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Leader Tips & Strategies Cooling Conflict

COVID-19 is an unprecedented experience, so if there is more conflict around you than before the pandemic, don't be disheartened. This pandemic has gone on longer than anyone could have predicted. Keeping our cool is not as easy as it used to be. If this situation is creating more conflict than is manageable, read on to see some strategies to develop and implement.

As a leader, one of the challenges we face is helping diverse individuals, with a range of skills, communication styles, experiences and ways of working, come together. This often happens and benefits the team so that its achievements are greater than the collection of individuals. Inevitably, sometimes the outcome is conflict. Conflict, like anything in life, can be positive or negative. Leaders try to find ways to turn conflicts of opinion into learning and growth opportunities. Leaders aim to harness conflict in positive ways that help individuals and teams grow. What can you do if the conflicts are less than positive, and intervention is required? Here are some tips:

1 — Take a moment

So often conflict occurs when things happen quickly. Afterwards, those involved regret their actions and wish they had taken a moment. This straightforward mindfulness exercise can be used, when stress signs are triggered, to reconnect and slow down the pace.

S – Stop what you're doing

T – Take a deep breath and exhale slowly/completely

O – Observe your:

- o Intentions
- o Body
- o Mind
- o Emotions

P – Proceed with awareness.

2 — Suspend judgement

This can be a big ask. When we don't have perfect information at our fingertips so our brain uses what it can. That means that we often assume, expect or rely on our previous experience to join the dots. The STOP method above can also help us here, giving us time to pause rather than jumping to conclusions that a person is a particular type or has certain motivations or motives. Try to look for the best in people and situations, listen more, practice empathy and be curious to learn more about what is initially unfamiliar. Having confidence and cutting yourself some slack can translate into suspending judgement towards others and once again, professor, lecturer and author, Brene Brown expresses it well:



"If I feel good about my parenting, I have no interest in judging other people's choices. If I feel good about my body, I don't go around making fun of other people's weight or appearance. We're hard on each other because we're using each other as a launching pad out of their own perceived deficiency."

3 — Encourage conversations

Just as conflict can build in the moment, it can also grow from lack of communication and misunderstanding. Seeking to respect and understand someone else's position or viewpoint can mean we learn the "back story" behind behaviours which can lead to empathy and personal growth. Cultivating an environment where your team feel confident to speak freely will help to get areas of friction up for discussion, make it less personal and more about working better together.

4 — Fairness

Fairness can be seen as closely linked to judgement and communication. Feeling that there are inequities in treatment, workload, or conditions can cause tension within teams. Everyone wants to feel that they are being heard, that their challenges are recognised and their contribution valued. As a leader, this can be one of the hardest things; both to do and be perceived to do. It is especially important for a thriving team in times of rapid change and increased stress. You are not always going to get it right but giving your people recognition and specific feedback, let's them know you are interested and aware of their development.

5 — Courage

Courage – if one of your staff comes to you with suggestions and ideas (outrageous or otherwise) resist the urge to say "no". It has taken a lot of courage for them to make time to talk to you and the very best outcome is that you listened to their ideas. If you have given them an invitation to come and speak with you and offer their suggestions, take lots of deep breaths if they give you direct feedback. Model to staff how effective receiving constructive feedback can be. Call out rude or inappropriate feedback, but the rest take time to sort through the threads of truth and fact.

6 — Model the areas of improvement

Lastly, as a leader **model the areas of improvement** that you most want to see in the team. If you are often explaining how people need to be more helpful and available – make sure the tones of your emails and phone calls reflect that. Value the experience of others and be open-minded to the conflict as it just might teach you something.

We are here to support you so that you can better support your people. If you have any further questions or would like to discuss a specific concern contact our Manager Support Hotline or your Relationship Manager. As always, as your EAP we are here to support your people whatever the nature of their concerns, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

