APEGGA MIT SEMINAR
For those of you who are members of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, and Geophysicists of Alberta I will be presenting a one day seminar 'Turning Conflict into Cooperation within the Workplace" On Friday, Oct. 15 in Edmonton and Tuesday Oct. 26 in Calgary. To register click on http://www.apegga.org/Members/MIT/seminars.html or call 1-800-661-7020.

I’m also available to come directly to your workplace to present similar workshops and check out my website for complimentary one hour presentations in the 'Power of Conscious Conflict

Conscious Conflict

Despite the technical focus of our formal training in university or college, most business related professions involve emotion and significant human contact. Most likely, we all experience some conflict with co-workers, bosses, subordinates, customers or suppliers. Constructively resolving these differences can make or break our ongoing relationships. It can also determine how effectively a group of people will transition through the stages of team development. Effective conflict resolution thus significantly impacts the quality of our jobs and even our lives. Skills to constructively handle conflict are typically not part of our training. Not surprisingly, human resources departments frequently offer courses to help us, although we sometimes ignore them because we don’t have enough time or we dismiss the topics as being too touchy-feely.
The Conscious Competence Ladder

When we find that we don’t know something important, we’re often motivated to learn more. However if we’re blissfully unaware of our ignorance, there’s little we can do about it.

One of the first steps on the journey to acquiring new skills is therefore to be aware of what you don’t know. This discovery can be uncomfortable, as can be the experience of not being very good at what you’re trying to do (as you won’t be, when you first start to learn.)

The Conscious Competence Ladder is a popular and intuitive approach (attributed to many different possible originators) that helps us manage our own emotions during a sometimes dispiriting learning process. More than this, it helps us to be more in touch with the emotions of the people we are teaching, so we can better coach them through the learning process.

Becoming more conscious is what conflict resolution is all about. In my view, all conflict is caused by unconsciousness or being unaware of our and other’s reactions in stressful situations. Our brains default to a fear response system when we encounter something that puts us in conflict - it’s the old flight or fight – our brains were not wired to stay and reason things through.

Your fear response system is triggered by something in your physical or emotional environment. Sometimes you will be aware of what that trigger is, but most of the time you will not. When you feel conflict emotions, such as anxiety, fear, aggression, or anger, you will note that you have been triggered. The problem is that as soon as your brain starts to generate these feelings, it looks for a cause. You will unconsciously blame or attribute cause to the nearest likely object. Typically, that is another human being near to you. Again, because your fear response system is completely unconscious, you will begin reacting against this person without conscious thought by accusing, planning, running, avoiding, or engaging in some other unproductive conflict behaviour.

When people are in conflict they are often times unaware of other perspectives and other information relating to their situation. Because they are unaware of this, they make assumptions and evaluations that are based on incomplete information. To become more conscious we need to expand the amount of information that we have to work with. As we do that, our consciousness expands and the ability to look at the dispute from a
broader perspective occurs. Thus, moving from conflict to resolution is a process of expansion of consciousness.

So I’m sure you’re asking yourself; how do I get myself out of fight or flight? How does somebody become conscious or more aware? Awareness is best explored though conflict coaching, but can also be created in your own environment during a quiet reflective time. Questions make up the majority of the process to aid in shifting perspective and are often applied to specific conflict situations. You can use this method yourself, but beware that your honesty when answering will depend on the success of the outcome.

- What triggers you? What sets you off in conflict situations?
- What values are being affected when you are triggered? What’s important to you about your identity, needs, etc.? In what way was this value undermined?
- What is the impact on you when your hot buttons are pushed this way? How is the conflict affecting you?
- What is your motive/intent in the situation? What was the reason you may have said what you did?
- What may be the other person’s motive/intent in the situation? How did you interpret the words that were said? How else could they have been interpreted?
- What crossed the line for you in that situation?
- What was your reaction to the boundary being crossed? How
would you have preferred to react?

- What were the consequences to you because of this dispute? How are the consequences of the situation affecting you now? What were the consequences for the other person?
- What don’t you know about the other person situation that may help you better understand where they are coming from?

Conflict is an essential part of our growth in the workplace and at home. Unless we work at becoming more aware in our conflict situations, we will end up in the never ending cycle of conflict. You can learn to generate a compassion response instead of a conflict response. This of course takes practice and time, but will yield enormous benefits.

Conflict is the beginning of consciousness -

- M. Esther Harding

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conflict in the workplace. She is currently designated as a Qualified Mediator and a member of the Alberta Arbitration and Mediation Society (AAMS), the Alternative Dispute Resolution Institute of Canada (ADRIC), the Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR), the Human Resources Association of Calgary (HRAC) and a Board member of Community Mediation Calgary Society. Michelle coaches at Mount Royal University and is a scheduled presenter with APEGGA's (Association of Professional Engineers, Geologist & Geophysicists) member-in-training program. She is a professional engineer and business owner who utilizes interest based tools to bring awareness and consciousness to successfully resolve conflict situations.