

# SKIDMORE

C O L L E G E

Office of Leadership Activities

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## Managing Conflict

### Introduction

Conflict occurs naturally when people have different opinions. When it comes to leadership, there are likely to be various opinions about the best course of action. In these situations, it is important to realize that both parties only want what is best. It is useful to know how to diffuse the tension that conflict causes so that a consensus can be reached in a respectful and organized fashion.

### Talk About It!

One of the worst things that can be done is to ignore the elephant in the room. If there is something that you disagree with, make it known! This way the other parties will know what your thoughts are on the matter, and you can work towards a goal that meets both parties' needs.

Some people seem to think that a disagreement can be disruptive. However, disagreements arise when one person has a perspective that the other person may not have yet considered. By withholding a dissenting opinion, nothing is accomplished. Being proactive and bringing a problem to light is the first step to resolving the problem.

### Clear Communication

When dealing with conflict, it is imperative to grasp exactly what the other party is arguing for; sometimes a mutual understanding can easily diffuse the conflict. Try to see where the other side is coming from. There are many techniques to help improve communication:

- Reflection: try to repeat what the other person says in your own words, and then ask if what you stated was correct. If you are correct, you may move on; if incorrect, the person will correct you and put you on the right path.
- Identify Needs: when dealing with complicated issues, try to identify the core attributes the other person wants. For example, if somebody has an issue with how the club is run, try to narrow it down: is it an issue with a specific event, regular meetings, or their position? And do they have a need for efficiency, directness, or respect? Identifying what the other person is looking for clarifies the situation.
- Write things down! It is easier to talk about things if they are written in a concise manner. By doing things this way, you can communicate in a more methodical way, rather than jumping from tangent to tangent. However, do not resort to social media or other text-based communications: conflict is always best discussed face-to-face.

### Consider Outside Help

As already stated, conflict is omnipresent in our day-to-day lives. To be human means to have opinions, so sometimes peoples' viewpoints will clash. When we cannot see eye-to-eye in a conflict, it is often necessary to consult somebody else as an intermediary.

One outlet is Skidmore's Conflict Mediation Club, FightClub, which is a safe environment where people can talk about these disagreements. Most members of FightClub are trained by the state of New York to help mediate conflict, and will do their best to help you better understand—and potentially diffuse—your conflicts. To set up a time, contact [mediate@skidmore.edu](mailto:mediate@skidmore.edu).

Another option is to seek conflict mediation from a trained staff member in Leadership Activities. Contact [jnelson@skidmore.edu](mailto:jnelson@skidmore.edu) to discuss details.