

Change and the Workplace Wars

In our personal and business lives, how we manage conflict determines whether we become casualties or survivors of change. While resistance to change is normal, change can pose a significant barrier to our survival in the workplace. There are three root causes of resistance to change. They are

1. Exception – it's good for others but not me.
2. Threatens self interest – what's in it for me (personal pay off)
3. Chauvinistic conditioning – my way is the right way.

The root causes to resistance to change apply to management and worker alike regardless of gender or ethnicity. Managing resistance to change and conflict in the workplace is an equal opportunity affair.

Today's Workplace

As early as 1995, management and workplace consultants told us that by year 2000, 85% of the workforce would be women, racial minorities and immigrants. Guess what? The consultants were right. Today our challenge lies in how we decide to think about the changes brought about by downsizing and out sourcing to foreign shores. Downsizing and global out sourcing may not always be bad for individuals or organizations unless good people are lost because they are fed up with bullying, shouting, backstabbing and other insults to self-esteem.

Avoiding conflict in the workplace simply encourages it. Managed conflict is not available to people who avoid confrontation. Open productive argument is good in facilitating our survival in an ever changing global workplace environment. It is the unresolved conflict with chronic patterns of finger-pointing or passive-aggressive non-cooperation that is problematic. This dysfunctional corporate behavior promotes conflict. We know that resistance to necessary change is normal to the human condition and yet we are often surprised, full of resentment and anger. Why? It is unmanaged conflict that is problematic. It is this environment that is best characterized by the workplace wars.

Historically Speaking

Throughout history, most managers and organizations operated by trial and error. By 1914 there were 25 business schools in existence performing roles of planning, organizing and controlling workers. As the workplace environment evolved, emphasis on productivity and responsibility still proved inadequate as a solution. As a result, conflict management has evolved into an increasingly collaborative style of interaction between employees and management. Less evident today is the outdated top down hierarchical leadership approach that can potentially exploit workers and diminish their self worth. This sense of self worth characterizes many of today's redress and alternative dispute interventions in the workplace. Workers are talking and some managers are listening. Effective managers have figured out that if they cannot listen, they cannot lead.

It Is All About Me

People in conflict feel disempowered and unable to connect to another person's view or gain clarity in their own perspectives for themselves. When conflict arises it is important to keep a connection between people, identify individual purpose and personal payoffs. It is beneficial to connect the company goals to personal goals. A sense of personal value is important to self worth. Money alone will not keep employees motivated and productive. Making money is a shared goal of labor and management; however, the process to achieve organizational and personal goals must include maintaining constructive interaction, especially involving the necessary changes that will arise in order to get a job successfully completed. This is particularly true while managing conflict in the workplace. It is important for workers to know what is expected and have an acceptable process for achieving desired goals. This can be done by providing training and development opportunities for the existing workforce without outsourcing, and is excellent tool to control employee retention, promote job satisfaction and provide personal rewards.

Management and Employee- Keeping the Connection

There is some substantial agreement between management and employees. Business management and front line workers tend to agree with noted psychologists Maslow and Erickson that there are basic requirements important to human survival and development in both physical and social terms. Both groups can have the same basic needs requirements.

Maslow speaks of individual needs associated with personal motivation in terms of enjoying: (a) safe physical environment void of hostility; and (b) self actualization geared toward achievement that is supported by personal recognition and empowerment opportunities. Another significant psychological contribution are Erickson's thoughts on the importance of positive group identity. Healthy group interaction through good communication allows managers to effectively manage conflict in the work environment. When management and labor talk and communicate with each other, they find that it is not always money that provides resolution to workplace conflict.

What Keeps Management and Workers Awake at Night?

Sexual harassment, hostile work environment and managing a diverse work force are only some of the things that keep management awake at night.

Cooperative exchange between employees and management can more effectively promote employee retention, prevent legal exposure and manage the workplace wars.

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