

# Karen Mathews & Associates Newsletter

Intentional Leadership -- Dealing with Conflict -  
peacemaker or trouble maker?

November  
2007

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Associates can help.**

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## Greetings!

As we begin to move into the holiday season, I'd like to consider as a leader how we contribute to the current peace or conflict that is going on in our work place. We all influence the group dynamic, leader or team member. If you are the boss and tolerating conflict, don't complain about spending half your time dealing with it. You are contributing to the problem on-going.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Mathew 5:9)

## • Dealing With Conflict (Read Time: 4 minutes)

For many of us, dealing with conflict is scary and something that is avoided like the plague. Unfortunately, when we attempt to avoid it, the avoidance holds the door open to have conflict become a dominant feature of the culture. When conflict is high, it means there is something within the dynamic of the group that needs to change, that's all. It doesn't mean we're going to die if we face it. For some people, conflict sounds like out of control confrontation, but it doesn't have to be if it is handled with skill. This does not include conflict that has gotten out of control with an emotionally immature group - that is a different circumstance than what I'm referring to here.

Often, the need to change sounds simplistic as a definitive cause of conflict, but what is really at the bottom of the conflict is a need to drop off something that doesn't work any longer. Maybe it's an employee, a process that needs to be modified, or maybe it's a cultural norm. It could be any number of things or combination of them. It maybe simple but it doesn't mean that it's easy to resolve. When we avoid conflict we are definitely not holding accountability for behaviors and outcomes. As a leader we must hold people accountable by sorting through the conflict. If the boss won't handle it, who will? I personally know people that would have stayed at their current positions for much longer if they had a boss who would deal with conflict. This one challenge gives you the opportunity to strengthen or weaken your team and

organization.

Since ignoring conflict will make it bigger, what can we do as leaders to make it go away? You probably already know that if handled improperly conflict can lead to some heavy repercussions but if left to boil over on its own, it can take down a business. Some simple steps that can be taken to get you started are first to understand what the conflict is about from a Meta level. Meaning, it is not really about the issue; it's really about what's underneath the issue that triggered the conflict initially. For example, who is getting their toes stepped on and why are their toes sticking out?

Sometimes conflict is about group norms and values not being followed. Sometimes an employee wants to remain in control and gets angry and creates a conflict. Other times conflict is created when there are divergent requirements for the same resources. Whatever it is, remember there is a solution beyond the conflict. The question really is finding the right combination of possible solutions to meet our needs in this situation.

The next thing is to be sure that you take the time to listen to the employees' complaints for a set amount of time. For example, you can call them into your office for 10 minute meetings. Let them know in advance they have 10 minutes and not one second more to tell you clearly and succinctly what their problem is and why they're seeing it as a problem. Sometimes, this can clear the whole conflict up because basically we all want to be heard. The other thing is you want to give equal time to all sides. When you have a complainant without a target, it is really someone who is unhappy with something and the conflict is within the person. This must be dealt with too, because such an employee can and likely will create negativity in her or his workspace by spreading his or her discontent. Remember the cliché - misery loves company?

What is it worth to you to have a workforce that is aligned with your strategies and a tight knit team marching in the same direction achieving excellent consistent results? We have solutions for every budget and can help you achieve the success and bottom line results you want. Do you have a key employee who is difficult and is creating legal exposure for your company? You will want to save yourself from a potentially expensive nightmare to let us mediate and coach them into a different way of relating to others in your workplace. Don't believe it's possible? We have helped the workplace bully change into employee of the month in as little as just 4 sessions. Give us a call at 408-988-2361 or email us at [info@karenmathews.com](mailto:info@karenmathews.com) to learn how your business can benefit from working with

our team.

To avoid this scenario be sure to be in regular touch with your staff so they know if they're troubled with something that you're willing to hear about it. Be clear that you may not take action about everything they tell you but take the few minutes to tell them you're interested in what they're have to say. This does not mean that you must get approval for or justify your decisions and actions; it means that we as leaders must be great communicators. In this day and age of highly skilled and educated workers, it is an imperative to demonstrate respect for them by helping them to understand why things are being done. Because you want to take advantage of this group intelligence you might gain insight into a different perspective you didn't have before. Overall, this results in happier employees, higher productivity and greater trust in you as a leader.

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• **Leadership Tip (Read time: 2 minutes) Leader as a coach - Dealing with the Worst-Case Thinking syndrome**

Sometimes people get into a negative thinking mode and start toward a downward spiral with ideas that the worst case scenario is impending. Fear is often insidious this way, getting rational people into a worst case scenario mode. They can see themselves going from success to abject poverty, loss of loved ones and security. You can recognize it by black and white thinking, no real solutions to the problem and extreme consequences. To effectively deal with this person, get into your best objective listener and coach mode and be present with her or him. Withhold offers of quick solutions or judgment; just listen until they have fully expressed their concern.

Then ask them if they are caught in the worst case scenario thinking. If they don't know what you mean, explain. Then gently suggest that there are likely some other possible outcomes or solutions and ask if they can think of some. You can get the ball rolling by suggesting a couple that you can think of. The goal is to help the person stay connected with others and lessen their anxiety.

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