

PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE OR JUST PLAIN AGGRESSIVE?

APPROACHES FOR
MANAGING CONFLICT IN THE
MINISTERIAL WORKPLACE

Archdiocese of Louisville

August 8, 2018

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OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE
- CAUSES OF CONFLICT
- GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING CONFLICT
- MANAGING CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH WORKPLACE
- COMMUNICATION SKILLS including reflective listening and negotiation

Small Group Discussion

- Some ground rules:
 - Please move to tables at which there are not other members of your parish staff or parishioners.
 - What happens at your table, stays at your table.
 - Please respect the confidentiality of each person who speaks in the group.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

- Share with your small group an example of a conflict or resistance in your workplace without sharing any identifying facts.
 - Have you tried to address this conflict?
 - Have your attempts at resolution failed or been successful?
 - What factors do you attribute to that success or lack of success?

ASSUMPTIONS

- Conflict, disagreements and difficulties are normal and not to be feared. (Where two or three are gathered in my name...)
- Conflict is not in an of itself bad. It can lead to creativity and positive change..
- I will assume in this talk that you have some management responsibilities and that you have experienced conflict in the Church workplace.

Assumptions continued:

- The conflicts can be between:
 - Colleagues
 - Staff and parishioners
 - Subordinates
 - Your boss

You want to do something about it.

WHAT IS PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR?

(From Wikipedia)

- The indirect expression of hostility, e.g.
 - Procrastination
 - Hostile jokes
 - Stubbornness
 - Resentment, sullenness
 - Deliberate and often repeated failure to accomplish requested tasks for which one is responsible

(From DSM-IV B)

A pervasive pattern of negativistic attitude and passive resistance to demands for adequate performance in social and occupational situations.

A habitual pattern of passive resistance to expected work requirements in reaction to both authority figures and in interpersonal contexts

There is sometimes a refusal to acknowledge one's own aggression but rather he or she is blameless victim.

- Passive aggressive behavior is not the same as non-violent resistance as seen by many social protesters.
- This person is not working toward a defined social goal

Passive aggressive behavior in the workplace

- Damaging to team unity and effectiveness
- Destructive
- Rather than quit, the worker is destructive to the work environment
- If the manager is passive aggressive, the mission of the organization is often imperiled.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH WORKPLACE

- Common Contributors to Conflict and Resistance:
 - Communication and miscommunication
 - Staff attitudes, supervisor's attitudes, staff values
 - Honesty/openness
 - Work habits
 - Treatment of others, e.g. disrespect

Causes for conflict cont:

- Organizational Culture
- Organizational change such as new hire
 - Assess the fallout
 - Give people a voice
 - Address concerns
 - Allow whatever control is possible
 - Bring in a professional
 - Mismatched expectations
- (Scott 46-47)

Causes cont:

- Assigned and assumed roles
- Pastors and/or supervisors can cause conflict by micromanaging or abdicating decision making responsibility
 - Appearing to take sides
 - Dividing your team
 - Overreacting
 - Misunderstanding the real issues
 - Looking the other way
 - Being dismissive

Pastors/supervisors cont:

- Creating ill-defined expectations and responsibilities
- Hiring right person for the wrong job
- Talking instead of listening
- Being judge and jury
- Rescuing instead of coaching

Values that are often at the heart of workplace conflict

- Acceptance
 - Cooperation
 - Recognition
 - Respect
- Control
 - Accomplishment
 - Autonomy
 - Competence
- (cf. Scott, pg. 29)

Simple Strategy

- Acknowledge the other person is hurt
- Show empathy
- Be patient
- Stay cool
- Understand the issues
- Set a vision
- Explore alternatives/solutions
- Agree on action

GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING RESISTANCE

- Behind resistance are feelings. You can't talk people out of how they are feeling.
- Try to help people verbalize their resistance/objections directly.
- It rarely works to fight the resistance head on. Try to let the resistance dissipate the way a storm dissipates.
- Look for neutral language to name the resistance.

General strategies cont.

- Suspend the “J”
- Respond rather than react
- Work on being flexible, resilient, nimble
- To manage the interaction, manage yourself.
- Keep your focus on the goal or preferred outcomes
- Be open to incremental progress
- Time-outs with purpose
- Parking lot

General strategies cont:

- View challenging issues as dilemmas not impasses or problems
- Reframe
- Use observation skills to understand the other
- The power of “I”
- While silence can be helpful briefly, it isn’t helpful when used to hide the truth or the concerns

General strategies cont:

- Set norms and expectations for the resistance resolution conversations that are good basic communication norms as well as norms attuned to our faith.
- Seek to understand. Don't dismiss anyone
- Communio: Build a bridge, Cross the bridge, invite others to cross the bridge

General strategies cont:

- Vision: The “What if” question. Brainstorming possibilities
- Adopt peace keeping, peace-preserving, peace promoting language

STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING CONFLICTS BETWEEN YOUR EMPLOYEES

- Assess the cost and scope of the conflict
- Empower staff to handle the conflict
- Develop a plan for mediation
- Prepare for a meeting
- Negotiate possible solutions to a conflict

- Mediation meeting with two persons or a group
 - Establish ground rules
 - Active listening
 - Your role
 - Reflecting emotions
 - Label issues
 - Hone in on values
 - Identify issues that cause resistance
 - Negotiate possible solutions

SIGNS OF RESISTANCE

- When the resistance takes this form what can you say?
- One Word Answers
- Changing the Subject
- Compliance
- Silence
- Press for Solutions
- Attack
- Intransigence
- High Emotion/Intensity

STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING CONFLICT BETWEEN YOU AND SOMEONE ELSE

- Figure out your core values and ask the same of the other person
- Identify your hot buttons
- Are you a good listener
- Recognize your strengths
- Think about what the other person wants
- Is there common ground?

When the Conflict is with Someone you Supervise

- Create a dialogue
- Conflicts usually about:
 - Communication
 - Work habits
 - Treatment
 - Attitude
 - Gossip
 - Honesty
 - In subordination

Your Approach

- You are in this conflict with the staff member (It takes two to tango)
- Put yourself in her shoes and ask how you would want your boss to approach you
- Set a goal for discussion that helps both of you get back on track
- Be honest with yourself about your part in the conflict
- Commit to a new approach
- Apologize when necessary and appropriate
- Keep your power in check

Your Approach with your Supervisor

- When is it a good idea to ask for a meeting?
 - You are determined to stay with the organization
 - One or both of you are new and got off to a bad start
 - You are concerned about your reputation
 - Respect and/or dignity have been violated
 - Situation can't be ignored

When shouldn't you meet:

- Emotions are intense especially anger
- Relevant issues are not yet known
- The situation is in flux
- You are not ready to listen but only want to vent
- You are not prepared to give up being a “victim”.

Steps that Lead to Effectiveness

- Ask for a block of time that allows for in-depth conversation without distractions
- Have a specific goal for the meeting in mind
- Write down your goals and the facts as you know them before the meeting
- Be ready with at least 3 suggestions for decisions
- Apologize readily if you have erred
- Admit your limitations
- Graciously accept any apology

What Can You Control?

- Your responses
- Your perspective
- Your responses
- Your investment
- Your role in the conflict
- Your expectations
- Your energy

What Reasons Managers Give for Not Addressing Conflict

- I don't know how
- I don't want to open a can of worms
- I haven't succeeded previously
- Problem? What Problem?
- I Don't Know where to start.
- It's not my business
- I have real work to do.
- I don't want to have to fire anyone.
- I don't want to look bad.

RESOURCES

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- Senior, Donald, The Gift of Administration, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 2016
- Lencioni, Patrick, Death by Meeting, John Wiley & Sons, 2004

RESOURCES

- Conflict Resolution at Work For Dummies by Vivian Scott
- Perfect Phrases for Dealing with Difficult People by Susan Benjamin
- Perfect Phrases for Conflict Resolution by Lawrence Polsky and Antoine Gerschel
- Ralph Bonaccorsi, Director of the Office of Conciliation Services, Archdiocese of Chicago
- Conflict Mediation Across Cultures by David W. Augsburger