

Alternative Dispute Resolution

The Dialogue at Work ADR Program assists employees, at all levels, with the opportunity to address conflict issues in an early, non-judgmental manner. This early effort can result in solutions that more satisfactorily improve working relationships and provide for more productive office environments. To accomplish these solutions, The Dialogue at Work ADR Program focuses primarily on *early intervention*. Our program methodology is, *the sooner the better*.

The early intervention approach is not a replacement for the traditional or formal procedures such as grievances, discrimination complaints, and appeals. In these formal processes, decision-makers determine the outcomes, usually after a huge demand on time, resources, and emotional stress for all involved parties. These formal outcomes result in winners or losers that can leave lasting scars on working relationships and overshadow the entire office environment.

Conflict

Conflict is a normal part of our working lives, but what constitutes a conflict, or its similar names (dispute, disagreement, clash, or misunderstanding), is very much an individual matter. It is said that no two snowflakes are alike. The same is true about conflict. Why? Because we are all unique in character, personalities, life experiences, demographics, goals, and many other life variables. These variables result in differing perspectives to the same set of facts, events, and/or conversations.

Conflict occurs when these differing perspectives cause communications to break down, changing an interaction from a positive and constructive dialogue to a negative and destructive confrontation. If the declining communication is not addressed in a timely manner but, instead, is dismissed as being trivial, or allowed to escalate to a point of loud and dangerous verbal exchanges, this will likely result in permanently damaged working relationships. Even an acknowledged disagreement over a shared concern can intensify the conflict because of speculation over the other individual's intention for the disagreement.

Addressing and acknowledging conflict is an important and positive component of successful change. Otherwise, unresolved conflict can bring about emotional stress for everyone involved, whether directly or indirectly.

How it Works

The Dialogue at Work ADR Program uses third party neutrals to help resolve a conflict before positions harden or the situation escalates to a more formal process. The participants can vary from two employees, two managers, a manager and employee, or the entire office.

The third party neutral consulting with participants will customize the conflict intervention to the specific circumstances using either a single approach or a variety of *techniques*, such as mediation, facilitation, conciliation, conflict coaching, etc.

The ADR Program is an **informal** process meaning there are no formal rules of evidence, no required witnesses, or no formal reports filed. The process is **confidential** with limited

exceptions, such as fraud, waste, child or elder abuse or criminal activity. Most of these ADR techniques are voluntary for the participants and, if a session results in a written resolution agreement, the signing of the agreement is always voluntary for the participants.

Third Party Neutrals

Third party neutrals are trained mediators, facilitators, and/or ADR Specialists. They are taught to promote dialogue and facilitate discussions among the participants. They encourage participants to explain their concerns and ask thought-provoking questions to uncover the root causes or underlining issue to the conflicts. Third party neutrals help the participants with exploring mutually acceptable resolutions. This active contribution to the process by the participants increases their commitment to the potential resolution and can enhance their capacity to work together in the future.

ADR Techniques

Mediation is a collaborative dispute resolution process. A mediator facilitates the discussion between the participants to help them discover the underlying issues and explore mutually acceptable resolutions.

Facilitation is a more casual process where a third party neutral works with the participants at a meeting to improve the flow of communication. This process helps to identify and solve problems to increase the group's effectiveness.

Conciliation is a process in which a third party neutral communicates separately with each person to identify and prioritize common concerns. This communication pattern continues to help identify potential resolution options until a mutual solution is reached.

Group Dynamic Problem Solving is a group intervention where a third party neutral helps a group of three or more individuals to identify and examine the root causes of any problems within the group. When this phase is completed, the neutral assists the group with developing solutions that address these causes and problems.

Coaching involves a one-on-one session with a third party neutral where an employee is trying to prevent or resolve a conflict with another individual or team. The neutral uses active listening techniques, reality-testing, skills training, and guidance, etc., to provide the coached person with options as to how he or she can prevent or resolve the conflict.

For more information about the Dialogue at Work ADR Program, please contact the Program Manager, at (202)401-0643 or email