

10 IDEAS TO MANAGE AND REDUCE CONFLICT IN YOUR LIONS CLUB

(Adapted from “Tips for Better Team Work” – www.managementstudyguide.com)

PREAMBLE:

Lions clubs are made up of a diverse group of people with a variety of skills, interests and goals as Lions. As well as every Lion bringing a variety of unique characteristics to their club, clubs themselves take on their own personality, depending upon the age, history and context of how the club has evolved.

Consequently conflict is an inevitable part of every group, including Lions Clubs, at different stages of their journey. In fact, at times conflict can be a positive and productive force in helping groups to develop and grow, if the conflict is managed in a healthy and positive manner. Unfortunately at times conflict in a club will not be positive, and, at its worst, will damage individuals and vastly reduce the productiveness of clubs and even at times destroy the club itself.

It is therefore essential that groups, including Lions Clubs, manage and reduce the negative effects of conflict in order to ensure the long-term health and viability of the club and all of its members. At times the wider Lion’s community is asked to step in and assist when a conflict within a club gets out of hand. Conflict resolution is generally a last resort and the least effective method of looking after your club. By following some of the suggestions below, it is hoped that your club may become better skilled at reducing and managing conflict.

1. Develop quality leadership within your club. An individual alone cannot create wonders. A good leadership team within a club can help to strengthen the bonds between members, create positive motivation within the team, and turn conflicts into positive and productive ideas and directions. It is important to look at leadership as a fluid and not a static concept. While Lions Clubs call for the appointment of specific individuals to fulfil certain roles, the most capable and productive clubs have a much more organic approach, where members are allowed to use their skills to support the club and activities often outside and beyond specific titles and role descriptions. The best leadership teams don’t really lead; they guide, support and inspire.

2. Regularly change the people holding formal offices within your club. Many clubs have moved towards having “traineeships” within their structure – not only do Vice Presidents become President the next year, but in the same way Assistant Treasurers, Assistant Secretaries and so on are generally expected to step up on a regular basis. This is most important with the position of President – most people can cope for one year with a President that they don’t see eye-to-eye with, but will quickly become frustrated or even leave if change is not foreseeable.

3. Balance work with play. Many clubs underestimate the value of social activities to their members. Yes, members want to help their community, but they also often join a club to connect with others. Social activities allow members to interact and see each other in a very different way to when the group is task oriented and not so tuned in to the needs of individual members. Sharing food on a regular basis is a well-recognised way of helping people to bond.

4. Think and reflect twice before speaking or acting. Often in the heat of the moment things are said that are difficult to then retract or modify. Angry emails and text messages can be particularly dangerous as they are so instant. Always talk through an issue with at least one trusted member before raising a difficulty with an offending member. Ask them to read through an email for you before it is sent or even to sit in on a difficult conversation. A great rule with angry emails or text messages is to respond only once – and if not resolved, discuss it face-to-face

5. Work as a family, not like a business. Always remember that we are all volunteers and not employees. Often the skill of leadership is to allow people to find their niche within the group, while still allowing others to work effectively around them. Every family has someone who has to be managed more than others – clubs can do this just as well as most families.

6. Don't play favourites. This is a challenge as most Lions will form lasting friendships with other members that can contribute to the club's effectiveness, as well as being one of the more rewarding aspects of club membership. It is one of the strongest arguments for important decisions being made by a leadership team rather than a single leader. Further to this, leaders should invite and investigate ideas and suggestions from all members. This is a great way to gain involvement from all members and improving upon things that the club has always done the same way.

7. Keep issues in perspective. Sometimes the goal will not be worth the cost. Reconsider activities that do not have a high level of support within the club. Sometimes Lions need to be helped to re-explore why they joined Lions so that they can choose a different focus that will reinvigorate them.

8. Support the Lions Code of Conduct. While we as Lions are good at reciting the Code of Conduct, at times we are hesitant to enforce it. Clubs that continue to support members who obtain a clear personal gain from membership will find it hard to attract new members. Clubs who do not challenge political, sexist or racist comments, even (or especially) when said in jest, will quickly alienate various members who may see the world differently.

9. Challenge problems early on. Frequently a conflict within a club will be ignored as it is hoped that things will blow-over. Often this is not the case and a small misunderstanding or slight can fester until a later trigger gives it explosive force. Clubs need to work hard to encourage open and honest discussions, even if this causes discomfort for a while. This does not mean that a complaint should be given a continuous platform, but does mean that clubs need to find ways for all members to regularly air their views on what is happening within the club.

10. Recognise and reward success. While Lions has a wide variety of formal awards, sometimes it is the quiet thanks, the free drink or the flowers that say the most to members who are the quiet achievers within clubs.

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For more information, please see the Lions Learning Centre
<http://members.lionsclubs.org/EN/resources/leadership-resource-center/lions-learning-center/index.php>
or contact your Global Leadership Team – we can tailor a solution to your needs.

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