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Turn Conflict into Collaboration

THE TOP 5 WINNING ACTIONS TO LIMIT THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE AND BENEFITS GAINED FROM THESE ACTIONS

It's a well-known fact that conflict has a negative impact on those involved. However, the conflict can be positive if it is managed or treated in time. In a Canadian¹ study, respondents related six positive out of seven total results observed following the conflict. Here they are:

- 77% Better understanding of other;
- 57% Better solutions to problems and challenges;
- 54% improved working relations;
- 40% Increase team performance;
- 31% Increase in motivation;
- 21% Significant innovation/idea creation;
- 13% No positive impact.

Reaping the benefits of conflict involves acting responsibly and not hesitating to take charge, especially as the team leader. Taking control of a work team is like acting as the captain of a boat. You must know how to win the confidence of the crew, create synergy and interdependence between the members and prepare for all possible circumstances. What are the winning actions of a captain aware of the interpersonal climate on board? My reflection based on my professional experience (coaching leaders and their teams for the last 20 years) and personal experience (as a team member aboard a sailboat) leads me to offer you *the top 5 winning actions*. These actions are aimed at the manager but can also apply to your business (with colleagues or between client/supplier), interpersonal, social relationships, and family.

1. I take care to plan the journey and to adequately communicate my expectations

Planning is taking into consideration the resources available, the route and the means available to attain these goals. To do so, holding meetings at the start and throughout the journey is extremely vital to create and maintain team spirit. At these meetings, the captain sets the tone and clearly expresses his values and expectations. He ensures that members can express their needs and expectations and increases everyone's cooperation. In communicating like so, the accumulation of frustration, often a source of conflict, is avoided.

2. I take every opportunity to appreciate and recognize the differences among team members

The way to go about creating synergy and fostering team bonds and complementary relationships is to value the strengths of each and every person. When resources become scarcer and recognition decreases, the feelings of insecurity among members increases. This often leads to emotional reactions that are poorly suited to reality (comparison, envy, judgment...). Appreciating the differences and exploiting them in a complementary way

¹ Reference : *Warring Egos, Toxic Individuals, Feeble Leadership – A study of conflict in the Canadian Workplace*, Psychometrics Canada, 2009.



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further minimize confrontation and opposition that can be based on the non-acceptance of differences.

3. I act as a role model by establishing shared values

Four core values to create team chemistry and harmonious relations: respect, openness, listening, cooperation. The captain in command acts as a daily role model and strengthens the members of his crew who emulates him. He also intervenes when members of his team seem to deviate or do not fully adhere to these values for the sake of the climate on board. He fosters the open discussion of ideas or opinions by focusing on issues rather than individuals. Thus ideas become a source of inspiration and creativity rather than ego wars resulting in unhealthy *competition*.

4. I intervene quickly when colleagues are arguing or not speaking

When two team members refuse to communicate, collaborate or argue, they not only have an impact on the global climate of the team but they may jeopardize the achievement of team results. Re-establishing dialogue between the two parties when they are slow to do so is the duty of the captain. The captain should facilitate dialogue and the search for winning solutions by focusing on the needs of each party. He prevents them from contaminating the rest of the crew with their differences and their personal difficulties and also prevents the formation of cliques.

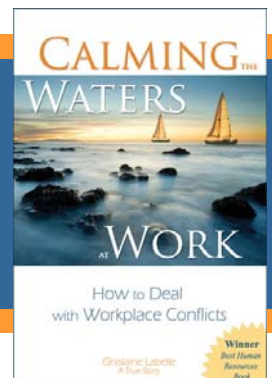
5. I “manage the storms” with courage and strength

Managers often fear being misunderstood or poorly received when exercising strong leadership or authority. Yet when “storms” threatens the balance or well being of his crew, a good captain should take the lead and confidently assert his leadership. What kind of storms are we dealing with? When crewmembers no longer participate in team results or no longer function in their roles, when they adopt negative attitudes or sabotage the work of others... These many situations should not remain without response from the leader. Constructive feedback must be given to individuals who have a negative impact on board. They should be encouraged to commit to change their inappropriate behavior. That being said, to confront these people, we need a good dose of courage, resilience and capacity to assert a desire to preserve harmony in the team. In doing so, we avoid the decline in morale and the demoralizing effect that the negative colleagues, abusive members or manipulators have on the rest of the crew.

Worried you won't be able to adopt these measures in your workplace? Think again! Remember, it is easier to maintain control when the climate is mild rather than trying to regain control when stormy weather threatens our stability and survival.

*“First with a witness’s eye and then with an expert’s eye,
Ghislaine Labelle knows exactly how to identify complex issues
in conflict management and resolve them in an efficient way.”*

~ Normand Richard, Director of Organizational Development & Human Resources,
Transcontinental Northern California



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