



APPLICATION GUIDE - MARCH 2015

Managing Tension

BOTTOM LINE:

A certain amount of tension is necessary for a healthy organization. Leaders must learn to recognize the difference between “conflicts that need to be resolved” versus “tensions that need to be managed.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Conflicts need to be resolved, but there is a difference between a conflict and a healthy tension.**
 - When conflict becomes destructive, it’s a personality problem.
 - As a leader, it’s your job to make sure that all the cards are on the table and everyone’s voice has been heard on both sides of the conflict/tension.
- **There are three ways to know if it is a conflict to be resolved or a tension to manage.**
 1. *Once a problem is solved, it should stay solved.*
If you notice a recurring theme, it may mean it’s a tension to manage, not a problem to solve.
 2. *Consider the advocates on both sides of the issue.*
Are they both competent people you trust who just refuse to give in? If so, chances are this is a tension to manage, not a problem to solve.
 3. *Are the two sides interdependent?*
In most cases, the two sides are interdependent. Some things simply can’t be resolved. As with Andy’s family time vs. work time example, it’s a tension that cannot be resolved. It needs to be managed.
- **Be aware of the weight of your words.**
 - As the leader of an organization, you should be mindful that when you weigh in on an issue, *your* words weigh more than others.
 - Leaders must be careful when they weigh in to keep the conversation alive.
 - A leader who wants the best for the organization will understand that they don’t always know best.
 - It isn’t about winning the argument. It’s about a win for the organization.
 - “Seek to understand before seeking to be understood.” —Stephen Covey

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR TEAM DISCUSSION:

1. What are the tensions we manage that we may have been treating as problems to be solved?
2. As a leader, are you considering the weight of your words when you weigh in on an issue?