

Quick Conflict Resolution Strategies for Real Life Situations

Fast tips to quickly diffuse small conflicts and prevent them from brimming over

It's the season our inboxes and mailboxes are flooded with sale catalogs and notifications for events. I love checking out the cattle, but often, I turn to thinking about the people behind all the glossy photos and nice videos. I think especially about how hard they worked to put material together — and how much they probably argued! Go ahead and admit it; if you are like my husband, Cary, and I — and I'm sure many of you are — working together in the picture pen is sometimes the fastest route to an argument.

But, why? For many couples, being together with cattle is one of the little things in life that make it worth living... and make you want to pull out your hair, quit your job or fire your family. This is just one example of a little conflict which left unattended can cause problems, especially when working with employees. Seemingly small matters can morph into very emotional trials or, worse yet, when things get out of hand, it's not only hurt feelings — employees may quit or even get hurt. This situation is called conflict and while it is not fun, it is natural. The solution is to diffuse conflicts quickly and build a culture in your operation where people learn to work small things out and let them go.

Diffuse conflict, build productive resolutions

I was reminded of escalating conflicts when I received a call from Jerry. He was debating whether to fire one or both employees involved in a conflict he could hardly believe was worth mediating — an argument about break times that had blown up into 'a thing' causing all kinds of problems,

including a wrecked grain cart and a broken wrist. Jerry relayed how two employees, Ashley and Justin, seemed to pick at each other, always finding fault with something the other did. Evidently, they disagreed on the amount of time that should be spent taking a break during the day and eventually the argument went public; they were seen in heated arguments at the local elevator and then took their disagreement to Facebook, calling each other names and denouncing each other's work ethic, ability, smarts and more online. The grain cart got wrecked when Ashley was driving a truck and looked down at her phone to see Justin's latest social media slam, a move which caused her to veer into the ditch and twist up the rig. When Justin and another employee arrived to help pull her out, the two got into such a venomous argument that Justin slammed his hand into the tailgate, denting it and snapping his wrist with the impact!

Jerry was appalled, embarrassed actually, that such a simple matter had gone to extremes. The thing about petty conflicts is they undermine trust and respect. Worse, these nuances make the workplace unpleasant, dreadful and less productive. Hopefully your picture pen doesn't get that rowdy (fortunately ours does not!), but here are some fast tips to quickly diffuse small conflicts and prevent them from brimming over.

One: First consider the topic of disagreement — is it something to be discussed? Could there be a problem with a system or process to fix for the benefit of everyone?

Two: Act quickly, but never instantly. As a leader, your essential function is avoiding escalation. Breathe and evaluate. Set a time to address the issue and let all parties know when it will be discussed. Often, talking in the morning is best.

Three: During the discussion about the conflict, ask and expect each party to explain their position and role in the conflict. No one gets a free pass. Even if one person appears to be clearly in the wrong, the other may have reacted poorly causing the problem to expand like hot air in a balloon. This is the time for behavioral change to begin, if people are willing.

Four: Come to an agreement about what change or result from the discussion is needed. Instead of acting as a judge, invite the individuals involved to determine the best path forward.

Remember, while most of us don't like conflict, it can be productive and it doesn't have to last. Employing a few simple steps can make these your smoothest season yet. **HW**

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