

# Managing Conflict Within Your Student Organization

## Overview

There's no way to avoid it, but there are ways to effectively deal with conflict. Let's face the facts; it would be unnatural if everyone got along all the time. Read the following strategies to effectively manage conflict between members and executive board members.

## There's a Conflict! What do we do?

### 1. Breathe and walk away

Attacking the situation when the moment is hot can lead to feelings of being hurt and to a potential split in your organization membership. It is best to walk away from the situation, take a deep breath and think about what caused the tension.

There could be an underlying issue that is not being addressed such as someone is feeling left out or that their voice is not being heard. Whatever the case may be breath and count to ten. Also, stepping away gives you a chance to think about a reasonable way to proceed with the conflict rather than escalating a situation.

### 2. Attack the behavior not the person

- Chances are good that something was done or said that made the conflict arise suddenly.
- Keep an objective eye on the problem and detach any feelings about the person presenting it.
- Rely on your active listening skills and try to understand where the person is coming from.
- Don't attack the other person and try to see the situation from their point of view.
- Do not make assumptions about their behavior, verify by asking or repeat what you thought you heard.
- Show respect and try not to interrupt someone while they are speaking.
- Avoid using hostile words.
- Remaining calm and leaving the assumptions behind is what is most important.

### 3. Watch the I-statement vs You-Statement

At one point in an argument everyone has said something along the lines of "You didn't...", which causes tension to rear its ugly head once more. Instead of jumping to the "You statements", turn the statement into an "I-message." This approach does not completely resolve a problem, but it can help retain a decent relationship between two people and generate cooperative interactions.

## No Social Network Venting

Let's repeat: NO social-network venting. Between Facebook, Twitter and other social networking websites, we are all connected in some way; whether its mutual friends or our profile is public for the world to see. Turning to social media to vent your frustration about a person and/or situation can quickly get around.

## Time and Place

There is an appropriate time and place to deal with conflict. Having a screaming match in front of other members, students and university professionals in an open hallway is neither the time nor the place. Ask to speak with the person or persons in a private setting. If the situation cannot be worked out properly, know when to involve a third party. It might be that someone needs to help mediate the situation.

## Reflection

Above all, remember why you are there and what you're working towards. Give the other person ownership in the resolution. Do not sell your ideas but engage in a joint problem solving discussion. Ask what is important and be sure agreement is reached in dignity and respect for each of you. Any ongoing relationship you have with someone can be altered to be constructive and improved.

# Managing Conflict

## Tips to Active Listening

### 1. Pay Attention

Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.

- Look at the speaker directly.
- Put aside distracting thoughts.
- Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal!
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations.
- "Listen" to the speaker's body language.

### 2. Show That You're Listening

- Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.
- Nod occasionally.
- Smile and use other facial expressions.
- Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and uh huh.

### 3. Provide Feedback

- Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.
- Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is," and "Sounds like you are saying," are great ways to reflect back.
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say." "Is this what you mean?"
- Summarize the speaker's comments periodically.

### 4. Defer Judgment

- Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.
- Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.
- Don't interrupt with counter arguments.

### 5. Respond Appropriately

- Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him or her down.
- Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
- Assert your opinions respectfully.
- Treat the other person in a way that you think he or she would want to be treated.