

The Power of Intercultural Conflict

The simple word “conflict” usually sends shivers up the spine of the most experienced manager. Visions of yelling and fistfights quickly come to mind with permanently-ruined relationships the ultimate result. This kind of atmosphere can quickly lead to loss of productivity and profitability as team members stop communicating with each other, withhold vital information and generally stop acting as a team.

Yet, conflict is necessary to resolve inevitable differences and can be extremely positive in the workplace. For example, every teambuilding exercise has at its heart a conflict that must be overcome by everyone learning to work together. What often comes out of the exercise is a greater level of cooperation, understanding and teamwork.

Unfortunately, not everyone resolves conflict in the same way, especially in the cross-cultural work environment found in today’s companies. There also isn’t always the time or opportunity to conduct a teambuilding exercise every time a conflict arises whether due to diversity or not. Managers generally have to rely on the existing relationships built up between the parties to resolve difference. This can be particularly challenging when cultural differences such as communication preferences, need to save face, or negotiation styles prevent co-workers from building trusting relationships in the first place and lead to cross-cultural conflict.

However, with proper training, intercultural conflict can be used as a type of teambuilding exercise even in cross-cultural settings but the participants must have the proper education and attitude to recognize the cultural impact on differences in the workplace. They must also recognize that their own ways of resolving conflict may not be the most effective ones and that others in the group may have a better solution. Contact us for a free consultation about how to harness the power of diversity in your company by calling (800) 417-7325.

About the author: Michael Soon Lee, DBA, is a cultural expert and author of eight books about overcoming cultural conflict including, “Cross-Cultural Selling for Dummies” and “Black Belt Negotiating”. Dr. Lee has spoken to over 1,000 organizations around the world such as Coca-Cola, Chevron, Boeing, State Farm Insurance, and Charles Schwab.