



ADR Newsletter



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS VOLUME 6, ISSUE 1 SPRING 2013

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Taking Responsibility During Conflict: How responsibility can resolve conflict, or contribute to it.

~B.J. Ocker, ADR Specialist



Responsibility, can be defined in several ways. Responsibility is connected to having the authority to take action, and to be accountable for the action. Responsibility is also used to impose the blame on others.

When individuals are in a dispute, the topic of responsibility is often an active part of the disagreement. Factual or perceived, the level of responsibility (or lack of responsibility) contributes to the conflict. Whether during a quarrel at home, or working as a third party neutral, how often have we heard someone say "I did --", followed by "You didn't do--", or "It wasn't me"? There is a fairly well-known phrase about pointing a finger. I like the description by author Christopher Pike:

"When you point your finger at someone, anyone, it is often a moment of judgment. We point our fingers when we want to scold someone, point out what they have done wrong. But each time we point, we simultaneously point three fingers back at ourselves."

Reflection prior to accusation is an excellent skill to learn and use by those in dispute. It is too convenient to assign culpability on the opposing party. What is more difficult to accept is personal responsibility. Fundamental to an effective resolution is **mutual** accountability.

In the book *Resolving Conflict With Others and Within Yourself*, Gini Graham Scott, Ph.D., explains another dynamic. The source of conflict may be the lack of taking responsibility; however, taking too much responsibility can also add to the discord. The author clarifies this by saying that just as denial can cause resentment, taking more credit or accepting more responsibility may create distance between the parties.

For the disputing parties, one valuable method to address the responsibility dynamic is to actively listen to what the other party is claiming you did or did not do. It is easy to become defensive and not truly understand the party's position. Ask questions to clarify or verify these claims. Before responding, take the time to reflect and consider asking these questions.

(continued on page 2)

*(Taking Responsibility continued)***Questions for reflection:**

Is this perception accurate?

Are there some aspects of the claim that are correct?

What is the proper level of responsibility in this dispute?

How do you respond to the claims?

Regardless of how these questions are answered, the lesson I hope to share is to evaluate your level of responsibility in a dispute, and be accountable for your actions. Not only contribute to the problem, play an active part in the resolution.

What Would You Do?

~B.J. Ocker, ADR Specialist

No matter how many times or types of disputes a mediator may have been involved with, it is common to be surprised with something new! In this section of the newsletter, I will share a scenario for your review. After reading the example, reflect on how you would handle it.

You may send an e-mail with your response to William.Ocker@va.gov. I will collect answers from the readers and share them in the next issue.

Please consider the following scenario:

An EEO complaint filed by a VA employee is in the informal stage and the parties agreed to mediate. You were selected as the neutral for this complaint. The session began at 1:00pm. After three hours of discussions the parties begin to explore options for resolution. It is now 4:15pm and the parties tour of duty ends in 15 minutes. The discussion is productive and you feel that a settlement may be reached, although it may be more than another hour to complete.

What would you do?

Looking for ADR resources?

The Harvard Law School Program On Negotiation (PON) is a resource for Neutrals seeking information, training and education in negotiation and dispute resolution.

For more information go to: <http://www.pon.harvard.edu/>

PLEASE NOTE: Providing this information does not constitute an endorsement from The Office of Resolution Management.

What's your approach to tackling conflict?

This diagram from the Creighton University on-line degree program web site is a useful tool for learning about different approaches to managing conflict. If you have difficulty reading the table, you may also find this at the following web address:

<http://online.creighton.edu/media/infographics/negotiation-styles-0712?cmgfrm=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.creighton.edu%2Fwerner%2Fgraduatedegreeinformation%2Findex.php>

ORM Updates:

We are please to introduce and welcome the following personnel to ORM:

Tahira Delaine, ADR Specialist

Tahira comes to VA from the New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) where she held a variety of positions with increasing responsibility to include Investigator, Mediation Case Manager, EEO Officer, and her most recent role as Mediation Supervisor.

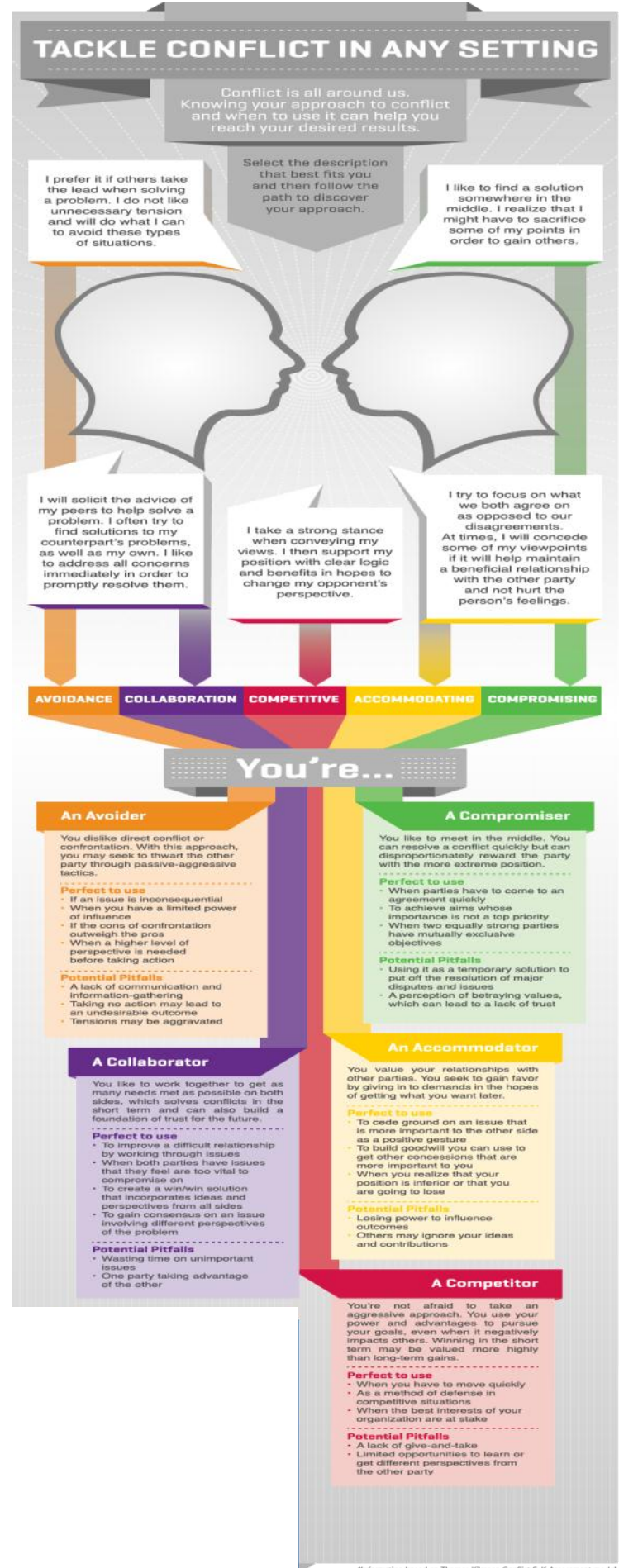
Welcome Tahira!

Neutrals Certification Program (NCP)

Virtual Mediation Program

Nicole Davis is serving as the POC (Point of Contact) for the NCP and the Telephone and Video Conference Mediation activities.

Thank you Nicole!



SPRING FORWARD

Answer key on page 6

E Q A I U P M O V N Y D I Z W Z A T E M
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 N I L J R X L I D S Q R N J L C V N T H
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 Q G N D I E G B O N R Z B D N K L H L P
 I O U C I M X N V O W G H V N E A G T F

ADR
 CLOSURE
 SETTLEMENT
 DISPUTE

EEO
 MEDIATION
 REFLECTION
 ORM

RESOLVE
 NEUTRAL
 COMPLAINT
 SPRING

The following information is from the Learning and Development Roundtable.

ESTABLISHING HEALTHY EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS

Improvement Guide for:

- Leadership and Vision
- Relationship Health
- Trust and Respect
- Loyalty and Commitment

Introduction

If you fail to establish healthy relationships with your direct reports, you stand little hope of playing an effective role in their development. Further, studies indicate that the single most important, non-financial driver of employee retention is the relationship a manager shares with his/her direct reports. In employee development, the messenger is as important as the message: managers who maintain poor employee relationships are less likely to be effective at employee development.

In short, the most powerful lever for improving the performance of your direct reports and reducing the likelihood that they will leave your team is the improvement of the relationships you share with them.

Guidelines

To Remember:

- *It is not about your individual performance anymore; it is about your ability to drive the performance of others.*
- *Every employee is different.*
- *Communication is key.*
- *Friendships do not always translate into good managerial relationships.*

4) Friendships do not always translate into good managerial relationships:⁴ Managers on friendly terms with their employees can be very effective at developing their employees. However, managers who establish firm friendships with members of their teams are advised to proceed with caution. Establishing loyalties that transcend the workplace not only can create the perception that you are not a fair broker with other members of the team, it can make conversations about performance expectations or actual performance, project assignments, or improving team dynamics especially difficult.

All of the factors discussed in this guide—leadership and vision, relationship health, trust and respect, and loyalty and commitment—are positively affected by successfully engaging in principles concerning the manager-employee relationship:

1) It is not about your individual performance anymore; it is about your ability to drive the performance of others: Many managers achieve their positions through the individual performance they demonstrated before they entered the management ranks. However, the skill set required for individual achievement differs from that required for management. While the job of the employee is to perform to the best of his/her ability, the job of the manager is to drive performance through others.¹

2) Every employee is different: Each of your direct reports has a different strength, a different weakness, and a different working style. Each most likely wants something different from a manager.² When you create a blanket management style, you may fail to maximize the potential performance of your direct reports and may create employee resentment.³

3) Communication is key: By clarifying objectives, providing formal and informal feedback, and engaging in open and honest dialogue with your team, you can improve the relationships you share with your employees.

Leadership and Vision

To Remember:

- *Managers who are supportive, enthusiastic, and provide recognition for jobs well done have a greater chance of being perceived as good leaders.*
- *Communicating a vision is only effective if it is realistic; promoting the impossible can cost a manager credibility.*

Your leadership and the vision you communicate to your team play important roles in your ability to effectively develop your direct reports.

Characteristics of good managers are team-focused: creating and enabling on-the-job learning experiences, generating enthusiasm, recognizing the efforts of both the team and individuals, and providing support for your direct reports.^{5,6} In short, managers with strong leadership abilities recognize that it is not about them, it is about their teams.

Leaders also clearly communicate their visions—either for the company or the team—to their direct reports. A vision must be above all realistic,⁷ as it adds to a manager's credibility. By communicating a realistic vision for the individual members of your team and the team itself, you provide context for the day-to-day work in which your employees engage.

Your efforts to actively lead your team and clearly explain your vision are more likely to be successful if you maintain healthy relationships with your direct reports.

Relationship Health

To Remember:

- *Managers who tailor their management style to individual employees have healthier relationships with them.*
- *Providing open lines of communication in which you speak as well as listen can create employee good-will.*

Every employee, like every manager, is different. Some employees are better performers when they receive constant feedback, others perform best when they are granted significant autonomy. As your job is to maximize the performance of your team, the onus is on you to adjust (within reason) your management style to fit the needs of the individuals on your team. Figuring out the right managerial tactics for the right employee does not have to be a mystery. By asking your employees outright or eliciting feedback on your own performance, you can gauge exactly what your employees need in their manager.⁸ **Caveat:** Adjustments to style should never result in (or be perceived as) unfair treatment. Managers must balance the benefits of individualized style with the necessity of consistency and fairness.

Creating open lines of communication can also improve your employee relationships. Although providing informal feedback, recognition, clear project parameters and expectations, and organizational or team goals is important, so too is actively listening to your team.⁹ Receiving and acting upon employee feedback, acknowledging and/or implementing employee ideas, and seeking solutions to employee problems reinforces your credibility as both a leader and an advocate of your team.

Trust and Respect

To Remember:

- *Trust and respect are earned, not granted.*

The key to earning employee trust and respect is to take the unknown out of your relationships—if your employees are unsure of your expectations, perceive you do not value their contributions or disapprove of their performance, or are unclear about the parameters of a project on which they are working, the chance of earning their trust or respect is slim. Additionally, your credibility is the foundation of your employees trust and respect in you: any actions that damage your credibility will have an adverse affect on the relationships you share with your employees.¹⁰

Loyalty and Commitment

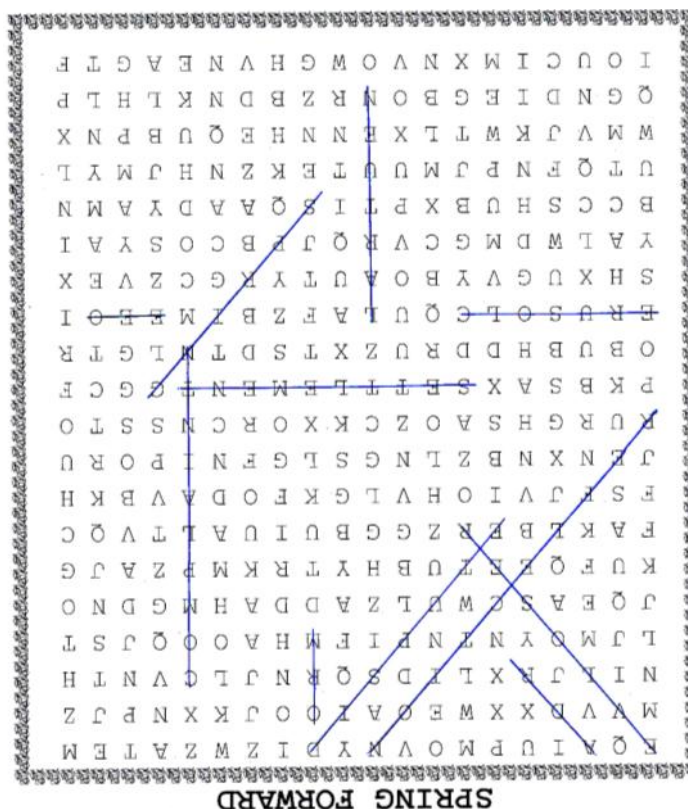
To Remember:

- *Employees with managers who are very effective at employee development are more likely to stay with and be committed to their organizations, put forth greater discretionary effort, and are more adaptable and dependable.¹¹*

Manager quality has a greater impact on employee retention than any other non-financial factor.¹² You can earn the loyalty and commitment of your employees when you provide steady leadership, clearly communicate your vision, treat your employees fairly and consistently, and earn your employees' trust and respect. In short, by serving as an advocate of your employees either within or outside of the team, your employees are likely to become your advocates as well.

Research Methodology

The information presented in this guide is based on a thorough review of professional and academic literature. Given the diversity of perspectives in these topics, this guide is designed to summarize for managers the existing research available on this topic, rather than to impart a particular point of view accepted by the Roundtable.



DID YOU KNOW...

Important events during the Month of April

April 3, 1944: The United States Supreme Court ruled 8 to 1 that African Americans could not be barred from voting in the Texas Democratic Primaries. The Court stated that discrimination against blacks violates the 15th Amendment and that political parties are not private parties.

April 3, 1985: Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor became the first woman to preside over the Court, sitting in for Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist who was out of town.

April 4, 1968: The assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King.

April 9, 1866: Despite a veto from President Andrew Johnson, the Civil Rights Bill of 1866 was passed by Congress, granting blacks the rights and privileges of U.S. citizenship.

April 15, 1817: The first American school for the deaf was founded in Hartford, CT.

April 29, 1992: Riots began in Los Angeles after a jury failed to convict four police officers in the video recorded beating of an African American man.

May is Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

May is Asian Pacific American (APA) Heritage Month—a celebration of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States. May was chosen to commemorate the immigration of the first Japanese immigrants to the United States in 1843. Much like Black History and Women's History celebrations, APA Heritage Month originated in a congressional bill put forward by legislators.

In June 1977, Representatives Frank Horton of New York and Norman Y. Mineta of California introduced a House resolution that called upon the president to proclaim the first ten days of May as Asian/Pacific Heritage Week. The following month, senators Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga introduced a similar bill in the Senate. Both were passed.

On October 5, 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed a Joint Resolution declaring the first Asian Pacific American Heritage Week as May 4-10, 1979.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is Passed in the United States Senate, June 19th, 1964

On July 2, the House of Representatives passes the Bill, and President Lyndon B. Johnson signed it into law. The debate on this Bill lasted over 500 hours and 500 amendments were made before signing.



Workplace ADR Program

Department of Veterans Affairs

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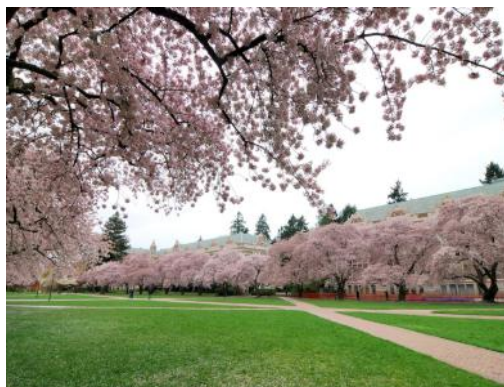
Phone: 202-461-0280

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E-mail: WorkplaceADR@va.gov

Mediation:

A Solution to Workplace Disputes



The Workplace ADR Program solicits articles for VA's quarterly ADR newsletter. The purposes of the newsletter are to communicate information relating to the use of ADR in workplace disputes, and to serve as a resource for those interested in learning more about ADR and its application within VA.

We invite you to submit ideas and articles for the newsletter through your respective administrations:

- ♦ VHA to Sherron Jernigan (10A2E),
- ♦ VBA to Johnny Logan (20M42),
- ♦ NCA to Nicole Maldon (40A),
- ♦ VACO staff offices to your VACO ADR Liaison,
- ♦ Labor organizations to your ADR Council Representative.

We are looking for ideas and articles on ADR related topics, noteworthy activities, initiatives, accomplishments, best practices, or other items designed to educate and inform VA employees and managers on ADR and its benefits in addressing workplace disputes. We hope the VA community will find the newsletters a useful resource for obtaining interesting and helpful information representing ADR activity throughout VA.

For more information, visit our website:
<http://vawww.va.gov/adr/>



Core Values "ICARE"

Integrity

Commitment

Advocacy

Respect

Excellence