



Conflict Management



Getting Along

To be effective and efficient in achieving their goals, American Legion Auxiliary members need to have a shared vision of what they are striving to achieve as well as clear objectives for each program committee. It is important to recognize and resolve conflict among members before conflict becomes a serious problem.

Managing conflict is never easy. Conflict involves members' needs, their perceptions of reality, power, values, feelings and emotions. All members need to have ways of keeping conflict to a minimum. Conflict management is the process of planning to avoid conflict where possible and organizing to resolve conflict as rapidly and smoothly as possible.

1. "Competition" vs. "Conflict"

Competition usually brings out the best in people as they strive to be the best in their field. Fair and friendly competition can lead to new achievements, inventions or outstanding effort in problem solving. When competition becomes unfriendly or bitter, conflict can begin, which can bring out the worst in people.

Conflict occurs when two or more people disagree because of differing needs, wants, goals or values. Hurt feelings, anger, bruised egos and poor communication are all precursors of conflict.

Common Causes of Conflict:

- Different attitudes, values or perceptions
- Disagreements about needs, goals, priorities and interests
- Poor communication
- Poor or inadequate organizational structure
- Lack of teamwork
- Lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities
- Desire for power

Individual Conflict People have different styles of communication, ambitions, views and different cultural backgrounds. In our diverse society, the possibility of these differences leading to conflict between individuals is imminent. We must be alert to preventing and resolving situations where conflict can arise.

Conflict between Groups When people form groups, they may emphasize the things that make their group "better" or "different." This elitist attitude can change from healthy competition to destructive conflict.

Conflict within Conflict within a Group Within a group of similar goals and interests, conflict can arise from individual differences, ambitions or from rivalry between factions. All leaders and members of the unit need to be alert to group dynamics that can result in conflict.

2. How to Identify the Signs and Stages of Conflict

Signs of Conflict between Individuals:

- Negative/hostile body language
- Members not speaking to each other
- Members ignoring each other
- Members contradicting and/or bad-mouthing each other
- Members deliberately undermining or not cooperating with each other

Signs of Conflict between Groups of People:

- Cliques or factions meet to discuss issues separately from the group
- A group is not invited to or does not attend an event that should include everyone
- A group adopts slogans or symbols to show their group is right and the others are wrong

Stages of Conflict: Handling conflict requires awareness of its developmental stages. If leaders can identify the conflict issue and how far it has developed, they can solve it before it becomes more serious. Typical stages of conflict include the following:

- Level 1: Potential for conflict. Lack of sensitivity to individual diversity can result in communication failure and conflict.
- Level 2: Latent conflict. When faced with a competitive situation, conflict can easily develop.
- Level 3: Aftermath conflict. A particular problem may have been resolved, but the potential for conflict still exists.

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Conflict Management (cont.)



3. How to Build Teamwork and Cooperation

- Share information by keeping members up-to-date with current issues.
- Express positive expectations about each other.
- Empower each other by publicly crediting members who have performed well and encouraging each other to achieve results.
- Team-build by promoting good morale and protecting the group's reputation.
- Resolve potential conflict by airing differences of opinion and facilitating conflict resolution.

4. Conflict-prone Personalities

Sherman Tanks — They try to intimidate with “in your face” arguments and state their opinion as fact.

- Get their attention by beginning a sentence with their first name.
- Maintain eye contact and give them time to wind down.
- Stand up to them without being aggressive.
- If they try to physically intimidate, suggest that you both sit down to continue the discussion.

Snipers — They make snide comments in meetings and avoid one-on-one confrontations.

- Expose the attack. Draw them out and address their concerns in public.
- Get other opinions. Don't give in to the sniper's views.

Chronic Complainers — They find fault with everyone except themselves.

- Politely interrupt and take control of the situation.
- Quickly sum up the facts and fight them with logic.
- Ask for their complaints in writing.

Negativists — They believe that nothing new works. They will toss a wet blanket on your ideas.

- Acknowledge their valid points.
- Describe past successes of new ideas.
- Avoid the “You're wrong; I'm right” approach.

Exploders — They throw tantrums and escalate situations quickly into conflict.

- Give them time to regain self-control.
- If they don't regain control, firmly state a neutral phrase such as “STOP.”
- Take a time out or have a private meeting with them.

5. Reactions to Conflict Compromise: When there is give and take for each party, which is generally not satisfying and lacks trust.

Collaborating: A win-win and often the best option, but requires time, assertive communication and cooperation.

Competing: Each party aggressively meets its own needs, which generally increases the level of threat toward the other party.

Accommodating: The smoothing-over of the situation at the expense of the party's needs, because preserving the relation is more important than anything else. This may lead to resentment.

Avoiding: The party hopes that the conflict will go away, but often pent up feelings and problems escalate.

6. Methods for Managing and Resolving Conflicts

Conflict Buster Conciliation: “The act of procuring goodwill or inducing a friendly feeling.” In this conflict resolution approach, individuals or groups come together to attempt to settle their differences. It can be useful to involve a facilitator (such as the district president) in the reconciliation process. The president should avoid “taking sides.” If the president is part of the problem, an arbitrator should be called in to assist in resolving the conflict.

Negotiation: When representatives of groups in a conflict situation meet to resolve their differences and reach an agreement. Negotiations often involve compromise; there is give and take for each party.

Mediation: When negotiations fail or come to an impasse, parties often call in an independent mediator. This person will try to facilitate settlement of the conflict. The mediator plays an active part in the process, advises both or all groups, acts as intermediary and suggests possible solutions. Mediators act only in an advisory capacity; they have no decision-making powers and cannot impose a settlement on the conflicting parties. Skilled mediators gain trust and confidence from all groups or individuals involved in the conflict.

Arbitration: The appointment of an independent person to act as a judge who decides the terms of a settlement. Both parties in a conflict have to agree on the chosen arbitrator and the finality of their decision.