

Soroptimist is a global volunteer organization that provides women and girls with access to the education and training they need to achieve economic empowerment.

## SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF THE AMERICAS

Leadership Tip: Conflict Resolution

**It’s just a fact of life – conflicts will happen. We have them at home, at work, and we even have them in our very own Soroptimist clubs.** Because we are global organization, we have a diverse membership with unique ways of working, thinking and speaking.

**Differences are bound to occur and conflicts will arise.** If they aren’t met head on, they can keep us from being successful. How so? Conflicts impact teamwork and divert focus away from our mission – two of the top qualities members’ value most about being a Soroptimist.

Conflict rarely resolves itself. While most people do not enjoy conflict, if left unchecked (or handled poorly), destructive actions can escalate into an even bigger problems, the least being hurt feelings and spiteful behavior.

That being said, conflict isn’t all negative. It can bring about new ideas, serve as a learning experience, and help hone our communication and interpersonal skills. Differing opinions can bring about innovations that like-minds can’t visualize. Look at the opportunities and leverage conflict as a way to build your team, develop leaders, promote transparency, boost retention, and demonstrate value – just to name few!

The next time you have to referee a dispute between members (and unfortunately, at some point you will) first, take a deep breath! Then use the following tips to help you work your way though the challenging situation so a positive resolution and closure can be obtained.

**Handle confrontation ASAP.** We can’t prevent it, but we can minimize it by catching it in its early stages. Take the time to immediately to identify and understand the brewing tension to avoid a massive flare up in the future. Minimize the severity by dealing with the conflict quickly so it doesn’t fester and grow.

**Be prepared. Go on a fact finding mission and d**iscover the real source of the conflict. This enables you to address the true cause of the situation (sifting out any hearsay and gossip). Ask questions and request clarification when necessary. Most importantly, take the time to evaluate and digest what you find.

**Calmly communicate.** Talk privately with the people involved and hold group meetings about the problem out of the public eye. Have a peaceful, constructive discussion while sticking to the issue at hand. Get to the point quickly and keep to the facts in order to maintain focus and avoid emotional outbursts.

**Listen**. Remember that hearing and listening are different – listening requires focus. Fight the urge to interrupt people and let them speak their opinions and thoughts. Be present in conversations, remove outside distractions, pay attention to body language and seek clarification by asking questions.

**Be objective.** Put yourself in each of the conflicting party’s shoes to understand their motivations and perspectives. Practice being free from prejudices and showing favoritism. A thoughtful and balanced attitude goes a long way and can make all the difference in the world.

**Find a solution.** Brainstorm options and identify solutions. Be flexible, listen and consider the alternatives. Clearly communicate the next steps and/or the final outcome so there are no questions or room for misinterpretations. Whenever possible, negotiate the outcome – everyone wants a win-win and compromise gives everyone a sense of satisfaction.

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Despite its bad reputation, conflict is inevitable and is necessary for us to grow and progress. Even leaving a minor disagreement unchecked can trickle over into the entire membership and adversely affect a club’s or region’s atmosphere. By being proactive, you can and diminish any growing “explosions.”

The next time the temperature rises among members, put the above tips into practice. Every conflict is different and the results will vary depending on each situation. But, the better able you are at resolving conflicts, the better able you will be at leading a productive group of members who can work together to accomplish our mission.