

## Let's Get Practical

### Conflict Resolution Starts with You

Episode 43: Interview with Ranjeeth Thunga

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As a leader, talk is cheap. Action is what counts and practice makes a difference. Below are practical steps to improve performance.

- **Give meditation and contemplation a legitimate place in your organization.** Much of what conflict resolution specialist Ranjeeth Thunga shared in episode 43 suggests that your best shot at healthy conflict resolution begins with introspection. Keeping yourself and your employees in a good place emotionally is critical to achieving that. Give yourself and your people space to process through their reactions, invite different perspectives, and acknowledge and integrate them together to resolve conflict in healthy ways. You can't do this when you or your employees are stressed and on edge, so find and offer ways for everyone to alleviate that within themselves.
- **Invite other perspectives.** There's so much richness to be experienced by learning the perspectives of others, and it's a critical step in the conflict resolution process. Obviously, it's important to understand your own perspectives, but inviting and understanding where others are coming from, and acknowledging and integrating those perspectives with your own to find common ground is often the difference between healthy conflict resolution and unresolved or unhealthy conflict.
- **Look to two eternal principles for guidance resolving conflict.** Ranjeeth spoke at length about two eternal principles that can guide all of us as we navigate through our attempts to resolve conflict in healthy ways. The first eternal principle is God, or source, or truth, or the universe, whichever of these resonates most with you; and the second eternal principle is "Love your neighbor as yourself". Leaning on these two eternal principles for guidance in our negotiations with others in conflict can provide a road map to success not often taught in leadership books.
- **Pay attention to your own responses.** As Ranjeeth said in episode 43, no matter how right your perspective might be or how deeply held your beliefs are, there is always room for an open response to someone else's perspectives and beliefs. Unlike in politics, where an over-the-top response is often met with more votes, your response to conflict in the workplace is best received when you seek to understand, not force your perspective on to someone else. Doing so not only invites healthy conflict resolution, but it also presents endless opportunities to learn from each other.
- **Work to find common ground.** In episode 43, we introduced the idea of perspective mapping, a simple process of mapping out where each person in a conflict is coming from. Stopping there, however won't lead to healthy conflict resolution. Only when we compare

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perspectives and share our perspective mappings with each other can we look for and find commonality, the common ground upon which mutually beneficial solutions can be built. Recognize that focusing on differences or focusing on similarities is your choice, and you will see whichever one you want to.

- **Work to bring out the best in each other.** If we view conflict resolution as a zero-sum game where there must be a winner and a loser, we miss the opportunity to hear, honor, and celebrate our many different perspectives. Instead, approach conflict resolution as an opportunity to bring out the best from everyone involved, sharing and celebrating what makes each person unique and contributes to your success.
- **Avoiding conflict with someone diminishes their humanity.** By entering into conflict, you honor another person and what's important to them. Too often, we avoid conflict because it's uncomfortable and we think we're doing them a favor, but really, we're missing an opportunity to listen to and honor what's important to someone else. That's why healthy conflict resolution moves relationships and organizations forward.
- **The feelings in your body are telling you something.** When dealing with conflict, your feelings are a form of intelligence giving you data and informing you of something valuable and important. Listen to them and pay attention to what they're trying to tell you!
- **You don't build high-performance organizations by getting rid of the sources of conflict.** Remember that conflict is a sign your people are invested, so getting rid of all sources of conflict eventually leaves you surrounded only by like-minded people and/or disengaged employees. Can you think of anything more disastrous? Instead of trying to rid yourself of the sources of conflict, engage everyone with whom you have conflict to understand their perspectives, find commonality, and resolve it in healthy ways that move you forward.
- **We've all been trained for the "us vs. them" perspective.** Very little conflict resolution is healthy when it begins with us vs. them, so keep in mind that's the starting place for most of us. Shifting that perspective is key to healthy conflict resolution.
- **Breathing is important to resolving conflict.** Slowing your response time and resolving strong emotions before you speak are two key strategies to healthy conflict resolution, and you can start by learning to breathe differently. A simple increase in your breath by  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a second before you respond will help you in any conflict, increasing to  $\frac{1}{2}$  second over time, then  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a second, until you are breathing more fully. The more you breathe, the better you'll do in conflict.

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- **Conflict resolution requires more than just one emotion.** While pain is a predominant emotion in conflict, other emotions desire to move through you in the process. Specifically, grace and forgiveness are just as important to healthy conflict resolution, both for yourself and for the others involved in the conflict.
- **Allow room for the misfits.** Healthy conflict resolution requires allowing for conflict in the first place. Create space for other voices, even if it means one lonely voice of dissent. Honor that person for having the courage to go against the tide, perhaps saving you from the mistake everyone else is missing.
- **If you need to point fingers, find a mirror.** Very little conflict resolution is healthy when it involves finger-pointing and accusations. Therefore, if you're dead set on pointing fingers, point it at yourself before pointing it at anyone else. Aim for the heart and ask yourself "Why am I feeling this way?" What is your role in the conflict and, more importantly, what is your role in its resolution?
- **Embrace the discomfort.** Dealing with conflict is uncomfortable no matter how skilled you are at it, so just embrace it. The emotions you feel are okay and just come from being alive. And it helps to remember there's more to leadership than just being strong and decisive. You're allowed to feel the awkwardness and uncomfortable feelings that come with conflict. Don't fight this. Embrace it.
- **Remember the Overview Effect.** Astronomers and astronauts speak about this phenomenon, the shift in one's consciousness that happens from seeing the entirety of the earth from a great distance all at once. Similar shifts can happen in your perspective by not looking at each perspective in a conflict one at a time, but by layering them on top of one another and seeing them all together. Expand your viewpoint in conflict and your perspective will change.

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