# Dealing with Conflict in a Rotary Context

Rotary Clubs are made up of different individuals who come together under a presumption of shared values, working within an ethical framework of mutual respect.

But we know and our experience informs us that we all come with our own preset of values and egos.

In leading a volunteer organisation, we should be able to avoid conflict through being prepared to listen to an opposing point of view, using active listening tools, constructive discussion, and compromise.

Escalations in conflict between members, members and the Board can arise and is often due to a range of issues:

* Poor communication – poorly worded emails,
* Disagreement of objectives and results pursued.
* Lack of agreement on direction, timing, pace
* Loss of focus
* Fear of losing influence / power
* Competition for resources,
* Personality clashes
* Poor monitoring and reporting inefficiency.
* Perceptions of Conflict of Interest.

Disagreement arises where diverse passions come together and can take the form of disputes or complaints, how we handle and record issues and the steps to resolution is important. Regardless of the nature of the conflict, it is better to address it as soon as possible before it escalates.

If it can’t be resolved internally then you may need to seek external assistance.

As Rotarians it is incumbent on us to respect each other, to be prepared to listen to each other and to respect the right of each to hold a different view. To agree to be different but to work collegiately in the best interest of the project / club.

Gordon Lippett (Organisational Renewal, 1982) summarised the principal methods of interpersonal and conflict resolution in the following terms:

***Withdrawal***: Retreating from an actual or potential conflict situation.  Withdrawal avoids the issue, but the solution may be only provisional; it may be used as a strategy to buy time or allow the parties to cool off.

***Smoothing***:Emphasising areas of agreement and de-emphasising areas of difference permits the process or project to continue, at least in the areas of agreement, but it may not address the real issue.

***Compromising***:This searches for solutions that bring some degree of satisfaction to the conflicting parties. Compromising helps avoid conflicts, but tends to yield less than optimum results.

***Forcing***:This involves exerting one viewpoint at the potential expense of another. Forcing often creates competition and win-lose situations. It uses authority and power, but can cause considerable resentment; however, it may be necessary in extreme cases where agreement cannot be reached amicably.

***Problem Solving***:Addressing a disagreement directly and in problem-solving mode, the affected parties work through the disagreement. Problem solving is generally regarded as most effective, owing to its approach involving objective examination of options that are available and the search for an agreement on the best alternative.

As Rotarians it is incumbent on us to respect each other, be prepared to listen and, if disagreement persists, decide whether it is critically important to allow that disagreement to continue if it will have negative implications amongst colleagues in the club.

1. KEEP AN OPEN MIND
2. PROMOTE DISCUSSION AROUND DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS AND PRESENT ALTERNATIVES
3. ENHANCE AWARENESSAROUND PERCEPTION OF OTHERS
4. ASSIST IN IDENTIFYING ISSUES THAT COULD ARISE
5. TAKE ACTION – DON’T LET IT FESTER AND ESCALATE
6. INITIATE CHANGE