

Ombuds Outlook — April 2018

Ombuds/Dispute Resolution Services for Faculty

The Beauty of Conflict

When people think of conflict in the workplace, words that often come to mind are contention, strife, argument, struggle, clash, and battle. When people think of beauty in the workplace, some words that may come to mind are harmony, agreement, synergy, calm, and maybe even peace. Beauty and conflict often seem to be incongruous and diametrically opposed. In his TED Talk “The Beauty of Conflict,” Clair Canfield (Utah State University) challenges us to look differently at conflict and seize its power to change our perspectives in positive ways.

Canfield offers three keys to seizing this power: 1) recognizing when you are stuck, 2) recognizing what conflict is really about, and 3) learning to speak responsibly. First, a common error that people make is justification. By believing that they are blameless, they fail to do the work required to change. Not only is this a dissatisfying situation, but we likely remain stuck and nothing changes. Second, it is important to recognize what our conflict is really about. Canfield suggests that conflicts are like icebergs, with depths far below the surface. Often a workplace conflict is not about what it appears, but rather some deeper issues such as respect, responsibility or reputation. When we pay attention to the real challenge rather than the surface issue, we are better positioned to make serious headway toward resolution and reconciliation. Third, Canfield encourages us to learn to speak responsibly. This means creating change in our ourselves, in others, and the world around us. We become active agents of transformation rather than waiting for our colleagues to take the first step. Using the acronym VOCAB, Canfield offers some practical strategies to increase fluency in our language and to foster change.

V - Vulnerability | It is important to take off the armor of justification and weapons of blame and accusation. In doing so, we allow our co-workers to occasionally see who we really are, how we feel, and even some of our mistakes. By sharing some vulnerability, we can better connect with others.

O - Ownership | This component encourages being accountable for our own needs and choices. It helps us shift direction by mapping the contributions — good or bad — that we make. Ownership types of questions might include: ‘How did I get here?’ and ‘How am I helping?’

C - Communication | Our chief responsibilities in communicating are to ask, listen, and explore. Our goal is to ask questions that help in understanding what is beneath the surface of our conflict, to be empathic, and to make our requests known to others.

A - Acceptance | Recognize that all relationships have conflicts and loss. An important skill here is to embrace reality; to let go of what we cannot control.

B - Boundaries | By establishing and conveying a perimeter of what you are okay with and what you are not, you can have different kinds of conversations and build a foundation of trust. If name calling, voice raising, and confidentiality are issues in the workplace, make your expectations known.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55n9pH_A0O8&t=7s



For information about our program, services and resources: please visit our website <http://ombudsfac.unm.edu/>

The website also has links to the Ombuds for Faculty brochure and to the item printed below, I Choose Civility.

I Choose Civility is entirely voluntary. You are invited to print/post this statement for your workspace.

I Choose Civility is entirely voluntary.
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I Choose Civility

I choose to maintain civility and respect of others -- whether or not I agree with them.
 I choose to listen and pay attention to what is important to others.
 I choose to check that I understand what is important to others.
 I choose to be civil when I describe what is important to me and when I respond to others.
 I choose to work with others, and not against others, to address concerns.
 I choose to disagree respectfully without attacking the other's character or deriding the other's motives.

Name

Date

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