Activities for Enhancing Conflict Resolution Skills

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Activity 1.1: Identifying Hot Buttons
Directions: All of us have “hot buttons” or things we react to with strong emotion. Hot buttons develop in many ways and can be based on past experiences or values that you’ve learned. Some common hot buttons are:

- Lack of Fairness
- Lack of acceptance
- Criticism
- Lack of respect
- Sensitivity about some aspect of who you are (e.g., appearance, ethnicity, intelligence)

Think about the last incident in your role as an employee or an elected official when you got really angry.

1. Identify 1 or 2 of your hot buttons that could have been “pushed.” List them here.

2. What values do you hold or what past experiences have you had that make this a trigger for you?

3. Analyze what happened once the button got pushed. Did you withdraw? Over-react? Lash out? Become stressed? In a couple of words, describe both your internal feelings (things you do not share) and your external behaviors (things that others could observe or experience).

- Internal feelings:
- External behaviors:

Now, think about the last time you experienced each of the emotions below as an employee or as an elected official and then identify what triggered the emotion. If you cannot think of relevant examples for each emotion, use personal examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMOTION</th>
<th>TRIGGERING SITUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety, Fear, Concern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness, Joy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness, Despair</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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*Share an example of a hot button in chat and why it is one*
Worksheet 1.2 - Explain Reasons Behind Your Statements Questions, and Actions / Contrast Statements

Part 1 - Directions: For each of the following situations, apply Skill: Explain the Reasons.... Then write what you would say or do to apply the skill.

1. Use the “explanation” skill proactively to reduce misunderstandings and inferences on the part of others.

1) It is budget time. You have asked for information from staff in the public works department about the CIP for streets in a neighborhood that is your ward/district. The Budget workshop is coming up in two weeks. The Public Works Director has historically been slow to get you information and you often have to ask him multiple times for information.
   a) Who do you call here to discuss the matter?
   b) You really need the information to be delivered on time in order to do your own homework.
      What do you say using the skill Explain reasons for statements and actions?

2) Parks and Recreation has developed an educational program that is so popular there is always a waiting list. Registration was scheduled to begin at 8:00 a.m. this morning. By 9:00 you receive two phone calls from citizens who complain that the P&R staff member who was in charge of registration permitted people to register as early as 7:40 a.m. The complainant’s say they were put on the waiting list for the program but would have arrived earlier had they know registration would start so early.
   a) Who do you call here to discuss the matter?
   b) What do you say using the skill Explain reasons for statements and actions?

3) One of the staff made a presentation to a community group. Her presentation was very well organized, answered all the questions accurately, and left the community with a positive impression. Today, you receive a call from the head of that community association who tells you that the relationship between the community and your department could not be better.
   a) Even though this is a positive example, why is this skill needed?
   b) What do you say using the skill Explain reasons for statements and actions?
Activity 1.3 – Contrast statements and I Statements

Background:
1. **Use contrast statements when:**
   - Relations with the other person are strained, or when the other person is likely to be defensive, and/ or you have been misunderstood in the past because of lack of clarity about your intention or purpose, use **Contrast Statements which are don’t / do statements.**
   - **Sometimes people feel disrespected even when you haven’t done anything disrespectful.** Contrast statements address others’ concerns that you don’t respect them or have a malicious purpose (DON’T) and confirm your respect while clarifying real purpose (DO)
   - Contrast Statements focus on what you DON’T want the other to misperceive about your intention in the relationship AND clarify what you DO want to have happen in terms of context and purpose. **Phrasing Formula:**
     \[ \text{“I don’t want you to think } \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \text{. I do want } \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \text{.} \]
     \[ \text{NOTE: No “but” between the two sentences because “but” negates the first sentence.} \]

2. **Using “I messages” is an effective way to convey emotions in a way that reduces the defensiveness of others because you are “owning” your own feelings – not prescribing theirs; and also reduces the likelihood that they will make inferences because they do not have all the necessary information upon which you are stating your feeling. I messages can be used to a) state an opinion, b) give feedback to someone, or c) set a boundary.** Following up with an open-ended question can go a long way to easing into constructive discussion

The formula for effective “I messages” is simple:
- I feel (insert emotion word here) when (describe the behaviors of others or situation that made you feel this way) because (describe what impact the behavior is having on you, the organization or department). 

Directions: Read the following and respond using the requested skills

1. A city employee sent an email to the board with disparaging remarks about the City Manager when the personnel evaluation was not good. The email made the elected official mad and they went to city hall and told the employee what their opinion of them.
   a. Use a Contrast Statement to start the conversation
   b. Make the feedback into an “I-Statement.”
   c. Bonus: What role in the Drama Triangle are you at risk of playing here?

2. Assume you are new to board and a member of an advisory board. A couple of veteran board members decide to make an advisory board appointee move, without any discussion with you nor informing you of their decision.
   a. Write an appropriate “I” message that keeps you out of the Drama Triangle.
   b. Use an open-ended question to get more information
   c. Listen

3. Think about a time you needed to set boundaries (e.g., say no to a request, refuse to do something on someone else’s time table).
   a. Write an “I” message.

*Compare your answers in the breakout room. Verify that you 1) stated an emotion, 2) explained the cause of your opinion or feeling in descriptive terms, and 3) explained its effect on you.*
Empathy does not involve feeling sorry for others, agreeing with their opinions or even, necessarily, feeling the same emotion they feel. It does require **understanding their perspective, which gives you information that may affect your decisions or emotions**. Empathy involves two skills: first, you must ask questions that help you understand the other person’s perspective. Second, you must engage in reflective listening. Once you understand the other person’s position or emotions more accurately and, in more depth, you can engage in more effective problem solving.

**Part 1: Open-ended Questions**

Effective questions are both neutral (not biased or leading) and open-ended (require an answer with an explanation rather than yes or no). **Open-ended questions begin with why, what, how, who and close-ended questions begin with are, is, could, would and should.** The purpose is to collect information about people’s thoughts, feelings or opinions. Here is an example of an open-ended question and open-ended statement:

Open-ended Question: What do you think about ____________?
Open-ended Statement: Tell me more about how that made you feel.

Now, write down open-ended questions or statements to respond to the following scenarios:

1. A Developer who has a significant proposal upcoming before the Board, calls you to complain about the appointed Manager. The citizen says that the Manager was abrupt and did not answer his questions on the telephone.

   Question:

   Statement:

2. The finance director is presenting details of the budget that include a tax increase.

   Question:

   Statement:

3. The Police Chief indicates that she needs an increase in funding for additional officers.

   Question:

   Statement:

4. A well-respected pastor in the community calls you by phone and demands that you support defunding the police
Part 2: Reflective Listening

Reflective listening involves **summarizing** what you heard the person say and/or the emotion you believe he is feeling. Do not just repeat the person’s words. For example:

Citizen: *I heard the staff are thinking about creating a new leadership position in Parks and Recreation. It’s ridiculous for us to consider that now when the economy is so bad and programs are canceled. Is this where our tax money is going?*

  Reflective listening: In light of reduced services in Parks and Rec, you’re concerned that we aren’t being good managers of your tax dollars because the staff are proposing a new position.

Citizen: *Absolutely. The fitness center has been closed for months and just opened last week, the kids programs were decimated over the summer. There is no justification for hiring someone new!*

  Reflective listening: It seems you have lots of frustration over the closures that were mandated due to COVID and do not see a reason why a new position would be needed. Am I understanding you accurately? I do have more information about this situation that I can share if you are interested?

Now, write reflective listening statements to each of the comments below.

1. **The permitting system takes way too long.** As a builder, I have to go to 5 different places to get anything approved. Time is money!

2. **I think the Fire Trucks are being wasted!** They are out on the road for every fender bender. No wonder it takes longer for them to get to “real emergencies”!!

3. **I hear you are all about All Lives Matter.** What about people of color in our community? What about police officers. I think you elected officials are just trying to avoid controversy instead of taking a stand.

Write down a recent statement made to you by a citizen and then a reflective listening response to his/her opinion or concern.

Citizen’s comment:

A reflective listening response:

*In the breakout groups, each person should take turns sharing a response*