

**Conflict Resolution**  
**Co-op Members, Board of Directors, Property Manager,**  
**Community Manager, Staff**

**Midwest Association of Housing Cooperatives**  
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## **CLASS DESCRIPTION**

Many situations occur that may cause conflict between your Board of Directors, Management and Staff. We have designed this class to help, define conflict, describe conflict, determine problems that result in conflict, and discuss solutions to resolve conflict. In other words, remove the “ELEPHANT” from the room.

## **DEFINE CONFLICT**

### **Definitions of Conflict:**

- ❑ To be incompatible or at a difference of opinion or struggle for power that prevents agreement.
- ❑ Dispute, quarrel, squabble, disagreement, or dissension.

## **DESCRIBE CONFLICT**

### **Sometimes Really Bad Things Happen:**

- ❑ Gossip among management about Board of Directors and vice versa
- ❑ Breach of confidentiality
- ❑ Micro management
- ❑ Retaliation. Example: automatic evictions

### **Board of Directors/Management Conflict:**

- ❑ Feelings
- ❑ Perceptions
- ❑ Actions

- Psychologists consider these three items the *MAIN* dimensions of human experience.
- So, therefore, conflict is rooted in all parts of our human nature.

### **Workplace Conflict:**

- A condition between or among workers whose jobs are interdependent, who feel angry, who perceive the other(s) as being at fault, and who act in ways that cause a business problem. Example: a community member corresponding to the Board of Directors that the Manager or staff made a statement that is alleged, and vice versa.

## **DETERMINE CONFLICT**

### **Determine Conflict or Something Else:**

- Do not confuse conflict with indecision, stress, or other common experiences that may cause, or be caused by conflict.
- These are not conflicts and they are not best handled by conflict-resolution tools.
- It would be a “conflict” if...
  - A. They are independent
  - B. They blame each other
  - C. They are angry
  - D. Their behavior is causing a business problem

### **The Steps:**

- Step One: Define the issue. What is the conflict? What is the issue?
- Step Two: Define the parties. Who is part of the conflict?

### **Let's Use “STRUCTURE” to Analyze Conflict:**

- Interdependency (parties need each other)

- ❑ Critical urgency (how much time do you have)
- ❑ Communication channels (face to face, face to phone, keyboard)
- ❑ Do we have a chain of command/hierarchy in place and are we following it? An example copy is attached to this handout.

## **RESOLVE CONFLICT**

### **So What Do You Really Want?**

- ❑ The obstacle to resolving conflicts by reconciling interests is *not* a lack of intelligence. One thing we know very well is how to recognize when it is happening.
- ❑ Conflict tends to divert our attention from our real interests by creating another interest.
- ❑ So, step back out of the conflict and think about what you want if you could have a wish. *That's your interest.*
- ❑ Simplify the situation. What do you really want?
- ❑ Discuss the pros and cons.
- ❑ Reach a balanced behaviorally specific, mutually acceptable agreement that defines each one's future behavior with regard to the business problem caused by the conflict.

### **Common Mistakes to Avoid:**

- ❑ Do not follow your initial instincts. Your first reaction is probably wrong.
- ❑ Natural reaction of “fight” or “flight” is a response to danger. But in the modern workplace, we deal daily with conflict in which escape does not work, nor is it an option.
- ❑ Do not ignore the situation. Stand down until you are calm.
- ❑ Never make threats to others involved in the conflict.
- ❑ Do not show disapproval and do not allow personal insults or other derogatory language.

- ❑ Ask specific questions to encourage passive individuals to respond and participate in resolving the conflict.
- ❑ Do not allow “subgroups” (Board of Directors, Management, or Staff) to “gang up” on any one. Discourage “us against them” predicaments.

### **The Ten Steps:**

- ❑ Step One: Address the ELEPHANT in the room.
- ❑ Step Two: Assure everyone that the purpose is to find a solution and resolve the conflict, not play the “blame game”.
- ❑ Step Three: When multiple levels of hierarchy are included, whether it be a Member of the Board, Management Company, Community/Site Manager, or staff they must be assured that they will not be harmed by being candid. Hopefully this reassurance will be sincere and can be trusted. Fear of retaliation, whether founded or not, undermines the success of resolving the conflict.
- ❑ Step Four: Openness and transparency is important. Team members, (Board of Directors, or Management) who are perceived by others involved as having hidden agendas, playing favorites, or keeping secrets, are unlikely to succeed.
- ❑ Step Five: Hear each person’s side of the story.
- ❑ Step Six: Define the problem to be solved.
- ❑ Step Seven: Have each individual respond to “What’s at stake for you?”  
After everyone has had a chance to articulate their interests, determine if we have found a solution to the issues at hand that satisfies everyone’s interests.
- ❑ Step Eight: If not, let’s compromise. Seize the opportunity to help each other reach a balanced compromise.
- ❑ Step Nine: Everyone wins when we optimize our resources, confirm support and trust and work together under challenging circumstances.
- ❑ Step Ten: Reach an agreement to meet once a month for a short period of time, to avoid future conflict.

## **HELPFUL HINTS**

- There is no guaranteed way to avoid conflict but you can do some things to minimize the negative consequences.
- Be sensitive to relationships of Board of Directors, Property Managers, Community/Site Manager, Staff and Members.
- Have a chain of command/hierarchy set in place and posted in the office, boardroom and staff areas, such as near the time clock.
- Encourage Board of Directors, Property Manager and Community/Site Manager to talk to each other and do what you can to bring problems out in the open, (disclosure).
- Analyze any conflict to determine the causes, both direct and indirect. The better you understand the more effective you can be at resolving conflict.

## **CASES OF CONFLICT**

- 1) Community Member in jeopardy of eviction corresponds to the Board of Directors and wants boyfriend who has been evicted/banned from the property due to violation of the VAWA Act., (a copy of which is attached to this handout), placed back on her paperwork stating that the Community Manager persuaded her to fill out the VAWA paper work under duress. Member also comes to the Community Manager and wants her to persuade the Board of Directors to negate the VAWA Act and allow this to happen.
- 2) Family Members of the Board of Directors, Management or Staff who are also Community Members being harassed by other community members. Who handles it? And how is the issue resolved?

- 3) How are requests and or complaints of Family Members of the Board of Directors, Management or Staff who are also Community Members delegated?
- 4) How are responsibilities and billing/payment of contractors who are Family Members of the Board of Directors, Management or Staff delegated?