

## *How to Manage Conflict*

*How to Manage Conflict* by Dr. William Hendricks is a practical guide to effective conflict management. Dr. Hendricks's purpose in writing the book is to help those in management to turn employee conflict into productive action, handle difficult people and situations for "win-win" results, and to discover five conflict management styles and when to use each style.

There are three stages of conflict: Stage One – Daily Events; Stage Two – Challenges; and Stage Three – Battles. It is to everyone's advantage to work out conflicts in Stage One when conflicts are characterized as day-to-day irritations instead of waiting until Stage Three when hostility has escalated, and the motivation is to "get rid" of the other party. It is suggested that the Boy Scout motto, "Be prepared" be adhered to when assessing conflict in an office setting.

The assets of the use of conflict management in an office setting are that it requires clear decisions, requires tolerance for diversity, and reduces aggression, passive behavior, and manipulation.

Chapter 5 describes the five styles of conflict management and is my favorite chapter because each style is congruent with a human personality type. The five conflict management styles are:

**Integrating** – Individuals who choose this style seek an exchange of information revealing a desire to examine differences and reach a solution that is acceptable to all parties. This style is typically associated with problem-solving and is effective when issues are complex. Creative thinkers are prone to use integration as a conflict management style.

**Obliging** – Individuals who use this style places a high value on others but a low value on self. This style may be an indication of the manager's low self-esteem, or it could be a strategy to deliberately elevate another person in an effort to make them feel better about an issue. Obliging, when used effectively, can preserve a relationship; when used poorly, can say, "Please walk over

me.” It can also be used to buy time to assess situations and consider alternatives.

**Dominating** – is the opposite of obliging because the emphasis is placed on self. Domination is an effective strategy when a quick decision is needed or if the situation lacks importance. This strategy can be reactionary and is activated by self-preservation; many times it is a reflection of the philosophy of, “It is better to shoot at ‘em than be shot at.” The dominating style is most frequently associated with the “bully” and “hardball tactics” and should be used sparingly.

**Avoiding** – The individual who uses avoidance does not place a value on either self or others. This is definitely a “don’t-rock-the-boat” style. This style of conflict management will “pass the buck” and “sidestep the issue” leaving others to struggle with the results. Avoidance can be effective when time is needed to allow things to cool off, but it can be frustrating because problems are solved slowly resulting in little satisfaction.

**Compromising** – is the fifth management style. It is neither high or low in concern for others or self. The philosophy is that everyone has something to give and something to take. It is powerful when both sides are right but can have negative ramifications when one side is wrong; therefore, compromise is most effective when issues are complex and there is a balance of power.

In conclusion, it is good to know that there is no right or wrong style of handling conflict; each style has positive and negative uses. It is an asset to anyone working in an office setting or in the field to be able to recognize others’ styles of handling conflict.