



Vol. I No. 20 Resident Assistance Program Newsletter Sept. 2002

## Conflict on the Job:

In the medical profession as in any other, conflicts are simply a fact of life. How to handle those conflicts, though, is something nearly everyone can learn to do better.

### Conflicts Can Affect Your Career Success

“Conflicts at work are stressful for most of us,” says Michael H. Smith, Ph.D. “They occur at any level of your organization and can range from conflicts about interpersonal style to values to goals. In the extreme, conflicts can lower morale, end relationships and even lead to lawsuits.”

Smith is an Oakland, California-based organization consultant, speaker and trainer who specializes in resolving organizational conflicts and building teams.

“People generally avoid conflict,” says Smith. “In fact, surveys have shown us that 80 percent of managers use conflict

avoidance as a first strategy.”

Not surprisingly, that’s not the strategy the experts recommend.

Why is it especially important not to ignore conflict? A new study by the Management Development Institute at Eckerd College found a strong link between a person’s ability to resolve conflict effectively and his or her perceived effectiveness as a leader. So, it makes sense for anyone who hopes to excel at work to be aware of how well they deal with conflict and to build a strong set of skills in this area.

### Learning to Manage People Can Ease Conflict

Smith says power issues between managers and employees can frequently trigger workplace conflict. In his work with the medical community, he sees the same types of friction between doctors and nurses.

But the larger problem, says Smith, is one of limited management skills. When doctors don’t learn how to manage people, that can lead to ongoing conflicts. In any work environment, a well-managed staff is going to

When you’re concerned about conflicts at work or any other difficulties in your career or personal life, it can help to talk things out with a professional. We understand, we are trained to help you work through conflict and other challenges. The free, confidential Resident Assistance Program designated line, (813) 870-3344, offered by Wood & Associates is as close as your phone.

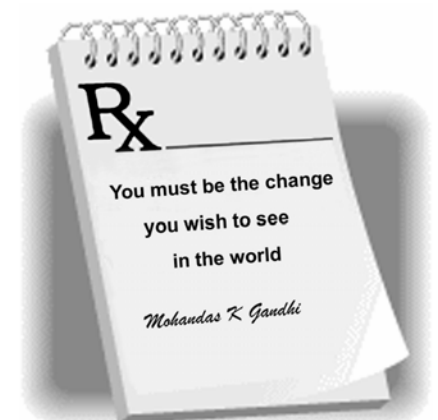
have fewer conflicts.

Smith recommends doctors take responsibility for building their own skills in the area of conflict management. If taking one more class or seminar simply won’t fit into your packed agenda, there are other options.

### Tap Into These Resources

One excellent resource recommended by Smith and other conflict resolution specialists is “Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In,” by Roger Fisher and William Ury. This national bestseller first published in 1981, offers concise, step-by-step strategies for negotiating conflicts at work and anywhere else they arise.

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Tell us what topics you’d like to see us cover in RAP!

Contact the editor by e-mail, [patricianalexander@earthlink.net](mailto:patricianalexander@earthlink.net)

## Money

### Life Insurance: How Much Is Enough?

The average household has about \$190,000 of life insurance. That sounds like a lot of money, but would it be enough to support all your family's needs in the event of your death? With some 69 % of American couples owning at least one life insurance policy, chances are pretty good you already have some coverage.

But do you have a policy that fits your financial goals? Will the death benefit provide enough for your family to live on without hardship?

When deciding how much insurance you need, it's critical to envision what your surviving family members may face in the future. Your insurance adviser can help you review these three key areas:

**Replacing Income:** Beyond paying immediate expenses, will there be enough remaining to invest? Also consider the effects of inflation.

**Raising Children:** As your children grow, so will the cost of feeding, clothing, housing and educating them.

**Repaying Debts:** Even if you leave enough to pay off your home mortgage, consider the cost of upkeep. Also consider the amount owed on credit cards and automobiles.

It's important to review your situation periodically and make adjustments as your family's needs change over time.

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

## Conflict on the Job, continued

Another practical guide to resolving conflicts is "Getting Past No: Negotiating Your Way from Confrontation to Cooperation," by William Ury. One especially helpful technique Ury recommends is "Going to the Balcony," a time-out of sorts that can keep a confrontation from escalating.

"When you find yourself facing a difficult negotiation, you need to step back, collect your wits, and see the situation objectively," Ury advises. "Imagine you are negotiating on a stage and then imagine yourself climbing onto a balcony overlooking the stage. The 'balcony' is a metaphor for a mental attitude of detachment. From the balcony you can calmly evaluate the conflict almost as if you were a third party. You can think constructively for both sides and look for a mutually satisfactory way to resolve the problem."

Smith uses many of the principles developed by Fisher and Ury in his own coaching and conflict management presentations. He adds the element of forgiveness as an important part of the process. "By forgiving the other person, you are saying 'I've decided I want to resolve this, I don't want to focus on the past, and I want to work on a solution with you,'" Smith explains.

When you learn and practice good conflict management skills, you'll not only be more effective as a physician, you'll have fewer sources of stress in every part of your life.

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### Steps for Resolving Conflict

- 1. Resolve your internal conflicts.** Often one part of us wants to forgive and another part wants to keep blaming and fighting with the other person.
- 2. Forgive the other person.** Forgiveness allows you to let go of the upsets of the past and deal with the other person in present time.
- 3. Listen to what they need.** What does the other person really want and need? Discover their bottom line by listening carefully to them and paraphrasing what they say to you.
- 4. Set your own priorities.** Often what we want in a difficult situation and what we really need are two different things. So decide what you really need from the other person and what you'd be willing to give up in the negotiation.
- 5. Discuss the situation calmly.** Never get angry or call the other person names during your discussion. Breathing deeply during your talk will help you stay calm.
- 6. Come to a mutually agreeable solution.** Always find an outcome that satisfies both of you. Otherwise lingering resentments will destroy the outcome.
- 7. Follow up in a few weeks.** Remember to set up a meeting to discover how things are going. Keep your side of the agreement and see if the other person needs any support from you.

*Source: Michael H. Smith, Ph.D. [www.michaelhsmithphd.com](http://www.michaelhsmithphd.com)  
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