasize its importance. Wrapping back around is the act of intentionally revisiting to make sure things are truly better. To ensure progress is made. That the conflict is truly resolved. You may not sense the tension any longer, but the real test is in the people involved and their perception of how things have improved. Be sure to come back around after an appropriate amount of time and ask, “Is it better? How?”

There you go. My four-step method for leading through conflict.

**What step would you add to this process?**

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