

# Resource 4: Managing conflict

## Champions of change are active: Welcome

Sport, like every other aspect of life, is full of conflict on and off the field. It is important that conflict is managed appropriately so that it doesn't escalate. One of the ways to help alleviate conflict is to learn effective communication strategies. The following provides a few common approaches to effectively manage conflict.

### Principles of conflict resolution:

**1. Active listening.** Displaying a willingness to listen can help alleviate conflict.

- Encourage the speaker by asking open-ended questions and showing interest.
- Validate the speaker. You can still show interest in the person while not necessarily agreeing with her/his point of view.
- Restate/reframe the speaker's message by paraphrasing main points.
- Try to find the key points of the message.

**2. Non-verbal communication.** A cold shoulder, eye roll, or clenched jaw can go a long way in communicating a point without even saying a word. In fact, 70% of our communication is non-verbal in nature. Be open and consistent in your body language, helping to defuse emotion.

**3. 'I' Statements.** If the speaker takes responsibility for her/his statements others will be less likely to put up a defence. In the following example, the first statement puts the receiver of the message on the defensive due to the blaming and accusing nature of the statement. The second statement has the speaker taking ownership.

"You hurt the team when you don't show up to training on time."

"I am frustrated when you don't show up to training on time."

**4. Avoiding common communication obstacles.** It is easy to fall into several traps when dealing with conflict. Some common obstacles that get in the way of effective resolution are:

- Advising – "Well, I'll tell you what I'd do..."
- Diagnosing – "Your problem is that you..."
- Discounting – "Cheer up, it'll work out..."
- Lecturing – "How many times do I have to tell you..."
- Threatening – "This is the last time I will..."
- Preaching – "You ought to know better than to..."

### Conflict resolution strategies:

#### Do

- Disperse onlookers
- Talk in private (if appropriate)
- Let the hostile person vent his/her feelings. The person needs to get rid of all the built-up frustration.
- Acknowledge the other person's feelings.
- Be patient and go slowly with what you want to communicate. Speak firmly but politely.
- Ask questions to clarify the situation (maybe someone didn't say what they meant to say or perhaps misstated what was intended).
- Try to understand the other person's position. Conflict can arise due to people having different perceptions. This happens most frequently when dealing with someone from another organisation, background, or culture.

- Listen to what the other person is trying to communicate. Listening is often more important than talking and the person is more likely to believe that you are taking them seriously.
- Focus on the issue, not the person.
- Take notes.
- Stay calm. If the situation turns physical, walk away and call the police.
- Get advice or help when you need it.
- Keep your promises and do your best to resolve the problem. If you don't keep the promises you make, it could make matters worse.

### **Don't**

- Take hostility personally. The hostile person is usually angry with the situation, not you.
- Communicate the solution; it is better to focus on the problem.
- Use put-downs or sarcasm.
- Rely on non-verbal hints to communicate, be direct and forthcoming.
- Discuss the problem with others not associated with the conflict (maintain confidentiality).
- Become emotionally involved.
- Yell.
- Interrupt.
- Ask too many questions.
- Make threats.
- Use aggressive body language (e.g. pointing fingers, hands on hips).
- Attempt to negotiate with anyone who verbally or physically threatens you. If you sense any danger at all, leave the area immediately.

These strategies are particularly important when one or more of the people involved in the conflict do not have English as their first language. In some circumstances, it may be worth considering using an interpreter and/or professional mediator.

**Developed in collaboration**

Collaboration leader:

