

Conflict Management-Problem Solving

April 24, 2009

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Oftentimes conflict is completely resolved simply by creating an environment where people feel heard, understood, and validated. Sometimes, however, there is a problem that needs to be resolved. Once emotions are heard and understood and communication has been established, you are in a position to move on to problem resolution. Problem solving is the process by which people explore alternatives.

For effective problem solving follow these steps:

1. Define the problem.
2. Brainstorm all possible solutions – it is very important to just let your imaginative juices flow during brainstorming. Too many people shut down creativity by immediately shooting down alternative solutions. The only rule in brainstorming is that anything goes.
3. Eliminate unacceptable solutions - Only after you have exhausted all possible solutions that you can think of are you in a position to evaluate whether a potential solution is unacceptable or not.
4. Choose a solution to try out.
5. Plan the implementation of the solution, giving it a specific trial period.
6. Implement the plan.
7. After the specified time period, come back together and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution tried. If it is working, stick with it. If it's not working, go back to the brainstorm list and choose another solution, or go back to brainstorming and start over.

Part of effective problem solving involves listening for distorted thinking. If distorted thinking is in effect, then problem solving will be ineffective. You will most likely need the services of an outside third party facilitator to assist you in getting through the filters of distorted thinking to a rational foundation. Secondly, unless the parties are able to own "their part of our problem," conflict resolution will be ineffective. Each person must own their own problems and they must also own their own emotional reactions to the problem. Often it is very effective to identify the problem as being in between the two of you, as in the interaction and dynamic between the two of you, and not lying within one of you. If the problem is in between you, then the two of you can attack the problem together and remove the obstacle from hindering your relationship.

It is important to note that most people try to move directly to problem resolution before first establishing communication and a foundation level of understanding. Problem resolution will never be effective over the long term unless healthy communication has been established and the parties are able to get to mutual understanding. When communication has been established and understanding is achieved, an environment that is conducive to effective problem resolution has been developed and your chances of success increase dramatically. When you are able to work through conflict in such a manner, the confidence level in the relationship also increases dramatically.

