

Leading When Times Are Tough

(Handling Difficult People and Situations)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven... For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'" (Matthew 5:43-48)

BIBLICAL
BASIS

No doubt you will experience some difficult and draining moments as you attempt to lead others. Leadership can be a thankless, lonely and even discouraging task, simply because you are the target for the criticism. It's very likely you will feel both *affirmed* and *attacked* as you lead.

You must remember that both you and your people remain "human" even though you are Christians. This means you'll face conflict before the journey is finished. People possess different perspectives, personalities, and struggles that cause them to react the way they do. Thank God for His grace. It has been said that the Church is a lot like Noah's ark. The stench on the inside would be intolerable if it weren't for the storm on the outside! Let's examine how to deal with difficult people effectively.

Discussion:

Take a moment to discuss some of the difficult situations you have faced in the past as a leader. Do you see any patterns?

Often, the most common sources of conflict and difficulty with people are as follows:

- a. Personality and relationship clashes
- b. Unspoken and unmet expectations
- c. Insecurity and identity issues
- d. Unresolved conflict from past wounds
- e. Independent attitudes and inflexible perspectives

Foundational Principles Leaders Must Understand

1. In relationships, leaders often must practice the 101% Principle: find the _____ you can agree with and give it 100% of your attention.
2. In relationships, it is better to build a _____ at the top of the cliff, than a hospital at the bottom. (Take steps to prevent potential trouble.)
3. When the _____ expressed far outweighs the issue at hand, there is a hidden issue to face.
4. When a person's _____ needs outweigh their intelligence, they won't be logical.
5. Hurting people naturally _____ people.
6. As leaders, we must never place our _____ health in the hands of someone else.

KEY POINTS

7. It is possible for a leader to sabotage himself. He might win an argument, but ultimately he _____ more than he gains.
8. We must practice the Law of Connection: Leaders touch a _____ before they ask for a hand.

Remember...

- Conflict is **Normal**. (*It is going to happen because we are different.*)
- Conflict is **Neutral**. (*It is neither destructive nor constructive in itself.*)
- Conflict is **Natural**. (*It is universal; you're not alone in your humanity.*)

Five Options When Faced with Conflict

- a. I'll get _____! (Retaliation)
- b. I'll get _____! (Escape and avoidance)
- c. I'll give _____! (Surrender)
- d. I'll go _____! (Compromise)
- e. I'll _____ with it! (Address the issue)

Handling Criticism in a Healthy Way

- a. Understand the difference between constructive and destructive criticism.
- b. Take God seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously. Laugh at yourself.
- c. Look beyond the criticism and see the critic. What's behind their criticism?
- d. Recognize good people get criticized. Even Jesus was criticized!
- e. Keep physically and spiritually in shape. Stay strong for such attacks.
- f. Don't just see the critic, see the crowd. Don't let one person bring you down.
- g. Wait for time to demonstrate what is right. Allow God to bring things to light.
- h. Concentrate on your mission. Change your mistakes, not your mission.

Five Stages: How Paul Did It in the Book of Philemon

KEY POINTS

The Apostle Paul faced conflict with a man named Philemon. He foresaw the fact that they didn't share the same perspective on Onesimus, a runaway slave belonging to Philemon. The following steps are the Apostle Paul's course on conflict management. He communicates masterfully with Philemon in his letter and gives five stages to walk through in the process:

1. _____ (v. 4-7)
Just as Paul began by affirming Philemon, we must begin by focusing on positive qualities. Practice the 101% Principle mentioned previously. Always open by focusing on the positive and what you have in common.
2. _____ (v. 8-13)
Paul chose to compromise and appeal to Philemon rather than make demands. We must be willing to assume some responsibility for the conflict, if possible. As you bring up the issue in conflict, recognize the differences in motivation and temperament; meet them halfway.
3. _____ (v. 14)
Next, Paul communicates the decision in front of Philemon. In the same way, you must lay out the choice in front of both parties, as you understand it. Maintain their dignity, if possible. Take steps to sustain friendship.

4. _____ (v. 15-20)

Paul then challenged Philemon to do what was right. You must commit yourself to the steps you will take, then extend a clear challenge to them and await their response. Settle the issue, if possible. Lay out good boundaries and parameters to keep the relationship healthy. Don't let enemies accumulate.

EXAMINE
THE WORD

5. _____ (v. 21-22)

Finally, Paul closed by expressing confidence that Philemon would take the high road. End by expressing sincere confidence in them as a person. Let them know you trust them to do what's right and nothing will prevent you from loving them. Remember, it is more important to win a "soul" than to win an argument.

Biblical Confrontation

When someone under your care has clearly done wrong, the Bible calls us to confront them on issues regarding sin, failure to keep a public commitment, a destructive attitude, harmful conversation, etc. If you waver on whether the Bible addresses this subject, review the following passages:

- *II Corinthians 10:4-5* — Our weapons are designed to challenge people's thinking.
- *I Thessalonians 5:14* — We are to remind, warn, admonish the fainthearted.
- *II Timothy 4:2-4* — We must preach, reprove, rebuke, and exhort with patience.
- *Colossians 1:28* — We must admonish (warn by reminding) people.
- *Titus 1:13* — We are instructed to reprove that others may be sound in faith.

Remember, your goal is to see them transformed by the power of God. Your objective is not condemnation, but restoration. People must know we love them, but we love truth more than anything else in the world. An unexamined life is not worth living.

Steps Toward Effective Confrontation

1. **Pray through your own anger.**

Don't let emotion lead you. Wait until you're objective, but deal with issues before they become too big.

CHECK YOUR
HEART

2. **You initiate the contact.**

Don't wait for them to initiate. Scripture beckons you to make things right whether you are the offender or the offended person.

3. **Begin with affirmation.**

Speak words of love and encouragement first. Then, receive fresh permission to challenge them, and to be honest about what you see.

4. **Tell them that you have a problem or a struggle.**

Don't say it's their problem, but yours; own the fact that you have wrestled through dealing with the issue.

5. **Bring up the issue, and explain you don't understand what's happened.**

The meeting may be more of a "clarification" than a confrontation. Give them the benefit of the doubt and allow them to explain themselves. Aim to clarify.

CHECK YOUR
HEART

6. Listen and allow them to respond.

At this point, you must stop to let them respond. They may present a new perspective that will help you both.

7. Establish forgiveness and repentance, if necessary.

Connect the issue you are correcting with who they are in Christ. Don't conclude the meeting until forgiveness is extended and issues are clear and resolved.

8. Compromise on opinions, but not on biblical convictions or principles.

Determine where you must take a stand. Be flexible with your own opinions or preferences, but not on issues where the Bible has clearly spoken.

9. Pray and affirm your love as you close your time together.

Always close these times with prayer. Give them hope, and remind them of their place in God's heart and yours; help them never to question that they are loved.

Pass the Blessing, Please!

While confronting conflict is important, it may be only a symptom of the real issue. The real issue is always an issue of the heart. Often, the primary reason people experience unresolved conflict and difficulties is that they are hungry for “the blessing.” In the Old Testament, men would give a “blessing” to their children; rabbis would “bless” their students, and craftsmen would “bless” their apprentices. The “blessing” consists of these elements:

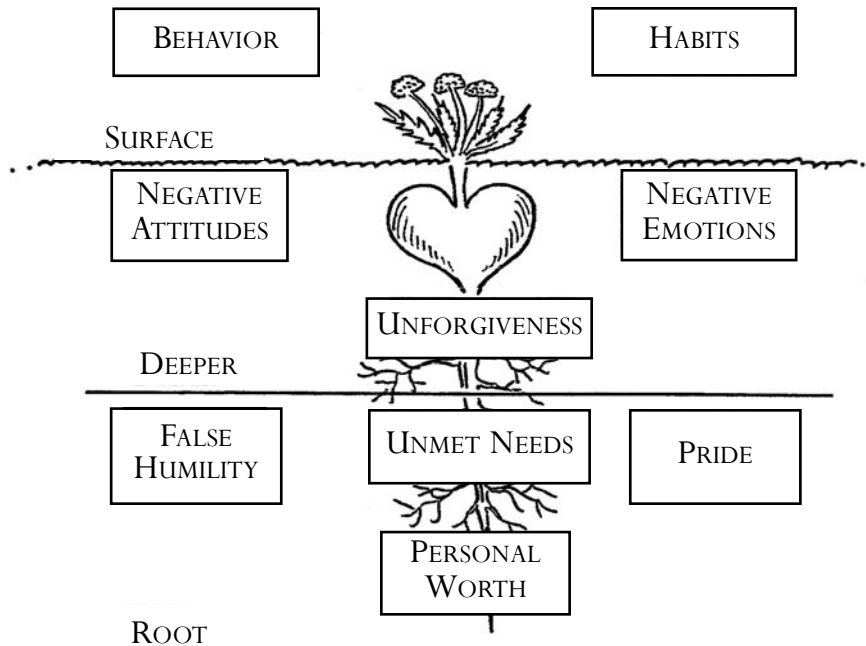
- a. _____
Patriarchs laid their hands on their shoulders or embraced them.
- b. _____
Patriarchs spoke words of encouragement to them.
- c. _____
Patriarchs shared the value they added to others.
- d. _____
Patriarchs used word pictures to share their potential.
- e. _____
Patriarchs committed themselves to see it come to pass.

Often we cannot put words to it, but we are like Jacob as we wrestle all of our lives to get the “blessing.” We seek the approval of those in authority, from our parents to our supervisors on the job. As fallen people, we have lost our security and sense of significance. In a very real sense, this may explain why so many seem to have lost their sense of identity. Hence, we tend to struggle to meet personal needs in an unhealthy way.

Components for Inward Health

- | | |
|--|---|
| a. A sense of _____
If this is missing, we feel inferior. | c. A sense of _____
If this is missing, we feel inadequate. |
| b. A sense of _____
If this is missing, we feel insecure. | d. A sense of _____
If this is missing, we feel insignificant. |

WHAT EVERY LEADER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE ROOT AND FRUIT OF BEHAVIOR



TRUTH IN A
PICTURE

What we can see above the surface are behaviors and habits. People may become a source of conflict or hurt because something isn't right in their life. You don't have to dig very far in a conversation with them to spot negative attitudes and emotions, like anger or depression. If you probe a bit further, you will often begin to see unforgiveness. Generally speaking, people have negative emotions because they have not been able to forgive someone or let go of something from their past. If you dig deeper, you uncover unmet needs. Obviously, they expected a person to meet a need. When that person failed to do so, they refuse to forgive them.

Ultimately, however, at the root of this issue is self worth. The person does not believe they have value, and they seek unhealthy ways to make up for it. They may spark conflict, seek attention, become depressed, hostile, driven, independent, oversensitive, fearful, ungrateful or inexpressive because they feel unworthy.

This is why giving the blessing is so important. Because so many families don't know how to do this today, the family of God must step in and do it. And, you represent a leader in the family of God. You must bless and teach others to bless people. This means you must be discerning. There will be times you must confront a person who has become a source of conflict. However, there will be times you must offer the blessing to those who are in need of it. If you create an environment that blesses those in need, you will likely prevent conflict in the long run.

ASSESSMENT: Evaluate your ministry. How much conflict do you experience? Is it a place where the blessing is offered?

APPLICATION: Identify one person who is a source of conflict for you as a leader. Diagnose their need. Do they need to be confronted or do they need a blessing? Go give them what they need.

ACTION PLAN