CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

In any group of people, there will be disagreements and misunderstandings, which can lead to conflict. Unresolved conflict reduces production, lowers performance, and fosters resentment. In the past you may have stayed above the fray, avoided conflict, or you may have been part of it, but now it’s your responsibility to manage it.

The Pinch Theory of Conflict Management

The pinch theory is based on the idea that conflict can be predicted and reduced. When expectations between people are not met, a pinch, or a breakdown in the existing relationship, is created. Pinches are inevitable, but can be reduced and managed. A pinch is anything that adversely affects your working relationship with a team member. It may be work related, for example, a difference in procedures that you don’t understand or agree with. It could be the work environment such as co-worker’s music. Or it could be a communication breakdown.

- Sharing expectations reduces pinches.
- Understanding others personalities minimizes pinches.
- Discussing pinches as soon as they occur avoids escalation and reduces stress.

When pinches are unresolved, allowed to fester, they lead to a CRUNCH – defined as an intolerable pinch.

How do we try to un-crunch?

If you’ve tried these strategies, you know how poorly they work.

- Ignore the pinch, maybe it will go away.
- Shake hands and make up without resolution. If nothing has changed, nothing will change.
- Avoid conflict by limiting contact. Shunning co-workers doesn’t track well in the work place, but how many of you reading this have done just that?

Or you could...

Agree to Form a Plan to Avoid Pinches

1. Introduce the pinch. Here are a few examples.

   - “There’s something on my mind I need your help understanding."
   - “I’m bothered by something—and if I don’t tell you what I’m thinking, it’s not fair to you or me.”
   - “Could you spare a minute to talk about something that is bothering me?”
   - “I want to talk about something I’m concerned could affect our work together if I don’t share it.”

2. Describe the behavior in observable terms. Do not be accusatory, blame oriented, or confrontational.

   - “Did I hear correctly when you said___?”
• What were you trying to accomplish when you said/did ____?

3. Describe how you were affected. Own the emotions.
   • “When you (observable behavior) I felt/thought _____. If I may ask, what was your reasoning?”
   • “When you said ____, I took it to mean ____. How did you intend it?”
   • “I’m not sure I’m clear about ____ would you mind explaining?”

4. Share your solution
   • “If you’re going to ____ I’d like to understand why/when.”
   • “I’d prefer if you would keep me in the loop, please.”
   • “Would you mind going over that with me before you do it again?”

5. Come to an understanding

Let the other party discuss their thoughts, wants, and feelings as early in the conversation as possible. Forge a mutual agreement on how you both intend to respond in the future.
   • "I’d like to create a plan to avoid this. How do you think this can be accomplished?"
   • “What do you think we can do to improve our communication?”

If I visited your workplace, and someone said, “Look at that old white haired man,” which should I do? (By the way, my hair is light blonde...very light blonde.)
   • Go to a third party and express my dislike.
   • Show anger toward the commentator.
   • Retaliate by finding something I dislike about them and sharing it.
   • Calmly discuss with the commentator my dislike.

Seems pretty silly doesn’t it, but have you ever done any of the first three, I have?

Pinch Meeting Procedure

• Put your thoughts in writing before the meeting.
• Meet in a private room without interruption.
• Turn off your phones.
• Communicate respectfully with understanding.
• Don’t allow it to be angry, emotional, or petty. Treat each other with courtesy.
• Listen attentively.
• Forge an agreement, an understanding.
• Honor the agreement.
• Don’t share the agreement with anyone else.
Pinch Meeting Form

1. **The pinch** - Share the action, the pinch. “There’s something on my mind I need your help understanding.”

2. **Share your view, not the blame** “I feel/think/believe…”

3. **Forge an agreement** “I’d like to form a plan to avoid this. How do you think this can be accomplished?”

Team member agreement

x ____________________________ Date __________

x ____________________________ Date __________

*This agreement is only for the teammates involved.*

*It is not to be shared with other parties.*