

Conflict Resolution

Setting Ground Rules

Ground rules provide a framework for people to resolve their conflict. Ground rules should be set at the beginning of any conflict resolution process. They can be very brief or very detailed – whatever the situation requires.

Ground rules should be:

- Developed and agreed upon by both parties.
- Positive when possible. (For example, “We will listen to each other’s statements fully,” rather than, “We will not interrupt.”)
- Fair to both parties
- Enforceable
- Adjustable
- Written and posted somewhere where both parties can refer to it (for more formal dispute resolution processes).

If the parties are using a mediator to help them resolve the conflict, it is important that the ground rules are developed by the parties and not the mediator. The mediator’s role is that of a guide and mentor, not a judge or supreme ruler.

Some examples of ground rules include:

- We will listen to each other’s statements fully before responding.
- We will work together to achieve a mutually acceptable solution.
- We will respect each other as individuals, and therefore not engage in personal insults and attacks.

Participants can use the ground rules throughout the conflict resolution process to monitor and modify their behaviors.

Ground rules give participants an objective, logical way of addressing personal attacks and emotional issues.

An example: “Joe, I feel like you have cut off my last several statements. We agreed at the beginning of this that we would listen to each other’s statements fully before answering.”

If the conflict is being mediated, this also gives the mediator a fair way to give participants feedback and help them work with the conflict. Since the same rules are being applied to everyone, it can help the mediator maintain fairness and avoid bias.

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Building Positive Energy

- Have a good attitude. The preparation steps we discussed earlier should help you identify the positive things that will come out of this conflict. Try to focus on these things instead of the negative aspects of the conflict.
- Frame things positively.
- Create actionable items.
- Try to keep emotions out of your statements. State feelings and opinions in as objective a manner as possible. Label your thoughts as thoughts by starting sentences with, "I think..."
- Take a break when you need it.
- If you say, "I see where you're coming from," make sure you mean it. If you can't see where they are coming from, ask them to tell you more. Often, sharing information can break down even the toughest person's defenses.
- Invite the other person to step into your shoes. Tell them a story, outline consequences, and explain how you feel in an objective manner. Share as much information as you can.

The Agreement Frame

The Agreement Frame takes one of three forms:

- I appreciate, and...
- I respect, and...
- I agree, and...

Here is an example of the Agreement Frame in use.

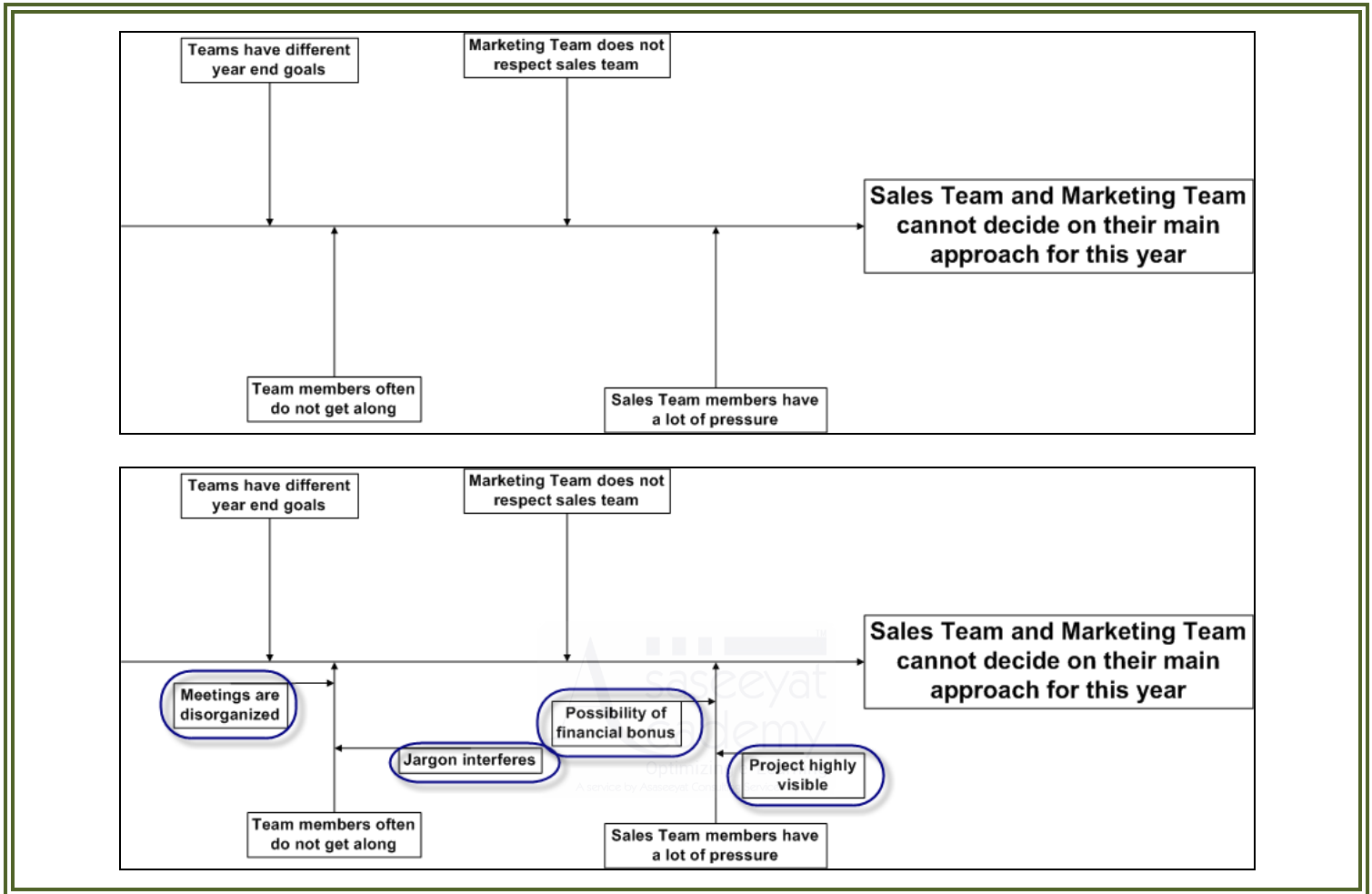
PERSON A	PERSON B
The best way to resolve this conflict is for you to resign your position immediately.	I respect your opinion, and I think that there might be some other viable options.
What options were you considering?	I think that if I issued an apology to the team for the misunderstanding, we would be on our way to resolving the conflict.
I think that option is too low-key for this situation.	I agree that it might not be a strong enough statement, and I may need to have team meetings to address the underlying issues.

Creating a Fishbone Diagram

1. To start, draw a horizontal arrow pointing to the right on a large sheet of paper. At the end of the arrow, write down the problem.
2. Now, work together to list possible causes. Group these causes. Draw a line pointing to the large arrow for each cause and write the cause at the top.
3. Now, write each cause on a line pointing to the group arrow. (Sticky notes work well for this.) Now the people in the conflict have a clear map of what is happening.



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