

COSO's Guide to Conflict Resolution and Crucial Conversations

Experiencing conflict in student organizations is a totally normal and inevitable challenge which has the potential to be a valuable learning experience! Here are some tips to dealing with conflict and ways to seek conflict resolution!

What to do while dealing with a conflict:

- ❖ Maintain your calm
 - The best way to deal with any stressful situation is to maintain calmness! Take a quick breath or revisit the situation at a later time to approach the situation calmly and rationally with a problem-solution approach
 - Decisions made out of anger or spite can be incredibly detrimental not only to the members they affect, but also to the student organization as a whole
- ❖ Work towards de-escalating the situation
 - Pay close attention to your word choice to avoid aggravating the situation
 - Avoid interrupting and actively listen to different viewpoints
 - Never resort to social media to express your emotions. Remember that nothing is truly anonymous on the internet and information will get around!
 - Express opinions respectfully
- ❖ Maintain objectivity
 - Avoid making assumptions about the person(s) involved
 - Leave any bias/personal issues out of the conversation
 - Recall the goals and objectives of your student organization

Methods of conflict resolution

Collaboration

While there are many strategies of conflict resolution, the best is collaboration! Collaboration involves the participation and effort of both parties to find an ideal solution. Parties should be honest, respectful, and committed to working towards mutual understanding and resolving the issue. Parties articulate their issues and viewpoints respectfully. All issues should be clarified and integrated into open discussions where everyone is afforded a voice.

The following are other methods of conflict resolution which may be detrimental to your organization:

Avoiding

This method involves ignoring the conflict without any desire to pursue resolution. This is not effective and may worsen the conflict at hand.

Accommodating

In this method, a party is willing to sacrifice their own needs to appease the other party.

Competing

The competing method involves a party wilfully pursuing action at the expense of the other party to satisfy their own needs

Compromising

This method involves finding a solution which partially fulfills both parties' needs. While not as detrimental as the past three methods (avoiding, accommodating, & competing), this method may still not fully resolve the conflict.

Crucial Conversations

Having difficult and crucial conversations are natural in the student organization setting. These conversations can truly bolster your leadership skills and develop your organization if carried out properly. Below are a few tips to help with dealing with crucial conversations:

1. Prior to the conversation
 - Setting
 - i. Set out a time and date to have a conversation. While time may be a factor, try not to make hasty/impulsive decisions.
 - ii. Be aware of the setting in which you have the conversation in as power dynamics can be exacerbated by certain locations (ex: dorm, personal office, etc). Try to meet in a neutral location that is easily accessible
 - Material
 - i. Take time to gather information and plan for addressing issues
 - ii. Focus on the central issues at hand and be cognizant of your goal in having the conversation
 - Attitude
 - i. Approach the conversation with a growth mindset! It will very be tempting to rethink having the conversation and speaking out
2. During the conversation
 - Initiation
 - i. Always begin the conversation being direct as possible. Introduce your objectives in this conversation (ex: what you want/ do not want to accomplish, why, etc)
 - ii. Pay attention to your tone and word choice to not escalate the situation. A calm mood and firm tone is important.
 - Atmosphere
 - i. The environment of the conversation should be comforting and secure, allowing all parties to share their thoughts. This type of environment is conducive to effective communication and resolution
 1. This is threatened when emotions start to dominate the conversation. While strong emotions are totally natural, try to steer the conversation back to an environment where parties can feel safe to express their opinions
 - ii. Maintain objectivity and focus on truthful fact
 - iii. Be patient and take time to carefully listen to the other parties' point of view. Always think before you speak!
 - iv. Never propose a dichotomous resolution (ex: either this option or not, "my way or the highway")

- v. Remember that silence is normal in these types of situations. Do not rush to fill in empty space with words.
3. Problem-solving and action
- o Resolution
 - i. Agree to come to a decision regarding the issue at hand
 - ii. You can utilize the conflict resolution strategies mentioned above!
 - o Taking action
 - i. After agreeing upon a solution, plan to take action
 - ii. Delegate responsibility amongst the parties involved as ensure appropriate tasks are assigned
 - iii. Set deadlines
 - iv. Decide upon a date to follow-up
 - v. Make sure all the material discussed is documented for future reference