

Controversy and Conflict: It's a Good Thing

Being a student leader inevitably means you will be working with many people who may have different ideas, priorities, and expectations than yourself. The ability to understand these differences is more than just a vital leadership skill, it is a life skill. Remember—conflict can be a good thing, even a great thing—if it can lead to new ideas and new ways of thinking.

In order to create an environment that manages conflict effectively, consider these tips:

- 1. Identify and Define the Problem**—Use “I” messages and openly state what the issue or problem is that is causing conflict. And offer others an opportunity to state their point of view openly too. Focus on the problem, not the individual(s).
- 2. Find Common Ground**—You may disagree, but with a little bit of time and attention, you will probably see that you agree on more than you disagree on. There are many paths to one common goal. So, determine what you are NOT in conflict about and then move towards finding a solution.
- 3. Deeply Listen**—Often when we are in conflict we are focused on getting our perspective across. Commit to deeply listening to the other perspective and then confirm that you are hearing what is being said correctly: “What I hear you saying is...”
- 4. Find a Mutual Solution**—Collaboratively brainstorm all possible solutions to the problem and select the ones that are mutually agreed upon. Move away from being “right” and make a strong attempt to find a resolution to the problem that

Take some time
to keep in Mind ...

...the experiences you have had when conflict has led to a positive outcome. Keep a mental note of new ideas, new relationships, or just personal growth obtained when you were in conflict. Remember what you can learn from controversy, rather than what you could lose.

will help everyone be most successful.

- 5. Use a Mediator**—Sometimes asking an objective individual to help mediate a conflict can assist in easing tension and facilitate finding a solution.

- 6. Agree to Disagree**—We will meet, work with, and even love many people in our life that we will not always agree with. Sometimes we just have to respect each other's perspectives, agree to disagree...and move on!

“When angry, count to ten before you speak; if very angry a hundred.”

~ Thomas Jefferson



Master Mediator

You may find yourself at times helping others resolve a conflict. There are a few simple strategies that mediators can consider when assisting people in resolving their controversies:

- Only serve as a mediator when asked.
- Identify what you hear as the misunderstandings.
- Consistently review and restate the common goals.
- Encourage all sides to walk in the other's shoes.
- Listen deeply and actively.
- Stay focused on the issues and the now.
- Ask all involved for potential resolutions.
- Know your limitations and when additional assistance is needed.