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Whether you need help with conflict resolution, or any of the sometimes overwhelming challenges you face as a resident, help is as close as your phone. The free, completely confidential Residents Assistance Program Hotline, (813) 870-3344, provided by Wood & Associates, P.A. can provide advice and resources to help you move forward in your career and personal life. Ask a question anonymously if you prefer, set up a consultation session, or just talk. We're here for you.

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Skills for Resolving Conflict Can De-stress Your Work & Home Life

"More anger stems from lack of sleep than from all of life's frustrations," observed D. Suttten. Suttten, one of the many insightful sources quoted in John W. Gardner's *Quotations of Wit and Wisdom*, may have touched on one of the truths of a resident's life. But of course it's not quite that simple.

Every resident has experienced moments of anger and interpersonal conflict. Whether those episodes are caused by sleep deprivation, stressful and competitive working conditions, family concerns, financial pressures or a combination of factors, conflict is inevitable.

Handling conflict successfully is a learned skill, and one that's important to learn now. There are ways to negotiate your way out of conflict and minimize your stress level at the same time. By learning those skills early on in your career, you can make life more pleasant for yourself and the people around you, at work and at home.

"Separate the people from the problem," advise the authors in the early chapters of *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In.*

Roger Fisher, William Ury and Bruce Patton offer in their book a concise, step-by-step strategy for resolving any type of conflict. Their methods are supported by a wealth of information developed by the Harvard Negotiation Project, a group whose experience ranges from domestic to international conflict.

"Dealing with a substantive problem and maintaining a good working relationship need not be conflicting goals," the authors state. They divide the world of various "people problems" into three basic categories: perception, emotion and communication. It's helpful to remember that in dealing with conflict, your own anger and frustration can overshadow the needs of others, and prevent you from listening to others' points of view or communicating effectively.

Perception, in a conflict scenario, consists of realizing that "the other side's thinking is not simply a useful activity that will help you solve your problem. Their thinking *is* the problem."

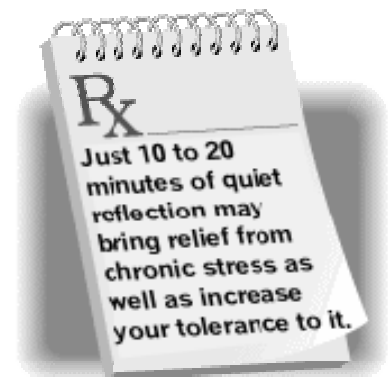
"Put yourself in their shoes," Fisher and colleagues advise. "The ability to see the situation

as the other side sees it, as difficult as it may be is one of the most important skills a negotiator can possess. Understanding their point of view is not the same as agreeing with it."

By understanding another's point of view, you can reduce the area of conflict, and proceed with accurate information that you can use toward a solution.

Emotion can get in the way of successful negotiation, but it's important to try to understand what you are feeling and what the other person seems to be feeling before you can make any progress.

See Skills, column 2, on back



\$\$\$ Money

Q. I'm concerned about taking on more debt. How can I determine the true cost of a loan?

A. You are wise to consider the true cost of borrowing money. The average resident is \$75,000 in debt, and college loan repayments start before training is finished. So it's important to manage debt effectively.

For a long-term loan, such as a 30-year mortgage, you will probably pay more in interest over the life of the loan than you originally borrowed. For example, if you borrow \$100,000 at 8 percent over a 30-year period, you will pay \$164,155 in interest, bringing the total pay-back amount to \$264,155 — more than 2½ times the amount you initially borrowed.

In the early years of a loan, a greater portion of your payment goes toward interest on the balance of the loan; as the balance of the loan is reduced, the interest accrued each month is reduced, and more of your payment amount is credited to the loan principal.

An instant calculator which estimates the true cost of a loan can be found on our web site, www.munizandassociates.com. Enter the amount you want to borrow, the interest rate, the loan term and your federal tax bracket, and it will calculate your monthly payment amount, the interest cost, and the potential tax savings.

By Julio C. Muniz, Muniz and Associates, Tampa, Florida, a Certified Financial Planner (CFP) and a Chartered Life Underwriter (CLU). Used with permission.

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Skills, continued

The authors suggest writing down what you feel. Are you fearful, worried or angry? How would you feel if the situation were resolved to your satisfaction? Confident? Relaxed? Now how might the other person feel?

“Make emotions explicit and acknowledge them as legitimate. Allow other people to let off steam, but don't react to emotional outbursts,” recommend the expert negotiators. They cite one unusual but effective technique used by The Human Relations Group, a labor management group. “The members of the committee adopted a rule that only one person could get angry at a time. This made it legitimate for others not to respond stormily to an angry outburst.” It also made letting off emotional steam easier by allowing people to “take turns” expressing their anger.

Communication is essential to resolving any conflict situation. Even people who know each other very well still have regular misunderstandings. Barriers to effective communication include:

Lack of direct communication, in which people stop talking to one another or get third parties to take sides;

Listening but not hearing, as people think they are communicating but are missing important information; and

Misunderstanding, when one side interprets incorrectly what the other is saying.

To counter these problems, one technique the book suggests is to use active listening techniques. Phrase the other person's words positively from their

point of view. You might say, ‘You have a strong case. Here's the way it strikes me...’ You can show that you understand without having to agree.

Prevention works best when it comes to people problems, the authors point out. The best time for handling interpersonal conflict is *before* it happens. People who have built strong personal and working relationships find it easier to resolve differences. Even when your schedule allows little time for relationship building—much less sleep—any small effort toward building trust and understanding with those around you can reduce conflict and lower your stress.

Tips for resolving conflict at work or home

From “Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In”

- Put yourself in their shoes.
- Don't blame them for your problem.
- Give them a stake in the outcome.
- Let them save face. Make your proposals consistent with their values.

RAP Response

We welcome you to tell us what topics you'd like to see covered in *RAP*. Fax your suggestions to (813) 871-6305, or send them by e-mail to garylwood@mindspring.com, attention *RAP* Editor. We don't need your name unless you'd like to provide it.