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ENTREPRENEUR

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CONFLICT: *Confrontation can be positive source for new relationships and growth*

Minimize stress by addressing conflicts

Conflict. The word stirs up emotions that make people run away.

Think back to the last time you had a conflict with someone at work. How did it impact your life? Did it make the environment tough to work in? Did you bring the conflict home? Did it cause you additional stress on top of the normal work-related stress?

Here's another fact to consider — studies have shown that heart attacks occur more often at 9 a.m. on Monday mornings, and least often at 5 p.m. on Friday afternoons. No other mammals on earth share this trend. Only we humans have the power to stop our own hearts when things get too rough. Since stress is the number one cause for heart attacks, where does that leave you when it comes to dealing with conflict and the stress?

Research has found that job stress and burnout are costing the U.S. economy more than \$200 billion per year. Are you taking the time and effort to save yourself from the next heart attack?

Before looking at ways to minimize conflict and stress, let's look at the definition of conflict.

According to contemporary management literature, conflict is simply a clash of differing

SEE CONFLICT, PAGE A25

FROM PAGE A23

points of view, opinions, values and goals. It can be generational or be caused by culture or gender differences. Often, values and dreams of employees are not shared or fully understood by others. In recent studies conducted by www.Knowledge-Builders.org, less than 10 percent of organizational leaders are aware of the values of their employees. Without knowing what one values, conflict will be a constant challenge.

In addition, fear of confrontation exists among countless professionals. According to the International Journal of Human Resource Management and other research journals, many business managers avoid confrontation until it's too late. This creates a co-dependent relationship where people fail to hold each other accountable because they fear confrontation. Whether it's in your family or your workplace, this tendency can cause major problems in the future and many physical manifestations of stress.

What if confrontation were viewed as a tool for learning, rather than something to be avoided? In many instances, conflict can clarify goals, explain personal values, lead to better communication and strengthen relationships. I've outlined here a few different ways to approach conflict so that it can be a source for positive growth.

Before working to solve conflicts, you need to identify them. Because many people will avoid confrontation until it becomes extremely stressful, identifying it is crucial to a timely resolution. A few simple steps in identifying an initial conflict include looking for eye contact, noticing when normal communications decrease and listening to your inner voice — usually,

you'll know when something negative occurs. All these methods require that you slow down and see people as delicate and emotional beings.

Once you've identified the conflict, you can resolve it using many methods. John Iveson, director of the Ohio State University's Center for Entrepreneurship, uses a process from the Flippen Group that includes:

- Finding the problems to determine the real issue.
- Stepping back to be objective and taking emotion out of the problem.
- Approaching the individual and scheduling a meeting.
- Finding alternative solutions; considering a mediator at all times.
- Agreeing on actions and resolutions

that will be implemented.

- Sharing strategies for future interactions.

This approach works well with many OSU students. The basis of this method relies on a good mediator to resolve the conflict.

Another method with good results is the A-E-I-O-U method created by Jerry Wisinski, an author on conflict resolution.

Because conflict stirs up emotions, this method uses emotions as the key to resolution.

If you assume that the other people involved in the conflict are well-intentioned, then you should express your own feelings concerning the situation, writes Wisinski. Next, you should focus on the outcome that you want while remain-

ing open to the suggestions of others. Finally, seek understanding of others as you reach an agreement, he writes.

There is no single approach that provides the best or right answer for all circumstances. The important thing is your health and that of the people in your organization.

Take the time to seek understanding, rather than to simply solve the problem. Otherwise, it may cost your organization and lead to unexpected heart-attacks. All of us are already facing increasing health care costs as it is, why not take actions to lower those costs?

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