Nutrition and Aging Resource Center

Conflict Resolution

What Is Conflict?

Conflict is disagreement between or difference of opinions among individuals that can be potentially harmful to any organization. In the workplace setting, it often involves personal agendas, insights, or goals versus those of the group or team. Conflict can arise between staff, participants, or volunteers.

There are often two root causes of conflict: personalities and issues. Personality-focused conflict is usually harder to deal with. It can be emotional, and the differences will typically worsen until a showdown occurs. This type is characterized as "hot." In contrast, issue-centered conflict is intellectual and idealistic. It is typically less emotional and revolves around what the parties feel their organization should do. This type is characterized as "cool." Whether a conflict is "hot" or "cool," resolution in a timely manner is important in order to keep your program running smoothly.

What Is Conflict Resolution?

Conflict resolution, also known as conflict management, seeks to resolve the disagreement or conflict with positive outcomes that satisfy all individuals involved and/or are beneficial to the group. Having some strategies and action steps to address conflict before a conflict happens will help make you more successful in running your program. Note that your program's grievance policy may be used to manage conflicts as well.

Strategies to Address Conflict

- Be aware of your own biases. Biases may be preconceptions or trigger points about people or issues. As a manager, it is important to move beyond these initial reactions or instincts to a place where you can think more clearly about the problem.
- Be an active listener. There are 3 aspects of active listening. They include:
  - Cognitive: Paying attention to all the information, both explicit and implicit, that you are receiving from the other person, comprehending, and integrating that information.
  - Emotional: Staying calm and compassionate during the conversation, including managing any emotional reactions (annoyance, boredom) you might experience.
  - Behavioral: Conveying interest and comprehension verbally and nonverbally. (Groysburg & Abraham)

- Practice empathy. Empathy involves understanding feelings and providing emotional support when needed.
- Focus on the behavior versus focusing on the person responsible for the behavior.
- Know when to involve human resources.
- Do everything you can to resolve the conflict. Keep in mind that it is okay to include higher management to assist.

Action Steps to Resolve Conflict

1. Before communication begins, set rules for respectful communication.
2. Ask all involved to set aside preconceived opinions about each other.
3. Ask all parties to engage in active listening without interruption.
4. Ask all parties to write down the problem. Then restate the problem out loud. This provides understanding and agreement about the problem causing the conflict.
5. Ask each party to come up with a solution.
6. Discuss each solution and the positive and negative aspects of each proposed solution. Try not to argue. This may result in both parties getting frustrated.