

QUICK TIPS – *Resolving Conflict*

I recently was engaged to facilitate a discussion with a partnership that was experiencing acute conflict. The situation had become extremely caustic and the very continuation of this highly-successful enterprise was in jeopardy.

Two of the partners were so estranged that they had ceased talking to one another. The third partner was a spectator to all of this, but had chosen not to intervene. It clearly was an awkward and untenable set of circumstances.

These partners were not bad people. In fact, they were quite nice and likeable. They were just *behaving* badly. These dynamics had become entrenched over time and the partners didn't know how to extricate themselves and change their behaviours.

As we cycled through the discussion, several issues were identified that were the root cause of the conflict. These included:

- ◆ Absence of a shared vision for the partnership
- ◆ No exit strategy and succession plan
- ◆ Differing expectations regarding roles

These issues had been lingering for many years, but the partners had avoided a candid and thorough discussion about them. With a facilitated process, they were successful in coming to consensus, committing to new behaviours and reviving their partnership. The process of renewing their trust was established.

The lessons from this scenario are two-fold.

Firstly, issues rarely resolve themselves. These were *mission critical* issues and, therefore, should not have been avoided. They needed to be openly and thoroughly discussed and resolved.

Secondly, the partners didn't have the backgrounds or skills to manoeuvre through this sorting out and reconciling process on their own. A third-party facilitator was absolutely necessary.

If this sounds like a reflection of your situation, you might ponder the lessons learned from this partnership.

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