CONCLUSION

In addition to introducing basic conflict management skills and theories, *Conflict Management for Managers* has been designed to address all realms of managerial conflict: from internal employment disputes to external conflicts with customers and clients as well as conflicts between regulators and the regulated. You have read multiple examples from organizations that have grown stronger, even during difficult economic times, because they have systematically monitored and reduced the costs of unproductive conflict.

EVERY MANAGER IS A CONFLICT MANAGER

Long before you read this book, you were managing conflicts. Whether your day includes complaints from customers, in-fighting between employees, poor team work in work units, providing feedback during performance reviews, negotiating with suppliers and vendors, hiring and training new employees due to turnover, or a myriad of other managerial tasks, your day involves the management of conflict and frequent negotiations. According to Cloke and Goldsmith (2011), exceptional leader managers have a number of traits and habits that set them apart. First, they make good decisions in chaotic or challenging environments and those decisions remain true to their espoused values. They don't sacrifice their belief in treating people right just because times get tough. Second, they are able to enlist and motivate others to address seemingly insurmountable problems or conflicts by looking for common ground and shared interests. Third, these managers create "respectful, ethical, innovative, and productive work environments where everyone is encouraged to invent solutions for ongoing conflicts" (2011, p. viii). Those managers who thrive and who look forward to coming to work every day are those who proactively, respectfully, and thoughtfully address conflict rather than those who seek to ignore it or pass it on to another manager or department.

The question is not whether you are a conflict manager. The question is, "What kind of conflict manager are you?"

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THE GOAL: CONTINUED GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT

Even the best managers have room for improvement. The same is true for organizations as a whole. Whether your organization or work unit is highly functional or dysfunctional, there is likely room for improvement or a need to consider how did we get here and where do we want to be as an organization. Be sure you understand those behaviors, attitudes, policies, and elements of organizational culture that are serving you and your organization well. You certainly don't want to change those. This means some sort of benchmarking is needed for you as an individual and your work unit or organization as a whole. How does your performance stack up to what it could be, to those you consider to be great leader managers? What are some realistic goals for self-improvement that you can set and revisit periodically? Would a performance coach be a worthwhile investment during this effort? Or perhaps a mentor within the organization or at a similar one? Positive change will only come when your performance is monitored and goals for improvement are set. Only you can determine what those goals should be, the timeline for their achievement, and the rubrics by which your performance changes will be measured. Spend some time considering the goals you would like to work on this week, this month, and this year. Be sure to set up automatic reminders that will prompt you to take stock of your movement toward (or even away) from those goals. How will you know when your goals have been achieved?

SELF-REFLECTION FOR GOAL SETTING

In order to ensure your continual improvement, consider setting aside just a few minutes at the end of each day to reflect about what worked well, what didn't, and what changes you will make in order to learn from the day's challenges. Did you have a difficult conversation with an employee, customer, or regulator? How did that go? Did you use active listening skills, frame your comments constructively, remain open to feedback, and engage in interest-based negotiation to reach a solution that will work well for all parties? Which parts of your performance went well and which would you like to continue to work on in order to achieve even better results next time?

Setting aside time for self-reflection accomplishes at least two important goals: first, it helps you transfer the skills and knowledge from the written pages of this book to your actual working experience (called *transference* in pedagogical lingo).

Conflict management habits took years to create and won't be changed quickly or without conscious effort. Taking the time to reflect on your performance will ensure you are transferring what you are learning into behavioral changes. Second, self-reflection helps provide mental closure so you do not ruminate over situations that did not go as well as you had hoped. Rather than beating yourself up about what you should have said or done, self-reflection allows you to make an action plan to redress the situation or learn from the incident so it is not repeated. This allows you to mentally move on rather than dwelling on the problem or beating yourself up over missteps that are likely to occur as you attempt to implement changes to your old habits.

At the end of this chapter, there is a self-reflection assignment and questionnaire. Use this assignment to take stock of your current use of these techniques. Choose one or more areas to set an improvement goal. During the next month, focus on improving your performance in this area(s), then come back and take the survey again to look for improvement.

BUT I'M NOT A MANAGER YET . . .

No problem. If you have read this far, you surely intend to be a manager in the future. The skills and knowledge in this book can help you get there. Understanding your own communication style and how to communicate with others will help you as you work your way up in your organization or seek a new job. Active listening skills, self-reflection, and understanding the need for collaborative problem solving with unions, vendors, and customers will help gain you a solid reputation as someone with management potential. Building trust with your coworkers and managers, offering integrative solutions to problems that arise, and receiving and giving constructive feedback will help you achieve your goal of working in management. Apply the skills you can now, making note of those changes you would like to implement once you have greater decision-making authority. Self-reflection and goal setting are just as important for your continued growth as an employee as they are for managers.

DON'T MANAGE LIKE A DINOSAUR

Did you read this book and at least once or twice have a cynical reaction? You may have noted there still seem to be some managers who rule with an iron fist rather than a collaborative spirit. In spite of their authoritarian methods, some of

these managers seem to survive, even thrive in their environments. What gives? If the best managers are proactive at managing conflict, if they seek integrative solutions and treat people respectfully and inclusively, then why do we still see some mean managers thriving, too? Kenneth Lloyd (1999) gave a name to these dictatorial, hostile, and often inappropriate managers: *jerks at work*. How do we explain their amazing staying power? Unfortunately, recent studies indicate that jerks at work earn more than nice guys on average but only if they are male (Rodgers, 2011). Men rated as less agreeable than their coworkers were found to earn more than others. The effect of disagreeableness didn't work for women. Although this isn't good news, the research indicates change is on the horizon.

There is some confusion as to why male managers who are disagreeable can still rise to the top in certain organizations or fields but there is more unanimity that they are a dying breed that can wreak havoc on an organization if not stopped. Perhaps those above and below them in the hierarchy simply seek to avoid confrontations with them, thereby allowing their bullying or rude behavior to continue rather than pursue their demotion or expulsion.

In any event, jerks at work can have a negative impact on the bottom line for their work units and entire organizations. "Disruptive behavior can impact engagement and there are absolutely mirroring characteristics that those bad apples can convey onto other people. Then, there is a downward spiral" (Rodgers, 2011). Organizations need to decide which behaviors they seek to foster and reward at work. Raises and promotions that are grounded in positive behaviors and the ability to play well with others are critical to rooting out bad behaviors, which in turn, reduces employee turnover and improves morale. Rodgers (2011) notes that it is more acceptable for women to be tough than for men to be perceived as nurturing. Getting rid of jerks near the top of the organizational food chain can mean changing the organizational culture and reward structures.

According to research by Davenport (2009) and others, jerks make poor decisions because they do not invite or welcome input from others, they see their own perspective as the only one that is valid, they believe they are always right, and they have difficulty thinking objectively and learning from mistakes. An interesting example comes from the debacles in the financial industry that arose in the mid- to late 2000s. For example, Joe Cassano came into power at the helm of AIG after his predecessor retired. By all accounts, Cassano was a jerk. "His crime was not mere legal fraudulence, but the deeper kind: a need for subservience in others and an unwillingness to acknowledge his own weaknesses"

(Davenport, 2009). He did not fully understand the complicated mathematics models being used or the changes in those models that led to poor decisions . . . and he refused to acknowledge that he needed help to understand them.

Similarly, Dick Fuld of Lehman Brothers is widely denounced as the jerk who let his bad personality get in the way of a bailout for his organization. He treated Hank Paulson, the secretary of the US Treasury, rudely, in plain view of many others during a dinner party in Spring 2008. Later, Paulson would decide to bail out Goldman Sachs but not Lehman Brothers. Although many factors likely influenced this decision, the poor treatment of Paulson has been noted by many as a factor that did not work in Lehman Brothers' favor. Clearly, treating others well not only makes it easier to sleep at night, it helps advance your career and your organization's mission. "Jerks often seem to get ahead in firms and advance through the ranks, but that's a dangerous phenomenon. If you want good decisions in your organization, don't hire, promote, or retain jerks" (Davenport, 2009).

The authoritarian approach to management was tolerated and even promoted during the twentieth century when factories and assembly lines were the mainstay of economic productivity. As North America has moved toward a service and knowledge-based economy the nature of work itself has changed, and workplace cultures have changed as well. Managers and supervisors are increasingly valued for their ability to support and motivate employees, removing obstacles to the fulfillment of their required tasks and duties along the way. The changes in the nature of work, along with emerging norms against bullying and disrespectful treatment, require a new kind of manager—a more collaborative manager. Managers who continue to use outdated methods will experience less success at work. Their organizations are more vulnerable to claims of discrimination, harassment, and the creation of a hostile work environment. Not only are these managers jerks at work, they are increasingly dated in their approach to management. Like the dinosaurs who roamed the earth millions of years ago, these managers are becoming extinct—they either adapt to new expectations and norms of respectful treatment or they die out. Although some of these old school managers remain, especially in industries in which competition and aggressive behavior are more common and hierarchies are entrenched (e.g., sales, banking and finance, professional sports and entertainment, factory settings), they are increasingly less common and less rewarded for these behaviors. They are a dying breed.

The techniques contained in this book are designed to support the changing expectations for managers in the twenty-first century. Through learning and

adaptation to change, leaders and organizations can thrive even in the most challenging economic or political environments.

A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

This book has repeatedly argued for the use of a systemic approach to conflict. Your organization has preexisting systems for managing conflict but they might be invisible, informal, or outdated. A system approach is used to catalog the sources of conflicts, analyze their costs, create systems for the prevention of unproductive conflicts, and manage unpreventable conflicts to early and efficient resolutions. Through the conscious application of the techniques in this book, your ability to work successfully with your team, your customers, and within regulatory relationships will be greatly improved. But remember, it takes time and practice to change habits that have been deeply ingrained. Expect mistakes, invite feedback, and set goals for yourself and the organization or unit you manage. The larger the organization, the slower it may be to implement big changes in the processes used for handling conflict — yet the potential gains are bigger as well.

SUGGESTED SUPPLEMENTAL READING

The evolution of leadership, *2*(9). Mind Resources Institute of Learning and Innovation. Retrieved from http://www.mindresources.net/web/institutejournal5/Article2.pdf

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Has your management style or approach changed since you began reading this text? If so, how and in what ways has it changed?

2. If you are not a manager yet, how can you use the concepts, processes, and skills found in this text to help you attain a management position or to move up in the ranks of your organization?

EXERCISES

1. Go back to Chapter One and retake the conflict skills inventory. Have your scores changed since you began reading and implementing the techniques contained in this book? Have you been able to consciously match your response to the problem or conflict at hand?

2. Self-reflection assignment: Answer the following questions. Once answered, set a goal for improving one or more of these measures within the next month. Then come back and retake the survey. Do this each month for one year. This is not an exhaustive list. Take a few minutes to add some questions that are customized to your managerial goals or your organizational needs.

   a. I get to know each employee as an individual, paying particular attention to his or her professional development goals and how I can assist in their professional development.

   ____Yes, definitely ____Somewhat ____A little bit ____Not really ____Unsure

   b. I use interest-based negotiation techniques with employees, superiors, clients, and regulatory agencies (or the regulated community) in order to ensure positive relationships and mutually beneficial outcomes.

   ____Yes, definitely ____Somewhat ____A little bit ____Not really ____Unsure

   c. I correctly identify those situations in which active listening is called for and apply it effectively, being sure to listen for understanding rather than listening to respond.

   ____Yes, definitely ____Somewhat ____A little bit ____Not really ____Unsure

   d. When conflict arises, I am able to identify potential cognitive biases at work in myself and take corrective actions (e.g., attribution bias, denial, reactive devaluation, etc.).

   ____Yes, definitely ____Somewhat ____A little bit ____Not really ____Unsure

   e. When providing feedback to employees, I use the EPM formula to empathize, pinpoint problems specifically, and suggest a constructive path forward together.

   ____Yes, definitely ____Somewhat ____A little bit ____Not really ____Unsure

   f. I receive feedback with an open mind, understanding that even poorly framed criticism may help me improve my management skills and

understand the concerns of those around me. I refrain from becoming defensive and do not attack the person providing feedback to me.

_____Yes, definitely _____Somewhat _____A little bit _____Not really _____Unsure

g. I build teams purposefully, train them to communicate effectively, and help them proactively manage challenges that arise during their collaborations.

_____Yes, definitely _____Somewhat _____A little bit _____Not really _____Unsure

h. I understand that conflict can be a constructive and powerful force for organizational improvement and enhanced relationships. It is the way conflict is managed that determines whether its outcome will be positive or negative.

_____Yes, definitely _____Somewhat _____A little bit _____Not really _____Unsure

i. I have conducted a needs assessment to catalog the sources and costs of conflict within my unit or organization.

_____Yes, definitely _____Somewhat _____A little bit _____Not really _____Unsure or nonapplicable

j. My organization has created a system(s) for efficiently managing the conflicts we can reasonably expect to recur with employees and with our customers and clients.

_____Yes, definitely _____Somewhat _____A little bit _____Not really _____Unsure or nonapplicable

k. I facilitate productive, efficient meetings that start and end on time. The goals for each meeting are clear to myself and to those in attendance and the goals are largely accomplished.

_____Yes, definitely _____Somewhat _____A little bit _____Not really _____Unsure or nonapplicable

l. I make time to attend to, create, and sustain a positive organizational culture, including team building, intervening to stop bullying or disrespectful treatment, the explicit creation and dissemination of behavioral norms, and leading by example in my treatment of others.

_____Yes, definitely _____Somewhat _____A little bit _____Not really
_____Unsure

m. I understand the causes of employee turnover in my unit or organization and have taken appropriate steps to reduce unnecessary turnover.

_____Yes, definitely _____Somewhat _____A little bit _____Not really
_____Unsure

n. I am proactive and collaborative rather than competitive in my relationships with the union and its leadership. I understand that we survive and thrive together.

_____Yes, definitely _____Somewhat _____A little bit _____Not really
_____Unsure

o. I bring in external specialists as necessary to improve performance and reduce unproductive conflicts (i.e., performance coaches, mentoring programs, mediators, arbitrators, ombudsmen, dispute systems designers, etc.).

_____Yes, definitely _____Somewhat _____A little bit _____Not really
_____Unsure

p. I know which governmental agencies regulate or interact regularly with my organization and the individuals within those agencies with whom I need to work collaboratively. I proactively manage relationships and problem solving with regulators (or members of the regulated community).

_____Yes, definitely _____Somewhat _____A little bit _____Not really
_____Unsure

q. Positive or negative incentives for individual performance or behaviors are aligned with the organization's mission, goals, and values. What is good for the individual is also good for the team and organization and what is good for the organization is also good for individual employees.

_____Yes, definitely _____Somewhat _____A little bit _____Not really
_____Unsure

r. Everyone in my work unit can recite the organizational mission and is clear as to their role in the achievement of that mission.

_____Yes, definitely _____Somewhat _____A little bit _____Not really
_____Unsure

s. I regularly take time to reflect on my performance as a manager, taking stock of the actions that work well as well as those that need improvement. I invite feedback and input from my colleagues in an effort to continually improve my performance as a manager.

____Yes, definitely ____Somewhat ____A little bit ____Not really ____Unsure

GOAL SETTING

Using the list in exercise two, choose two or three questions in which you answered "a little bit" or "not really" and seek to improve your performance on those issues. Come back and take the test again in one month and see if your scores have improved.