DEALING WITH CONFRONTATIONAL ISSUES

#### by David Beam

Think about it. How many people, including you, avoid confrontation? Why do people avoid situations where they differ with another person? There are a variety of reasons (really excuses).

You may feel insecure or intimidated by certain people when they confront you or you disagree with them. It may make you uneasy to see other people emotionally upset; crying or raising their voice. But differences and confrontations are a part of life and business. Here are some principles and suggestions on how to approach confrontational issues and how to respond to emotionally charged situations.

## DON’T BLOW UP OR CLAM UP

Anger is not bad, it’s what you do with it that is right or wrong. Anger just means that you are not happy with a situation. In your opinion, there is something that is not right, and it needs to be addressed. There are two negative reactions stemming from anger that shut down the communication and thus hinder a resolution to the problem; Blowing Up and Clamming Up. When people “vent” and yell and raise their voice, it shuts down the communication. No one listens to a hot head, and no one likes to be yelled at or criticized. There is another response to anger that cuts off the communication as well – clamming up. When a person sulks, or holds grudges, or just refuses to talk, then the problem does not get addresses as well. Both blowing up and clamming up cut off the communication. Instead, you need to speak your mind clearly, but with kindness and gentleness and in consideration of the other person’s feelings.

## MOVE TO A PRIVATE SETTING

Most people do not want an audience when discussing a controversial issue that has upset them. Go somewhere where you don’t have the distraction and concern of uninvolved parties.

## DEFUSE EMOTION BY ACTING, NOT REACTING

There is no good reason to respond to an upset person in like kind. It takes two people to argue, and arguments don’t solve problems, but instead drive people farther apart. You need to calm down and be in control of your emotions before working on a problem. Thank them for bringing the situation to your attention. You can’t fix what you don’t know about. One of the best ways to diffuse anger from another person is to listen to them. Much anger and frustration stems from people feeling misunderstood, ignored, or not cared for. Seek first to understand, and only then to be understood. Get a complete understanding of the issue from the other person’s viewpoint, and then repeat that understanding back to them in your own words. Once you have restated their perspective in your own words, ask them if you have a correct understanding of their viewpoint. Continue in that manner until you have a clear understanding of their viewpoint that you can clearly state. Ask them to do the same, by listening to you and then restating what you have said in their own words.

## ATTACK THE PROBLEM, NOT THE PERSON

Once you have a clear understanding of the problem, look for areas of agreement before addressing the differences. Then you will have a basis to find solutions and resolutions where you differ. Often, just listening and understanding each other will resolve issues. Invite the other party to help you find a superior solution. Look for win/win resolutions. Find out clearly what the other person is wanting in the situation, and what would satisfy them. Also clearly state what you want. Then work together to find a mutually satisfactory solution. There are always many ways to solve a problem. Innovate. Be creative. Think outside the box. If necessary, find an outside mediator that you both trust to facilitate the communication and a solution.