



MANAGING CONFLICT IN NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS



Our City strives to meet the needs of all residents who choose to call Orlando home. To do this, I have made it a priority for the Neighborhood Relations team to organize, support, mentor and guide residents and neighborhood organizations in their effort to keep Orlando a great place to live, work and play. In 2014, we launched iLead, a comprehensive neighborhood-training program that informs, connects and involves our neighborhood leaders through a series of interactive guides. I encourage you to use the iLead program to build and sustain your successful neighborhood organization.

Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer

Guides



- Emergency Preparedness
- Engaging Volunteers
- How to Avoid Leadership Burnout
- Taking Neighborhood Leadership Skills to the Next Level
- Board of Directors Operations
- Leadership Survival Skills
- Communication Tools
- Cultivating Neighborhood Leadership
- Engaging Next Generation Leadership
- Neighborhood Profile
- Ice Breakers
- Writing your Neighborhood History
- Effective meetings
- Parliamentary Procedures
- Event Planning
- New Board Orientation
- Mayor's Matching Grant for Neighborhoods

iLead is a comprehensive program that provides you with the tools to inform, connect and involve your neighbors through a variety of trainings, such as the iLead Leadership Series, Lunch and Learn and Community Connection Workshops. These tools cover topics such as how to effectively hold meetings, how to utilize a variety of communication tools and how to engage the next generation of leaders.



MANAGING CONFLICT IN NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

What is a conflict?

A conflict is a serious disagreement or argument involving competitive or opposing actions or opinions. It's a struggle between individuals resulting from incompatible needs, drives or demands. It also can be a hostile encounter.

Conflicts make people uncomfortable, anxious, and leery about continuing to participate in conversations or meetings. Conflicts make people so uncomfortable because of the negative emotions that it provokes and feeds on. It is destructive when it becomes hostile, turns into accusations and threats, when someone wants to "get even", or one issue becomes many...a litany of complaints.

In conflict, the individuals believe that their way or opinion is the best course to take. Conflict does not have to end with a winner and a loser. You may be thinking isn't that the result of a conflict...a winner and a loser? It doesn't have to end that way if the individuals recognize what is causing the conflict and are willing to compromise.



To disarm or prevent conflict from getting out of hand, you must know what causes it to arise.



6 CAUSES OF CONFLICT

1. **Misunderstandings** - *One person misinterprets the meaning of what the other person is saying leads to miscommunication, misperceptions, and misjudgments.*

For example, have you ever thought or heard "Why would you say that?" "That's not what I said."

Misunderstandings in neighborhood meetings are inevitable and cannot be avoided. What attendees hear will be based on their experiences, beliefs and other factors that can't be fully assessed before engaging in conversation. It takes patience and humility to deal with misunderstandings. Or maybe the one speaking is not speaking clearly. Either way, misunderstandings are never intentional and should not be held against anyone in the conversation.

2. **Incompatibility and Differences** - *Individuals have different views about the subject.*

When everyone's trying to work together, finding a common platform can sometimes be a challenge. To be a successful organization, working well as a team is a must. Culturally diverse neighborhoods have strength because of all the views and perspectives different people bring to their neighborhood organization, these differences sometimes cause gaps, frustrations, and conflict. It's a sure bet that you have heard this before "It's this way!" "No, it's that way!"

If two people have differing opinions and they both express them, the incompatibility alone is harmless. It is always best in these instances to agree to disagree, but oftentimes people who are incompatible begin to debate to prove why their point of view is more accurate. When a person does not have confidence in their point of view, they desperately need for others to agree with them and when they don't receive that validation, they can become defensive.



3. **Disrespect – One individual speaks from ego and insults the other for not agreeing.**

Often you may hear exchanges like this “That’s not true. You’re an idiot!” “Well, you’re a jerk!”

Disrespect is the only cause for conflict that is absolutely a choice. This can happen in a meeting when a person disagrees with something that is being said and interrupts the person speaking, yells or even swears.

This type of behavior shows a complete lack of control and in a meeting, should be diffused immediately. Disrespect kindles negative emotions in people and the more emotional people are, the less logically they think. In instances like these nothing can be resolved until people have settled down, are calm, and logical again.

4. **Resistance to Change – An individual is hesitant to, or opposes change, or a new way of doing things.**

Individuals may experience resistance as stubbornness or inflexibility. Frustration mounts between individuals as the resistance in the conflict increases. Resistance may be expressed by an unwillingness to adapt to different circumstances. It can be covert or overt, organized, or individual. Association members who don’t like or want a change and resist publicly, can be very disruptive. Resistant members may express their resistance through criticism, nitpicking, snide comments, or sarcastic remarks, missed meetings, failed commitments, and endless arguments.

5. **Lack of Trust - An individual doesn’t trust the other person; communication breaks down and conflict usually occurs.**

You’ve probably experienced this before “You promised to do the job for this amount, and now you are charging me a lot more?”

A loss of trust or where trust was never established can evoke alarming and uncomfortable emotional reactions. Trust is important and allows us to interact with each other in confidence and understanding. Trust promotes cooperation, harmony, and connection. It creates safety and acceptance. Breaking any type of trust can lead to conflict.

6. **Lack of Ground Rules - When an association hasn’t defined and agreed to a code of conduct at association meetings and events, it’s easy for conflict to erupt.**

Ground rules detail the code of conduct for a meeting and the team, explaining the behavior that’s expected. Ground rules should be created and agreed to by members, because individuals are more willing to accept and abide by rules they’ve set themselves.



Here are a few examples of ground rules:

- Show up to meetings on time and prepared.
- Be respectful and listen to what others have to say.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Everyone that wants to speak to the topic gets to before a previous speaker addresses the members again.
- Attack or address the issue and not the person - no personal accusations are permitted.
- Association will rely on a majority vote when conducting business.
- Stay on point of the business or issue being discussed.
- Close decisions and identify and state action items.



STAGES OF CONFLICT

It is best to recognize when conflict is about to arise and deal with it early before it reaches the point of no return.

What are the early stages of conflict and how does it escalate?

1. **Internal** – a conflict that has not been expressed yet
(Ex: a person sitting uncomfortably and trying to decide whether to say something or not)
2. **Expressed Divergence** – When it is obvious that there are opposing views
(Ex: When some one hears another person's statement and shakes their head in disagreement.)
3. **Holding Ground** – defending one's perspective and opinion
(Ex: During an extended argument one person may say "There is nothing you can say that would change my mind about this.")
4. **Accusation** – expressing your opinion that the other person is wrong
(Ex: When someone says to another "You don't know what you're talking about.")
5. **Embarrassment** – feeling attacked and disrespected
(Ex: After a person is insulted, they may turn red and put their head down before becoming defensive.)
6. **Hostility** – trying to hurt the other person with words
(Ex: After a person feels belittled, they may lash out and say, "You are an idiot and they were insane to let you join this board!")





SOLUTIONS FOR DEALING WITH CONFLICT AFTER IT HAS BEGUN

Use Constructive Confrontation

Constructive confrontation is a structured approach that decreases conflict and increases accountability by connecting the dots between what members want and what the association needs. It's a healthy tool to use that will help achieve a positive outcome when confrontation is necessary.

HERE IS HOW TO APPLY CONSTRUCTIVE CONFRONTATION:

Step 1: Identify Your Grievance

- Identifying a grievance is almost never a simple matter, because usually what someone is doing to make you angry is just the tip of your mental iceberg.
- It's a function of past interactions with the person or issue, whether you're stressed, whether you have had a bad day, and other issues that affect your personal interactions on any given day.
- Sometimes the smallest thing will push you over the edge and make you furious. You need to figure out whether it's worth confronting them.
- So, the first thing you need to do is to think...sit down and think.
- Focus on one single thing that you want to address. Just one. Not two. One.
- Trying to address all your problems at once is a good way to get in over your head, get off subject, and/or put the other person firmly on the defensive.
- You don't want them on the defensive. You want them engaged.
- Don't overload them, and don't make it seem like everything they do is wrong. Just pick a thing you'd like to change.

Step 2: Plan Your Approach

- Plan out your phrasing and identify key points you want to raise regarding your grievance.
- How are you going to arrive at the outcome you want?
- What compromises are you willing to make to resolve the conflict?

Step 3: Pick Your Battles

- Is confronting the individual during a meeting going to be constructive or just fuel the confrontation?
- Take some time to think about the conflict before hitting it head on. There are good and poor times to have a constructive confrontation with someone.
- The best times are when neither of you are particularly stressed nor busy. The poor times are when one of you is either over-stressed or too busy to talk.



- When determining when to have a constructive confrontation with someone, think about how they may react to you at that moment.
- What you don't want to do is make them too defensive.
- Defensiveness makes people closed-minded and mad.
- You don't want to deal with closed-minded, angry people when you're trying to get them to see why you are frustrated. The conversation will not be constructive for either of you.
- Pick your battles wisely.

Step 4: Have the Talk

- After going through the first three steps, you need to confront the other individual.
- Depending on the personality involved, you may not want to tell them that you're going to do this beforehand.
- Giving people time to plan also gives them time to stew, and they may be on the defensive more than if you approached them without notice.
- When confronting someone, it is **ALWAYS** better to do so one-on-one.
- **Praise in public, criticize in private.** You don't want them to feel outnumbered or embarrassed.
- **Points to incorporate into your conversation:**
 1. Use an "I" statement to specify your reaction to the problem.
 2. Specify the inappropriate behavior to be stopped.
 3. State the reason for your reaction.
 4. Specify the behavior you want instead.

Step 5: Keep It Short

- Try to be direct and concise, while at the same time being respectful.
- Time is not on your side once you start a confrontation.
- You want to keep it short and to the point, you don't need to belabor your opinions or point of view.





Diffusing Verbal Attacks

- Wait a few seconds before responding.
- Speak slowly and softly.
- Take a time out if you're getting angry.
- Show that the complaint and feelings are important.
- Treat the person as a valued individual.
- Help them see options, choices, control.
- Use non-inflammatory words and body language.
- Watch your facial expressions and your tone of voice.

Emotional Aspects...Staying Cool, Calm and in Control...Most of the Time

- "Is this event or situation pushing one of my hot buttons?"
- "What is my level of commitment to this person or event?"
- "What else is happening right now in my life?"
- "On a scale of 1-10, just how important is this?"

Dealing with Angry Neighbors

- It's not personal.
- Keep your cool.
- Defuse the anger.
- Be sympathetic.
- Listen attentively.
- Don't make promises you can't keep.
- Analyze the problem.
- Ask the person exactly how he would like the problem resolved.
- Emphasize what you can do.
- Act on the problem and follow through.
- If appropriate, recruit the angry neighbor to participate in resolving the issue.

Points to Ponder

- Accept life as it is...conflict and all.
- Accept yourself and be true to your own values and beliefs.
- Accept others as they are, even all their shortcomings and annoying habits.
- Be willing to let your needs/wishes/positions clearly, calmly, and gently be known.
- Allow others to express their needs/wishes/positions without interruption.
- Look for common ground, areas of agreement and mutual concerns.
- Recognize that although a particular issue may seem critical at the time, in the overall scheme of life it just may not be that monumental after all.
- Differences should be recognized, respected, and utilized rather than rejected and resented.
- Reduce fear in others by legitimizing their right to be heard and by receiving their point of view as valid.
- Practice active and empathic listening.
- Learn to let the initial wave of emotion pass without imputing grave consequences to the occasion.
- Say something good about another person or event before saying what you don't like.
- Being aware of how people react to words and actions and understanding the emotional climate of a group are two examples of the insights that are helpful to successful conflict resolution.
- A calm, reasoned response is always better than a hasty reaction.

Effective communication is the absolute best tool to resolve conflict.

To communicate effectively there must be understanding, effective expression and effective listening. There is no greater adversary to effective communication in meetings than conflict.



THE 3 COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATION ARE:

1. Verbal | *What you say:*

- Actual words chosen to give the message. About 10% of communication is content. Make sure content is accurate so that you don't lose credibility.
- Have you ever heard someone say, "That's not what I meant!" in a conversation? Well, if so, you may have witnessed an example of someone who has missed the verbal content of a message.
- Verbal content is best described as a message received as if it were read from writing.

How you say what you say:

- The tone, pitch, and pace speak volumes above actual verbal content.
- Your tone communicates the attitude you have about what you're saying or who you are speaking to. For example, speaking with an aggressive and sharp tone may communicate that you are frustrated with someone.
- The pitch your voice displays the position that you have regarding the person you're talking to. For example, a person may speak with a high pitch voice to seem non-threatening or submissive to the person they are speaking to persuade them. Children do this a lot.
- The pace of your voice represents how important or urgent your message is. For instance, a salesman may speak with a very fast pace to convince a potential customer that if they move too slowly, they will miss out on a great deal.

2. Non-Verbal | *What you're doing when you say what you say.*

- Body language, facial expression, stance, gestures, movement, and proximity also influence how your message is being received.
- Facial expressions oftentimes seem involuntary, but it tells others what you really think about what is being said. For example, if a member says, "thank you" for receiving something from another member, but there is a frown on their face, the giver will believe the frown before the "Thank you."
- Physical stance shows others what you are prepared to do, based on what is being said. For instance, if two members are talking and one squares their shoulders and legs, folds their arms and sticks their chin out, they may be showing the one speaking that they are stubborn and will not change their mind about the topic.
- Proximity to the person they are speaking to shows how important the message is to the one giving it. For instance, if someone says, "Listen closely" and steps in close to speak they want you to take what they are saying seriously.
- Bold letters and exclamation points, gestures enhance the message that is being shared. For example, if a person says, "good job" and gives you two thumbs up, that's just like saying "VERY good job!"



3. Visual | *Using visual elements to convey ideas and information and reinforce your message.*

- Visual communication is the act of using presentations, websites, social media , photographs, art, drawings, sketches, charts, and graphs to create meaning and convey information.
- Visuals are often used as an aid during presentations to provide helpful context alongside written and/or verbal communication. Because people have different learning styles, visual communication might be more helpful for some to consume ideas and information.

Communication involves two messages: the INTENDED one and the INTERPRETED one.

Knowing this will empower you in times of inevitable conflict during neighborhood meetings.

Listen Actively!

- Practice active listening in meetings by asking questions, paraphrasing, summarizing, and empathizing with the other person.
- Trying to communicate to someone who isn't listening or doesn't understand can be frustrating.
- If someone is arguing with you, try not to take anything they say personally. Remember, they are not upset with you, but at the frustrating situation.

In the moment of conflict at a neighborhood meeting, keep in mind that you represent the association and not yourself. Stand your ground in a non-defensive manner and make sure that everyone feels listened to if time permits. If time is running over be sure to take note of the concern and revisit it at the next meeting.

Whether you're at the brink of a conflict or deep in it, use phrases like:

- "I hear what you're saying, on the other hand..."
- "I can appreciate that, however..."
- "You are right, although..."

Using these phrases helps the listener calm down and let down their defenses. When redirecting the conversation away from conflict, use professional language that's not highly technical so that it feels more personal and warmer. Be pleasant or friendly, without expressing too much emotion, because it will encourage those who are upset to be more logical.

Changing the way you think about communication will decrease the chance of unnecessary conflict arising in neighborhood meetings. Before you know it, you and your association will be able to diffuse conflicts that arise, use conflict to improve your association and keep your meetings on track.

For more information and training on conflict resolution, reach out to our Neighborhood Relations team at 407.246.2169 or neighborhoods@orlando.gov.

A special thanks to Dr. Mimi Hull, president of Hull & Associates, who assisted with the content of this guide. Dr. Hull is a fully licensed psychologist who specializes in the workplace, conflict management, team building, leadership development, and board development. Her office is in Maitland, FL and she may be reach at HullOnline.com or 407.628.0669.

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