Workplace Conflict

BY KATE SHIRLEY

"Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict."

– Dorothy Thompson

It's inevitable, really. We spend eight hours or more each day with the same group of people with differing personalities, goals and problem-solving methods, often in a cramped office environment. Disagreements are bound to happen, and when they do, they never fail to be frustrating, time-consuming and distracting to everyone involved, and even to employees not involved at all. What starts out as a small conflict can escalate to a larger issue rather quickly, bringing down workplace moral and productivity in the process. Establishing an informal resolution process can be a much less costly and time consuming solution.

According to the Washington Business Journal, the typical manager spends 25-40% of his or her time dealing with workplace conflict. On the high end, that's over two days out of the work week! Most of us are motivated to take the "just say nothing" approach, but it has become hard to afford that sort of complacency. It is best to attempt to deal with workplace conflict head-on. There are many easy things an employee or manager can do to try and snuff out conflict before it escalates into a serious issue and causes significant disruption.

Creating a civil and positive work environment translates quickly into happier and more productive employees. Take the time to employ a few of these processes for improving workplace relations, and get creative with your solutions. In the end, everyone will win!

- Learn how to recognize conflict triggers in your workplace, and use this to identify potential issues before they have the chance to escalate into a total time drain. Most conflict arises from strained relations between employees, and more because of how something is said, rather than what is said.

- Try to minimize recurring problems that preoccupy employees or cause conflict on a regular basis, so that issues that were once problematic no longer even come up.

- Curb gossip, and never ask coworkers to keep an eye on one another. This will only foster paranoia and cutthroat behavior. Create consistent performance review procedures so everyone feels like they got a fair shake.

- Employees are more likely to feel stressed and contentious if they are unsure whether their work is being appreciated or valued. Recognize and praise achievements – let your employees or coworkers know when you think they're doing a great job.

- Resolve conflicts to the satisfaction of all parties involved, so no one feels slighted or resentful. Encourage individuals to collaborate in reaching a common goal.