

>> CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Exposing The Inexcusable Excuses For Not Handling Conflict

Francie Dalton urges us to constructively confront and resolve conflicts.

ONE OF THE MOST pervasive problems within executive ranks is the frequency with which they avoid conflict. However, one role executives should be playing is that of conflict solver. But addressing conflict is never easy, and excuses for side-stepping it are often made. Here are 10 tips for overcoming excuses the next time you are faced with conflict in the workplace:

Excuse #1: I'm just not good at handling conflict.

So *get* good at it. Needing to

improve your skills with conflict doesn't justify avoiding it in the present. Try this four-step formula when addressing your adversary: "When you____, I feel ____ because _____. Therefore, _____."

Excuse #2: If I'm not feeling it, it doesn't exist.

If you're refusing to act because you've experienced no ill effects from others' conflict, understand that your immunity doesn't invalidate others' pains. As the boss, you have a fiduciary responsibility to

facilitate resolution among feuding subordinates whether it's affecting you or not.

Excuse #3: If I ignore it, it'll go away.

I call this the ostrich mentality. You can certainly stick your head in the sand, but not without simultaneously offering up what for most of us is a much larger alternative target, which will be much easier to hit since you're standing still! Ignoring conflict just increases your risk.

Excuse #4: If I confront, the conflict will get worse.

When executives tell me why they think confronting conflict will make it worse, their reasons are more often based on assumptions than on actual experience. Are you making negative assumptions about what would happen if you confronted conflict in order to justify inaction?

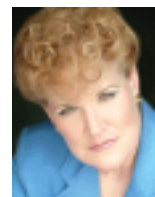
Excuse #5: It's not urgent, and I have other priorities.

Are you feigning other priorities
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Conflict creates gaps that will only grow if not addressed.

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Closing Call

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to justify not having to deal with conflict? Understand that conflict doesn't have to be urgent to poison the work environment. Allow low-grade hostilities to continue unchecked and they'll fester, infecting every functional activity and resulting in considerable productivity losses.

Excuse #6: Solving their interpersonal problems isn't a good use of my time.

Then perhaps you should consider giving up the managerial function.

Excuse #7: Executives should be able to solve their own conflicts without involving me.

Telling those at an impasse they should be able to solve it themselves isn't helpful. Try getting each party to answer briefly the following questions regarding their conflict: What's true right now? What would be the impact if nothing changes? Now what are your recommendations? This process usually unearths similar suggestions.

Still Not Convinced?

ARE YOU STILL FEELING FEAR and trepidation about handling conflict? Francie Dalton suggests reading *Effective Phrases For Performance Appraisals* by James E. Neal, Jr. "Just insert the words 'does not' in front of any of the phrases he provides, and you're equipped to address any conflict," Dalton says. "So, no more excuses!"

Neal's book (Item # NB7217) may be purchased from the PPAI bookstore by calling 972-258-3087 or ordering online at www.ppa.org/bookstore.

The cost is \$12 for members and \$13 for nonmembers.

Excuse #8: I don't want to be the "heavy."

Being the heavy is part of the weight your rank confers. Be willing to carry it, or step aside and let someone lead who's willing to do so responsibly.

Excuse #9: I don't care enough about the people involved in this conflict to want to fix it.

Then work somewhere else! Don't kid yourself into thinking that others can't sense your toxic disdain. Realize too that your passive aggressive behavior is now a major part of the problem.

Excuse #10: If I were to confront

the conflict, I wouldn't be able to control my emotions.

Maturity involves giving up the luxury of behaving the way you feel. Learning to subordinate emotions to the achievement of targeted results is a key requirement for successful management and leadership.

By revealing the flaws embedded within these excuses, you are now armed to face conflicts head on. **PPB**

For more information on developing your conflict management skills, e-mail Dalton at fmdalton@daltonalliances.com with "Conflict" as the subject line.

Chair's Letter

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programs/initiatives compared to the resources dedicated to each. This evaluation aids the board in strategic planning and provides direction for reallocating resources during upcoming budget meetings.

And, we added several new tactics to the plan. Some of them include:

- Investigating membership models that both reflect the diversity of the industry and enhance value

- to PPAI constituents
- Staying on the front end of technology-based tactics
- Adding more value to current PPAI memberships
- Increasing our focus on the Regional Affiliate Program
- Continuing the end-buyer task force to measure effectiveness of current and proposed efforts
- Enhancing public relations efforts with buyers and students to position promotional products as a unique and valuable advertising medium

With this strategic plan, we are creating PPAI history and paving the way for its future at the same time. The board and Association staff can develop it, but in order for the plan to be effective, membership must embrace it—if for no other reason than someday we will be remembered for our own principles. **PPB**

To find out more about PPAI's strategic plan goals, visit www.ppa.org/member.