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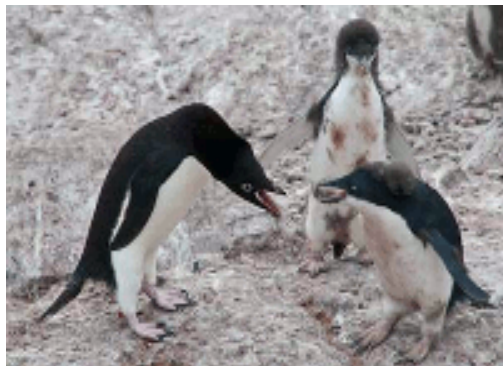
FEATURES

Must Conflict Always be Resolved? Ask Dr. Conflict

MARCH 01, 2011
MARK LIGHT

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Dr. Conflict and his wonderful family got in the car one recent Friday for a five-hour drive to Chicago. Alarm clocks were set the night before for a pre-dawn departure, bags were checked; all was good. Dr. Conflict even made the rounds one last time to be sure everyone was ready to walk out the door in the morning. Even though Dr. Conflict could feel the excitement, he

sensed conflict – its evil twin – waiting in the wings for a starring role.

After a fitful sleep made worse by the staccato of freezing rain on the window (it was a dark and stormy night), Dr. Conflict woke early and turned on the Weather Channel to find that an ice storm had moved in. Conflict was cheerfully getting ready to go on stage. After a two-hour postponement of departure, the clan began its trip, but not without a

tremendous rush of anxiety, anger, and attitude (triple A conflict) from everyone. Conflict was now in the spotlight; exit stage right for excitement.

Dr. Conflict is often asked whether or not you should try to fix conflicts like this. Some say that an intervention to get resolution is always required. For these folks, no conflict should be left alone. It should be resolved in a timely manner to make the workplace – or the world for that matter – a conflict-free zone. And the sooner the better. As Deputy Sheriff Barney Fife of the Andy Griffith Show used to say, “Nip it in the bud.”

Others say that conflict doesn’t always need to be resolved; conflict should be managed, yes, but not necessarily mediated. You want innovation? You want an organization thriving, brimming over, top full of innovative ideas? You better be willing to let conflict in the room. Great ideas don’t come from a group of homogenized “yes” people who respectfully defer and concur; it comes from the sizzle and snap of diverse “yes, no, and hell no” folks comfortable in their skin with conflict. Like Aunt Bea, the matriarch of the Andy Griffith Show and one of Mayberry’s prize-winning rose growers, says, “Let it bloom.”

So, what did Dr. Conflict do about the anxiety, anger, and attitude in the car on the way to Chicago? Did he nip it in the bud or let it bloom? Neither. He did nothing; driving the car in an ice storm was all he could handle. And guess what? By mile marker 90, all was back to normal. No need for an intervention, no need for resolution. Conflict is sometimes best left to a good night’s sleep or 90 minutes of listening to Car Talk on NPR while avoiding a wreck. It simply dissipates.

Fact is that all conflict is situational; context is everything. There is no one best way. Today you avoid, tomorrow engage, and there are times you simply “Fuggedaboutit” and the conflict takes care of itself.

Though letting conflict ebb and flow on its own can be just the ticket, there are other situations when you need a house call from Dr. Conflict. So [e-mail him](#) today with your problems, sleep well tonight.

Dr. Conflict responds to your questions about conflicts in each issue of the Nonprofit Quarterly magazine. All submissions are kept confidential. Don't harbor your questions in solitude, [ask Dr. Conflict today!](#) Send e-mail to editorinchief@nonprofitquarterly.org .