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8 Steps For Conflict Resolution Overview

7. Manage Impasse with Calm, Patience, and Respect

- Clarify Feelings
- Focus on Underlying Needs, Interests, and Concerns
- Take a structured break, as needed

It may also be true that certain issues will not present immediate solutions, and an impasse will be reached regarding such issues. Impasse is the point within a dispute in which the parties are unable to perceive effective solutions. People feel stuck, frustrated, angry, and disillusioned. As a result, they might either dig their heels in deeper, anchoring themselves in extreme and rigid positions, or they might decide to "take their marbles and go home," withdrawing from negotiation. Either way, impasse represents a turning point in our efforts to negotiate a solution to the conflict. As such, rather than avoiding or dreading it, impasse should be viewed with calm, patience, and respect.

At such times, it is important to refocus efforts on the underlying needs, interests and concerns of the conflict:

- What do I really need here?
- What are my desired outcomes of this discussion?
- What are my alternatives (BATNA, WATNA, MLATNA) if I decide to withdraw from further negotiations?
- Does impasse mean that we have to forget about the other issues we need to discuss, as well as other solutions we have already negotiated?

These are all important questions to keep in mind, so you may remain focused on your priorities in a realistic manner. Collaborative efforts to negotiate solutions to conflicts are not necessarily driven by shared goals or concerns; indeed, you may have very different 'visions' for the organization, even if

you work together. But you may still find it worthwhile to negotiate together because the alternatives are more costly. In the end, your decision regarding whether or not to continue negotiating will be based upon self-interest and your best opportunities to meet your needs.

A number of strategies for managing impasse exist, and each may be considered for its potential contribution to your specific situation. As you seek to navigate this tricky stage of the process, be sure to check your own energy along the way. As appropriate, take breaks (a few minutes, a few days - whatever is appropriate) in order to regain your energy and focus for the challenge. Try not to view such breaks as complete opportunities to withdraw from the negotiation process; rather, we should structure these times between conversations as opportunities for reflection, examination of the true needs of the situation, and consideration of possible alternatives that we may have been reluctant to consider in the heat of the moment.

If you are working with a third party mediator or facilitator, breaks may also provide an opportunity to "caucus" in separate meetings that allow you to gain perspective on your frustrations and other resentments towards the other party. By taking such reflective time, you return to the conversation with a clearer sense of your commitment, as well as parameters that exist for you at this time.

Strategies For Managing Impasse

Impasse is an important challenge in the evolution of a conflict. During the negotiation process, people will commonly get "stuck" and feel a sense of desperate frustration about what is occurring. At such times, it is important to consider the appropriate use of the following strategies:

1. When stuck, talk about how it feels... set aside "the issue" for the moment.
2. Reframe the issue: Shift from substantive issues to procedural or psychological concerns. This may generate new energy to revisit the substantive issue, or put it into proper perspective.
3. Break the problem into more manageable elements. Start with a "bite-able bite" that is also a shared concern... It probably feels overwhelming in its current form... build a sense of confidence.
4. When in doubt: RESTATE...RESTATE...RESTATE! Be sure the other person knows you are making reasonable efforts to understand his or her point of view. By doing so, you greatly increased the likelihood that the other person will sense the integrity of your efforts, and respond positively.
5. Stay flexible - generate new options. Affirm the value of continuing to explore better responses when people feel trapped by their thinking.
6. Validate and affirm areas of agreement... these are frequently overlooked, as we have focused only on areas of disagreement!
7. Clarify criteria: On what basis are we evaluating the various options before us? Can we agree on criteria that are "mutually acceptable" to all parties, even if not fully shared by all?
8. Reaffirm the ground rules. Again, these are frequently overlooked at times of impasse, to our collective detriment.
9. Take a structured break...or CAUCUS (as appropriate). Be sure people go to the break with "homework" to do.
10. Explore alternatives: BATNA, WATNA, MLATNA. This allows for an important reality check before

determining not to negotiate further.

Article courtesy of [Office](#) of Human Resource Development University of Wisconsin-Madison and Harry Webne-Behrman located at <http://www.ohrd.wisc.edu/onlinetraining/resolution/stepsoverview.htm>

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