

Conflict Resolution —

It's as Simple as A-B-C

by Ron Newton

Equipping workers to quickly resolve damaging interpersonal workplace conflicts is as simple as A-B-C.

The following three-step method from is a fast, practical process that any worker can use to facilitate conflict resolution in their work place.

A - Achieve Contact (Attention)

The first step in conflict resolution is to simply gain the undivided attention of all parties involved. The goal of achieving contact is to have all parties agree to sit down and commit to a resolution process.

Individual parties involved in the conflict may need to be approached separately in order to urge them to enter the resolution process. Once all parties are gathered, they must agree that they will not leave the meeting until a solution to the conflict is achieved.

The exercise of good people skills is the key to getting both parties to sit down and agree to resolution. Those who attempt to facilitate a resolution must call upon the following people skills in order to get the resolution process rolling.

1. *Attending behaviors.* Attitude and actions of concern must be shown. This involves good body posture, appropriate meeting place, manners, eye contact, etc.

2. *Listening.* Excellent listening skills must be demonstrated — not verbally forcing the issue of resolution on others. Facilitators should listen to complaints without judging each party. This communicates that an objective ear is listening. Such neutrality will disarm the conflicting parties.

B - Boil Down (The Problem)

Rarely does a conflict consist of only one item. Workplace conflicts are typically

caused by a jumble of differing emotions, behavioral preferences, and battles over job tasks and exercise of authority. The “B” step, boil down, is designed to help both parties talk through the present conflict and boil down the problem(s) into one manageable issue.

Bringing such order out of chaos requires a formalized listening process where each participant tells the facilitator what he thinks the problem is. The facilitator’s role is to listen to each participant’s story and help them boil down what they say into one simple statement that accurately summarizes the primary issue causing the conflict. This is done through the reflective listening process — a people skill.

Allowing each participant to speak without interruption, the facilitator listens to what both parties say is their view of the conflict. After they have spoken, the facilitator then uses a reflective listening question to feed back to them what they have expressed. For example:

Are you telling me . . . ?

Did I hear you say . . . ?

This gives the participants a chance to either agree or disagree with the facilitator’s summary statement of what they have said.

The boiling down process is repeated until the facilitator has a clear understanding of the issues surrounding the conflict and the participants are able to agree upon the one main issue causing it.

Again, the exercise of good people skills is crucial in this step of conflict resolution. In addition to the verbal skills that enable a mess of feverish input to be boiled down into a simple summary statement, the facilitator also helps the

parties to focus on the main issues by facing reality, filtering out irrelevant data and formulating an understanding of the problem.

C - Cope Actively (Make A Way Out)

Once the main issue causing the conflict has been identified, the last step to resolution is to help the participants cope with the conflict. This involves developing and implementing a plan of action that provides a way out of the conflict.

A plan should take into account several factors.

- What do the participants want to see happen?
- Who or what can help them?
- What else can be done to help out?
- How is the plan to be carried out?
- What evaluation is to be done to tell how the plan is doing?

The plan should be short-term, simple, easy to carry out and easily evaluated for success. It should focus on only the one main issue identified by both parties (through the boil down process), and it should be put into effect as soon as possible.

The conflict resolution skills outlined in this A-B-C method are particularly effective when used as an intercession technique to improve safety teamwork.

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This article is adapted from an open resource conflict resolution training course for ministers. Ron Newton has taught the simple A-B-C principles of this conflict resolution method to thousands of blue-collar labor supervisors and line-level workers.