

Everyone Deserves a Respectful Workplace

The Dance of Conflict – Part Three

How does a manager resolve a personality conflict between two disputants? How does the conflict dance get disrupted?

The disputants have to want to end the dispute – or at least one of the disputants has to want to end the conflict. That person then steps outside the dance. That means s/he stops reacting in the patterned behaviour. When that happens, the disputant who is still in conflict becomes confused, can't continue the conflict alone and eventually the conflict settles and no longer is a 'personality conflict' but one that involves one disputant. Soon the person who stepped outside the dance no longer has any emotional reaction to the 'other' and the matter dissipates.

Management's role is to find the appropriate leverage, that when applied to the disputants, creates an impetus for them to want to end the conflict dance. Sometimes that leverage could be 'job action'. Sometimes that leverage is about setting clear boundaries and expectations and then monitoring the progress. Sometimes the leverage is about job change – either the opportunity to move to another area or another job – much like a carrot held out as a reward for good behaviour. Leverage will vary depending on the disputants and the workplace. Management should keep in mind that behaviour changes take about a month of practice to become a habit – so any leverage used needs to apply for at least that length of time. In any event, an employer today has power behind them in the form of legislated Acts such as Human Rights, Harassment and Discrimination, and Respectful Workplace Policies also address expectations and behaviours.

An employer has the right to expect civility from employees in the workplace – civility to each other, management, the public and clients. Civility means that work-related questions are responded to in a civil way. Civility means that co-workers are expected to work cooperatively, in a team environment. Civility means that co-workers are expected to greet each other in a civil manner. Civility means engaging in respectful interpersonal communication with all others in the workplace regardless of your own personal feelings towards them. Along with the expectation that an employee be 'technically competent' needs to be another expectation of

an employee needs to be 'civil' to all others. Job evaluations should capture this in an 'interpersonal' area.

What can you do if you are one of the disputants? Seek some assistance from others to help you learn to distance yourself from the situation, so you can have some time to observe your own behaviours and recognize your own reactions that are contributing to the personality conflict situation. It is *not exclusively about the other person – you are a contributor too*. As long as you continue to see yourself as a 'victim' of what the other person does, you will continue to react to that person's actions and be caught in the conflict dance. When you are able to see that you too are contributing, at that point you can take some steps to disengage yourself from the dance of conflict.