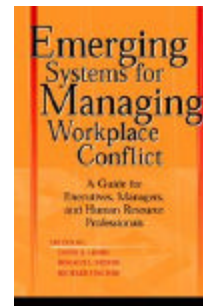


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EMERGING SYSTEMS FOR MANAGING WORKPLACE CONFLICT: A BOOK SUMMARY

Emerging Systems for Managing Workplace Conflict: Lessons from American Corporations for Managers and Dispute Resolution Professionals by David B. Lipsky, Ronald L. Seeber and Richard D. Fincher (2003).



In most U.S. corporations, mediation, arbitration and other alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes are not yet utilized in a systematic or institutionalized fashion to address workplace conflict. Rather, most ADR processes are utilized on an ad hoc basis, if at all. In 1997, the Institute on Conflict Resolution at Cornell University conducted a survey of the 1,000 largest U.S.-based corporations with the objective of obtaining comprehensive information about each corporation's use of ADR. Interviews were completed with 606 respondents. The authors found that whether a corporation will adopt a "system" for managing workplace conflict depends on a number of factors including corporate culture and mission, market factors, regulations and litigation exposure. The survey found that nearly all U.S. corporations have some experience with mediation and arbitration. However, a much smaller number of companies have extensive use with alternative dispute resolution nor have they tried to use it as a general approach for resolving disputes.

Corporations are moving toward incorporating the use of alternative dispute resolution processes to resolve disputes for a number of reasons including, cost control, time savings, and regaining control of the dispute resolution process. On the other hand, the authors also found that some corporations have decided *not* to use ADR. The reasons given for these decisions include: the difficulty of getting adversaries to agree to utilize ADR and the tendency of ADR processes to result in compromise settlements. However, as parties learn more about ADR processes, they may determine that the potential benefits of ADR are greater than these perceived impediments.

The authors provide a 6-phase framework for designing and implementing a dispute resolution system within an organization. The 6 phases include: Phase One – Assessment, Inquiry, and Initial Commitment; Phase Two – Research, Analysis, and Internal Alignment; Phase Three – System Design and Support; Phase Four – Finalizing the Design; Phase Five – Implementation and Training; and, Phase Six – Institutionalization. The authors also utilize extensive real-world examples and interviews to support their conclusions. This book is an informative and worthwhile read for any

organization considering implementing a dispute resolution program.

ADRGI has assisted numerous companies in designing and implementing dispute resolution programs. To learn more about how we can help you, visit us at www.adrgi.com.

ON THE JOB TRAINING? WHAT WOULD MICHAEL JORDAN THINK?: A MESSAGE FROM MICHELLE WECKSLER

Over the past decade, we have helped a number of Fortune 500 companies design and implement conflict management systems within their organizations. As a part of these initiatives, we often have the opportunity to train large numbers of professionals – HR, legal, IT and business managers - in an effort to ensure the success of the program. Prior to the training we take the time to gauge the level of experience the participants have with conflict resolution skills. I was surprised to learn that most of the professionals we encountered had never had a day of formal training in how to resolve conflict in their lives. Rather, the participants explained that all of their learning on how to manage and resolve conflict occurred “on the job” since that’s what they do on a daily basis. So I ask myself, “What would Michael Jordan think?”



Of course, you are probably asking yourself “What does Michael Jordan have to do with this?” Well, let me explain. My mom was always a huge Michael Jordan fan. Whenever the Chicago Bulls were on TV my mom was glued to the screen. (She even had a 7-foot cut out of Michael in the upstairs den...sorry mom!). I watched Michael play a lot of basketball and, like my mom, was continually amazed at what an incredible player he was. Whether you like basketball (or the Bulls) or not, we would probably all agree that Michael had a lot of natural talent. But how crazy do you think Michael would think we were if we told him he never needed to practice his skills, but rather, all he needed to do was show up on “game day” and play? After all, wouldn’t that be “on the job” training?

I can only imagine how many free-throws Michael attempted during the course of his life that were not on a “game day.” I cannot even guess the amount of hours he must have spent preparing and practicing his skills on and off the court, with and without a coach, in anticipation of the next big game. And yet, we, who may not have the same “natural” skill at our jobs as Michael Jordan had with basketball, seem to be okay with the concept of receiving all of our training “on the job.”

When it comes to conflict management skills, it is critical to take some time “off the court” to be able to focus on our skills. How often do we slow down our communication to examine the words we use and the way we send and receive messages? How often do we give ourselves an opportunity to sit with a coach to try out our skills and get feedback and advice for ways in which we can improve our efforts and increase our success? Often, we already have the skills we need at our disposal. We just need to be given an opportunity to take off the “game face” so that we can reflect and focus on what we are doing. The way I see it, if it helped Michael Jordan be the best he could be, practice certainly can help us. Yes, I want to be like Mike! Do you?

*Explore how we can help you develop your conflict management skills.
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LESSONS FROM TORO: BEGIN WITH AN APOLOGY

In September 2003, Fast Company magazine reported on the corporate practice of “anti-apology” – it just seems easier for corporations to blame others or blame circumstances rather than to say “We’re sorry.” The article cited Ken Blanchard, author of *The One Minute Apology* (William Morrow, 2003) as saying that corporations should realize “the longer you wait to apologize for a wrongdoing, the quicker a weakness is seen as a wickedness.” People say, “if they’re not going to fess up that they screwed up, I wonder what else they’re going to lie about,” he says.



The Toro Corporation (manufacturer of lawnmowers and snow blowers) seems to have taken the lead in figuring out that apologies do count. The company instituted a dispute resolution program in 1991, when it decided to stop litigating cases involving injured customers. The Toro dispute resolution process always begins with an apology from the *company*, regardless of who's at fault.

The article quoted Drew Byers, Toro's corporate integrity manager: "People are frequently quite surprised. The *company* hasn't been to trial since 1994, and 95% of its cases are settled on the day of *mediation* or shortly thereafter. But that's not the aim. Often these people just want to be heard."

Kudos to Toro for utilizing a sincere apology and alternative dispute resolution to assist both the company and its consumers!

To learn more about how your company can design and implement a dispute resolution program, visit us at www.adrgi.com.

IS THERE A DEAD ELEPHANT'S HEAD IN THE ROOM? – MANAGING CONFLICT EFFECTIVELY

In “The Art of Managing Conflict” (USA Today Magazine, January 2004), four approaches we can take to conflict were identified. We can play the victim, flee, change ourselves or confront the situation. Dealing with the issues openly, candidly and objectively through communication with those involved was identified as the ideal approach.



“One executive we know uses a colorful metaphor to illustrate the concept. He likened the tendency to let disagreements fester to having a dead elephant's head in the middle of the room. It is unsightly, disturbing, and takes up a lot of space, but no one is willing to acknowledge its presence. It distracts people from more important work. The longer the elephant head remains, the worse its effect will be. The elephant head will not get up and go by itself. Only when people admit that this distasteful object is present and needs to be dealt with will they be able to remove it and move on to more productive activity” (USA Today Magazine, January 2004).

The article suggested a “4 C” approach to addressing conflict. First, “connect” with the other person. However, before you connect with the other person, make sure it is the right time and the right place to make a connection. Catching someone on the way to the bathroom in order to have a hallway “chat” may not be the best thing to do. Second, “clarify” your concerns and create a space where the other person can clarify their concerns and needs. Ask the individual what they think and what their view of the situation is. Third, “confirm” your understanding of their perspective and their needs. By summing things up and restating the issues, you can ensure that there is no misunderstanding. Finally, “contract.” This stage involves finding a win-win solution that everyone can commit to.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Never try to teach a pig to sing. It wastes your time and annoys the pig.”

- Author Unknown



A CHALLENGE TO YOU!

CONFLICT

What are your first thoughts when you see this word? How does your body react to the word “conflict?”

What we believe about a situation is often how we experience a situation. If you respond negatively to conflict (even the word), it is likely that your experiences with conflict in real life aren't always the most positive times for you. We can help change that.

Whether you're interacting with co-workers, significant others, customers or business partners, conflict is eventually going to happen. It is a natural and necessary part of life. However, it is what we do when conflict arises that matters. How we respond to conflict can make the difference between destroying or enhancing a relationship.

What about the positive side of conflict? What opportunities does conflict create? What positive outcomes can result from conflict? To explore the positive side of conflict take each letter from the word “conflict” and come up with at least 3 words that begin with that letter that speak to the positive aspects of conflict. For example, the letter “C” can stand for creativity, collaboration, clarification, or “clearing the air.”

If we consider approaching conflict as an opportunity for creativity, understanding and listening, the outcomes we experience from conflict will begin to change. What we believe is what we create. So go out there and try this approach and see what happens – we challenge you!

We offer one-day workshops on “Approaching and Resolving Conflict Creatively.” To learn more, e-mail us at info@adrgi.com.

Share your success stories with us! If your company utilizes ADR in a way that work or if you approach conflict in a successful way, please e-mail us and share your story. We would welcome the opportunity to highlight your successes in our upcoming newsletters! E-mail us at info@adrgi.com.

