**LESSONS LEARNED IN RESOLVING DIFFERENCES**

**Chairman’s Seminar – August 22, 2023**

**Presented by Mel Reeves**

**Conflict is Always Uncomfortable**

* Welcome the opportunity to learn.
* The more you deal with it, the better you become at working through discomfort.
* You can’t control the conflict – you learn by doing.

**There Are Always Two Sides to the Story – Make Sure You Know What They Are**

* Often, we believe the first report and create a judgment.
* Assume you don’t have all the information. Seek other views and perspectives.
* Start from a place of curiosity not assumption.
* If we form a judgment, we often start from a place of defense vs. open-mindedness.
* Ask lots and lots of questions vs. making declarative statements that sound like conclusions.

**Do Your Homework: Understand What Led to the Conflict**

* The problem person often doesn’t understand the impact they are having – it is unintentional. But we assume malintent (not always consciously).
* Are there exterior factors (outside the conflict) impacting the person’s behavior and/or state of mind? Be open to exploring this. When getting the “other” side of the story, listen to understand – not to respond or conclude.

**Problem Children Don’t Know They are Viewed as a Problem**

* This is the MOST frequent issue I run into.
* Issue: the person has not been given the feedback to understand their behavior and/or performance are viewed as problematic.
* Outcomes: If you tolerate behavior, not addressing it infers acceptance.

**When A Problem Gets Escalated To You, Focus on the Other Person**

* It can be hard to know what to say when dealing with conflict issues – that’s normal.
* Don’t rush to make a comment or react.
* Often, the leader/manager focuses on how they are feeling in having to deal with the issue and makes a comment about their own emotions/feelings.
* That can quickly lead to an erosion of trust and lead the other person to conclude that their side of the story or perspective will not be seriously considered.

**STEPS TO TAKE TO AVOID PITFALLS AND RESOLVE DIFFERENCES PRODUCTIVELY**

**Build Relationships with Those You Work with the Closest**

* Really get to know people so that you understand what motivates them, what their strengths and opportunities are, and what matters to them both at work and outside of work.
* When building relationships is not reasonable or doable, minimally, ensure that your team understands who you are, what you are about, why you do what you do and your expectations of team members.
* Without a relationship, there is only perception. Perception is reality.
* The stronger the relationship, the higher the trust, the easier it is to Collaborate.

**Give Feedback in a Timely Manner that is Clear and Specific**

* Bad behavior doesn’t get better if you ignore it.
* No human can read your mind, so don’t expect them to figure it out.
* Tell people the truth. Do it as soon as possible after the behavior occurs. Be concise, clear, and kind.
* Give specifics or use examples of the behavior to reinforce the point.
* The hardest part is determining how best to do it for each person so that they hear and understand. The receiving part is just as important, if not more so, than the giving part.
* By the way, don’t forget to give positive feedback too and use the same guidance.

**Tips for Being a Great Feedback Giver:**

* Do it in person, privately. By phone, if necessary, by email if no other choice. Don’t do it by text.
* Be thoughtful. Be prepared. Be specific.
* Slow down. Talking at a slower pace keeps the temperature of the discussion from escalating.
* Stop talking if appropriate. For sure stop talking if the person shuts down. They won’t hear you.
* Let them say their piece, even if they are emotional such as being angry or crying. Don’t interrupt. Listening does not equal agreement.
* Don’t make a rash decision or conclusion. End the session if you need time to process. Come back later.
* Don’t take disciplinary action without telling the offender (such as removing them from a roster). Think about how you want to be treated in a similar situation.
* Check for understanding. You may have to have more than one discussion or follow-up in writing.

**When Required, React Quickly. (There are Exceptions to Everything)**

If you hear someone say something or see someone do something inappropriate, don’t remain silent. Address it quickly and in public, if needed.