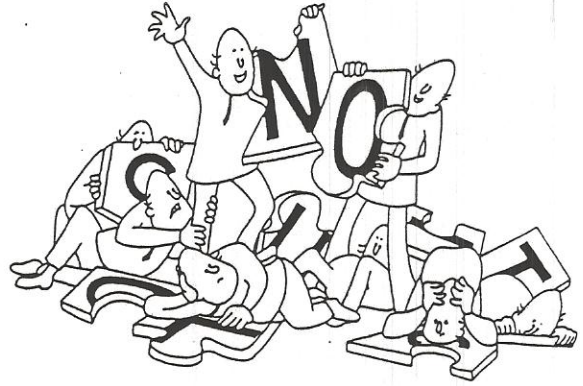


MEETING PROCESS TO HANDLE CONFLICT



The following ideas should help you handle confrontations in a positive way.

1. **Clarify Objectives:** Conflict sometimes develops because participants have different understandings of the meeting's objectives. Clarifying and reaching agreement on objectives is an important first step.
2. **Strive for Understanding:** Often, when involved in argument, people do not listen carefully to the opposition's presentation.* They are too busy formulating a rebuttal to listen. As the meeting leader, you may find it necessary to stop the action and make sure each party in a confrontation can state the opposing party's position and supporting reasons.
3. **Focus on the Rational:** Emotional involvement is a natural part of confrontation. However, sound decisions cannot be reached when participants are too emotional. Therefore, for the benefit of the outcome, you should keep attention focused on rational consideration—facts, supporting reasons, potential problems if a certain course of action is followed, etc.
4. **Generate Alternatives:** What alternate solutions integrate the needs of the diverse points of view involved in the confrontation? This is a challenging part of the process. Participants often can not see how any alternative to their solution exists. This is where group members not at either extreme can become a resource to generate some reasonable alternatives.
5. **Table the Issue:** Tabling can be an effective way to deal with conflict when you feel a party needs time to consider the arguments that have been presented. It works particularly well as a facesaving device. People sometimes find themselves in a position of having argued so strongly for a position they cannot gracefully change even after being convinced of the logic of a different position. Tabling gives a person time to work this out.
6. **Use Humor:** If you are good with humor it can be used to reduce the emotional tenseness of confrontation. It can serve as a release and clear the way for more rational problem-solving

*For an excellent book on listening, order **THE BUSINESS OF LISTENING** by Diane Bone.