BRIDGING DIVIDES
Managing Conflict at Board Meetings

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Serving as a statewide catalyst to advance:

• Sustainable resolution of matters of public interest

• Broad use of community mediation throughout Minnesota

• Effective collaboration and dispute resolution in state and local government
Objective: Increase your ability to effectively address contentious people and situations.

Participants will:

• Learn the importance of having a positive attitude and practicing everyday leadership;

• Learn about developing a problem solving mindset

• Identify the underlying interests that are key to resolution

• Enhance your skills at managing conflicts
I. Understanding Conflict
II. Communications & Perspective
III. Problem Solving Mindset
IV. Interest Based Problem Solving
V. Reframing & Synthesizing
VI. Applying What We’ve Learned Today
VII. Wrap-up
Things to always remember...

• People just want to be heard. Remember to: Listen to **LEARN**, not to **RESPOND**

• Even when people are in disagreement, there are often underlying values that are agreed upon (such as public service, a desire to do good work, etc.)

• We all need to see the other person’s perspective AND to better appreciate the role you may be playing in the dispute

• ‘Tell Me More’ and ‘Try to learn one more thing about...’
Things to always remember...

• A big part of dealing with conflict is being aware of your own role in what is happening. Being able to step outside yourself, to see where maybe you could have done better, is very important to getting to resolution.

• Be hard on the problem, and soft on the people

• A person who feels appreciated will always do more than expected.
• Your Name

• What is your guiding value?
Understanding Conflict
CONFLICT
Conflict = the *perceived* incompatibility of interests, needs and goals.
Understanding Conflict: Summary

What you see or hear:
• The conflict situation

What lies underneath:
• Human Needs
• Underlying Emotions
• World View
• Past experiences
What is going on in conflict situations?

• Why do they act that way?
  • Underlying interests
  • Different perceptions of what is happening

• And how do people typically respond?
  • They blame the other person, or they blame themselves
  OR
  • There are reasons for what is happening— and we need to figure them out!
Fundamental Communications Skills Review
Perspective
Perspective

Perspective

Remember...

Being able to see someone else’s perspective doesn’t mean that they are right or that you agree with them!

It simply means that you are willing to acknowledge that it is the experience of the other person, and therefore true for her or him.
• [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4EDhdAHrOg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4EDhdAHrOg) ‘It’s Not About The Nail’ video
Fundamental Communication Skills Summary

• Start by trying to understand how the other person’s story makes as much sense to them as yours does to you

• In order to find out, commit to really listening hard by listening beyond the words to *the heart of the message*

• When you do speak, talk more about yourself – your feelings, needs, and part – than the other person
A Problem Solving Mindset
Problem Solving Mindset

A mindset is a belief that orients the way we handle situations.

It is the way we sort out what is going on and what we should do.

You can develop a problem solving mindset!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Problem Solving Mindset</strong></th>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Traditional Approach</strong></th>
<th><strong>Problem Solving Approach</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong> Win</td>
<td>Goal: Wise outcome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants - adversaries</td>
<td>Participants – joint problem solvers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attack problem <em>and</em> people</td>
<td>Concentrate on the problem</td>
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<td>Assume negative intentions</td>
<td>Presume positive intent</td>
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<td>Traditional Approach</td>
<td>Problem Solving Approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on position</td>
<td>Focus on underlying interests</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assume I am right</td>
<td>Assume I need to learn their story</td>
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<td>Come with “the” solution</td>
<td>Willing to explore options</td>
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We all need to be on the lookout for bias that we don’t realize ...

• **Attribution Bias** – the common tendency for people to unconsciously be more generous with themselves (and members of their group) than with individuals perceived as “others” (think Republican vs. Democrat)

• **Confirmation Bias** – the common tendency for people to unconsciously seek out information that confirms their beliefs and disregard information that challenges their belief
Problem Solving Mindset – Watch out for Triggers!

• The physical symptoms of fight or flight – racing heart, clenched fists, sweaty palms

• Use of superlatives – always, never

• Finding fault with the character of the people involved rather than their position

• Dismissing evidence that contradicts negative portrayals of the other side
Problem Solving Mindset

Steps:

• Get curious
• Question assumptions
• Seek to understand their story
• Identify mutual contribution
A Problem Solving Mindset: Summary

• A mindset is a belief that orients the way we handle situations – the way we sort out what is going on and what we should do.

• A ‘problem-solving’ mindset can be developed to help resolve conflicts.

• Key elements of this mindset are:
  • Remembering that while they certainty do bad things, human beings are basically good. They are trying to meet their basic needs.
  • Prefer integrative solutions over compromise.
  • Notice when you are getting triggered and take steps to get yourself into a problem solving mindset.
Interest Based Problem Solving
Interest Based Problem Solving

• Issue
  • The topics or areas of controversy that stakeholders wish to discuss in the process.

• Positions
  • One stakeholder group’s fixed proposed solution to resolve the negotiation of an issue.
Interest Based Problem Solving

**Interests**

• The needs underlying the issue that the stakeholders wish to see satisfied in the process.

• The real ‘why’ the issue is being raised.
Interest Based Problem Solving – An Example

• Issue
  Possible building of a manufacturing plant on the edge of town

• Positions

  •

  •

Underlying Interests for each position

  •

  •
Interest Based Problem Solving

**OPTIONS**

Possible, not fixed, solutions that satisfy one or more of the stakeholder’s **interests**.

To reach a resolution you will need to identify options that meet some of each stakeholder’s interests.
Interest Based Problem Solving

Only Proposals That Include Others Needs Succeed
Options for our manufacturing plant scenario

•

•

•

•
Interest Based Problem Solving: The Goal

Integrative Problem Solving

Domination       Compromise       Integration
Reframing
Reframing is

translating toxic, positional, threatening or unclear statements into statements that others can respond to productively.
Reframing

Principles of Reframing

• Every strong statement contains some underlying interest or concern that promoted the strong statement.

• People usually want a constructive response to their statements.

• People can switch to more constructive communication when they believe that their needs or concerns are being dealt with.
Reframing

Steps of reframing

1. Listen hard
2. Identify interests, needs, concerns
3. Remove problem language
4. Paraphrase the statement using constructive language
5. Stick with it until person lets you know you got it right
ACTIVITY

Let’s take a look at the Reframing Handout...

How could you use similar types of responses to the bad statements that come at you?
Scenario 1: “Clearly the County Board has not considered the impact of this proposed new jail on our neighborhood and community. All this talk about jobs – well, that’s great, but what about all of the criminals that are now going to be living right across the street from our homes. And just down from the elementary school. You don’t live in town, and you don’t care about the folks like myself whose property values will drop because of a jail across the street.”

Identify....

Underlying Interests = ________    Possible Reframes = ________
Reframing: Summary

• Reframing is translating toxic, positional, threatening or unclear statements into statements that others can respond to productively.

• Every strong statement contains some underlying interest or concern that promoted the strong statement.

• People usually want a constructive response to their statements.

• You need to listen hard in order to dig out the underlying interest or concern.
Synthesizing
Synthesizing

• Synthesizing helps group members see how each idea connects to the whole

• Synthesizing helps build the sense that all needs matter

• Synthesizing generates movement toward strategies that can meet multiple needs

• Synthesizing shows leadership!
ACTIVITY

Let’s take a look at the Synthesizing Handout...

How could you use similar types of statements to help during a contentious meeting?
Examples of synthesizing statements...

- *Here’s what I have heard so far...*
- *The common thread seems to be...*
- *Here’s how I see the connection between all that has been said...*
- *What is really important seems to be...*
Applying what we’ve learned today ....

Let’s talk about challenges faced at Board meetings:

• Tough, contentious public meetings (‘public engagement’)
The Spectrum of Public Participation

- What is the reason for the meeting?
- What is your promise to the public?
- Examples & Techniques
Planning For Public Engagement

- Know Your Likely Participants
- Plan, Prepare and Provide Information
- Design an Appropriate Process
- Transparency
- Negative, Emotional or Challenging Comments
- Dealing with Disruptive Behavior
Applying what we’ve learned today ....

Let’s talk about challenges faced at Board meetings:

• Tough, contentious public meetings (‘public engagement’)

• Loud arguing, or bad behavior, between Board Members
Tips for Struggles between Board Members

• Remember that timing and location are important
  • Perhaps not during the meeting, in a more discreet location

• Perhaps get support from a colleague

• Frame it carefully, prepare to listen

• Look at the ‘Guide to Dealing with Conflict’

• -- what has worked for you? --
Review: A Guide to Dealing with Conflict

A GUIDE TO dealing with conflict
Helping people work through and resolve their own disputes.

Are you in the middle of a conflict?
Would you like to have it resolved?

This guide was developed to offer ideas on how to prepare for discussing disagreements and can be helpful in disputes with:

- Neighbors
- Family & Friends
- Post-Divorce Shared Parenting
- Landlords - Tenants
- Colleagues at Work
- School Issues
- and many other situations.

Mediation Services for Anoka County is a community-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Contributions are very much appreciated and are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by the law.
Applying what we’ve learned today ....

Let’s talk about challenges faced at Board meetings:

• Tough, contentious public meetings (‘public engagement’)
• Loud arguing, or bad behavior, between Board Members
• Constituent who blasts away while at the microphone
Tips for Dealing with Difficult Constituents

• Listen authentically, and respond carefully
• Try not to let it become personal for you
• Consider getting help from your Administrator / Staff / other Board Members
• Perhaps offer to discuss later (not at Board meeting)
• Remember the ‘Guide to Dealing with Conflict’
• -- what has worked for you? --
Wrap Up
Summary

• Understand that conflict is about the perception of incompatible needs.

• Cultivate a problem solving mindset of being joint problem solvers working together to develop solutions that meet the most important needs of everyone involved.

• Start from accepting that the other person’s story is as true and valid for them as yours is for you.
Bridging Divides Summary

• To solve a problem you must know what the **interests** are of everyone involved. To identify the interests you need to develop your listening skills.

• Use reframing techniques to change toxic or positional statements into statements that others can respond to productively.

• Help to move the conversation forward by synthesizing disparate needs and options.
If We Had A Silver Bullet, It Would Be ...

Get as invested in solving the other person’s problem as you are in solving your own.
Recommended Reading

- **Crucial Conversations** by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler
- **Difficult Conversations** by Stone, Patton and Heen
- **Getting to Yes** by Fisher and Ury
Thank You!

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